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MDG Report 2008

CIS and SE Europe recovering from rocky 1990s transition, raising hopes in region for meeting UN Millennium Goals

MOSCOW, 11 September 2008 – Transition countries of South-Eastern Europe have brought the share of their populations living below the newly re-defined \$1.25-a-day poverty line back to a very low 0.5 per cent, according to a report from the United Nations released today. Extreme poverty in these countries, virtually non-existent at the beginning of the 1990s, had risen to a rate of 1.7 per cent by 1999. Countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States similarly saw poverty rates increase sharply in the early 1990s – from 2.2 per cent in 1990 to 8.4 per cent in 1999. But the drop-off in CIS poverty rates has not been as steep as in adjoining South-Eastern Europe, falling only slightly to 7.6 per cent.

In general, the standards of living that are covered by the UN Millennium Development Goals have begun to improve in these regions since the beginning of this decade, reversing declines of the previous decade.

In the CIS countries in Europe, grade school enrolment dropped during the 1990s to 88 per cent in 2000. Enrolment since has progressed slowly to 93 per cent in 2006, but more needs to be done to reach the goal of universal primary school enrolment. In the Asian CIS countries, enrolment in fact increased throughout the transition period, rising steadily to 94 per cent in 2006.

Uneven trends within CIS

Differences between these two parts of the CIS countries are also seen in child mortality trends. Levels of child mortality in CIS countries in Europe are lower than in any developing region. But in Asian CIS, the child mortality rate is the fourth highest among all regions, at 47 deaths per 1000 live births.

Similarly, while the proportion of workforce in unstable jobs – measured in the report by the proportion of self-employed and unpaid family workers – is low in European CIS countries and approaching the levels of developed regions, in the CIS in Asia and in the other transition countries of South-Eastern Europe, close to a third of workers hold these more vulnerable jobs.

The CIS and South-Eastern Europe countries commenced the 1990s in a situation of relative advantage compared to all developing regions. If the pace in addressing remaining problems accelerates modestly, most of the Millennium Development Goals can still be achieved by the target year of 2015.

For example, the coverage of measles immunization in 1990 was already as high as the average for developed regions, at 85 per cent of all children. Maternal mortality was lower than in any developing regions, at 58 deaths per 100,000 live births. Similarly, well above 90 per cent of deliveries were attended by professional health attendants in CIS in Asia, and such coverage was almost universal in CIS in Europe and in the other European transition countries, at 99 per cent of deliveries.

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Access to improved sanitation facilities and to safe drinking water was already at 90 per cent in these countries in 1990. In some transition countries, progress was sustained, but in others, slow advance has put countries off track on reaching MDG targets. For example, progress in access to improved sanitation has slowed and reversed, and maternal mortality has declined only marginally to 51 deaths in 2005.

Slow progress on health

The prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) was low across the board in 1990. However, progress has been slow – the number infected per 100,000 people almost doubled from 78 in 1990 to 152 in 2000, and only started to decline slowly to 124 in 2006. And only 14 per cent of those living with HIV were receiving antiretroviral therapy in 2007, although this already represents some progress from coverage of only 9 per cent the year before.

Women in these countries have traditionally enjoyed easy access to paid employment and political participation. Women held more than half of the paid jobs outside agriculture in 2006, a small increase over 1990. But with the onset of the transition, their participation in national politics was no longer guaranteed and parliamentary representation dropped dramatically. The trend has since reversed, and women have gained ground again, with female representation in national parliaments rising to 14 per cent in 2008.

The UN report, the most comprehensive and updated global MDG assessment, is based on a comprehensive data set gathered by over 25 organizations both within and outside the United Nations System, including the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The project is overseen by the UN Secretariat's Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

For more information and media contacts, please see www.un.org/millenniumgoals.