



Report of the Secretary-General Theme of the 2009 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council: Current global and national trends and their impact on social development, including public health

- The report examines the impact of current national and global trends on social development, and how to address the emerging challenges.
- The world economy is in the most severe financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression. This signifies a marked slowdown in every economy in 2009, and a strained budget. This will aggravate poverty and hunger, undermine social cohesion, propagate diseases and more specifically, increase violence and inequality towards women.
- Without long-term commitments to maintain social spending in developing countries, the Millennium Development Goals will be difficult to achieve.
- Investing in infrastructure and maintaining health spending will help mitigate damages created by the economic downturn, and protect recent social and health-related achievements from being undone.
- The international community should pursue its commitments to delivering aid for health, in the hopes of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Moreover, the response to the crisis needs to be multi-sectoral in its approach.

Key recommendations include:

- Fiscal stimulus packages must be aligned with long-term sustainable development goals. This includes investment in public infrastructure to tackle climate change and inequities in health access.
- Alignment of fiscal stimulus packages with health goals and other Millennium Development Goals should include investments in capacity-building and the training of health professionals, service delivery, information and knowledge tools designed to promote public health goals.
- Developed countries should meet their aid commitments without further delay. Substantial increases in resources and financing for developing countries are needed to be able to implement macroeconomic decisions, and cover payments.
- At the national level, efforts must be strengthened to avoid contraction of social spending, including social protection, safety nets, employment, education and health.
- Governments of developing countries should see social spending as part of a long-term agenda of investing in people. It can also provide and guarantee a significant fiscal stimulus for future economic growth.
- In terms of food security, there is a need to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable populations while at the same time building longer-term resilience by addressing underlying causes.
- Successful agricultural policies can contribute to good health by producing both the food and the income needed for well-being, and successful health policies can benefit agriculture by protecting the agricultural labour force against disease.

Executive Summary

The world economy is in the most severe financial and economic crisis since the Great Depression. Virtually all economies will see a marked slowdown in 2009, with the contraction in developed economies translating into weaker growth in all other countries.

The slowdown is being rapidly transmitted through trade, which it is estimated will decline by roughly 9 per cent in 2009. Unemployment rates are rising in many countries, straining national budgets and putting pressure on household disposable incomes. In many developing countries, the negative impact of the crisis on employment constitutes a major setback in efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

The impact of the global financial and economic crisis seems to have exacerbated the effects of the earlier food and energy crises, which, according to some estimates, pushed between 130 million and 155 million people into poverty.

The present report analyses the impacts of those trends on social development, focusing on poverty and hunger; social cohesion; public spending on social areas, such as social protection, safety nets, education and health; job security; and food security. The report pays special attention to the implications of the current trends for health-related goals and makes a number of recommendations on how to deal with the attendant challenges.