

## 2009 ECOSOC HIGH-LEVEL SEGMENT

### **Dialogue 1: Social trends and emerging challenges and their impact on public health: Renewing our commitment to the vulnerable in a time of crisis**

#### **Overview**

The current global economic and financial crisis threatens to engulf economies throughout the world. In particular, developing countries face falling demand for exports, decreasing commodity prices and a resulting decline in export revenues, declining capital flows, stagnating foreign aid and a rapid slowdown of remittances from overseas workers. As a result of the severe economic slowdown, job losses are increasing rapidly. As more than half of the workforce of developing countries is already employed in conditions that fall short of decent work, the potential impact of the financial crisis on livelihoods of the working poor will be more severe than what is captured in the unemployment rate. The urban poor are at risk because of the impact the crisis will have on employment.

The social effects of the current economic turmoil have the potential to be devastating. With the resulting lower economic growth rates, one estimate is that at least 46 million more people will fall below \$1.25-a-day poverty line during 2009 and an extra 53 million people will be trapped on less than \$2 a day, compared to the level projected before the crisis. The global financial crisis comes on top of the food and energy crises in 2008, forcing 130 million-155 million people into poverty. Higher food prices pushed 115 million people into hunger in 2007 and 2008, pressing the total number to close to 1 billion people. The middle class in many countries is contracting.

Falling revenues will lead to cuts in social spending and increased demand for social expenditure, further exacerbating the situation. Vulnerable groups, children, women, youth, elderly, migrants and people with disabilities, are the ones most affected. Clearly, innovative measures need to be found and implemented in order to pursue social development during these difficult times.

Aging and migration are two demographic trends with a direct impact on public health. Societies of many developed countries require skilled personnel to meet the particular demands of their aging populations, which are currently increasingly met through high number of migrant health workers from developing countries. The developing countries, in turn, face the challenge of meeting their own demands for these skilled personnel if their development goals, in particular the health-related goals, are to be met. The public health demands of an aging population also strains public expenditure. Understanding the implication of these trends on present and future policies can help shape national and global health.

## **Objective/aim of the Dialogue 1**

Dialogue 1 will seek to understand the effects of recent macroeconomic trends on employment, social cohesion, on public spending in social areas and on malnutrition and health challenges. With regard to longer-term demographic trends, the dialogue will address changing age structure, urbanization and migration and their impact on public health.

### **Key questions to be addressed:**

- What are the impacts of the current financial and economic crisis on the public health challenge of developed and developing countries?
- How can we safeguard social expenditure in these times of reduced revenues? What are possible sources that governments can tap into?
- What kind of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms can be put in place to keep track of the impact of unemployment on the health status of the most vulnerable populations?
- What are the good examples of how countries are adjusting to the return of migrants to the country/place of origin? Can these policies be replicated?
- How can we meet the challenge of large scale migration of skilled health workers especially from Africa?
- What would be the long-term trends in aging that have been observed in many parts of the world and how will these impact on the patterns of public health expenditures?
- What are the innovative measures that could be put in place to monitor the fall-out of the crisis, in particular malnutrition and other health impacts and to establish a social protection floor?
- Which are the kinds of concerted actions that can be taken by key partners that could work together in pursuing social development? How can the UN system organizations most effectively support the countries within the framework of its “Delivering As One” agenda?

**Documentation:** An Issues Note of 3-5 pages will be prepared as background documentation for the Dialogue. It will include key policy challenges and possible recommendations for the consideration of member states.

### **Participants**

Chair: H.E. Ms. Sylvie Lucas, President of ECOSOC

Moderator: Mr. Juan Somavia, ILO (tbc)

Lead Panelists:

Dr. Frances Stewart (tbc – will know in 10 days)  
Professor, Development Economics, Oxford University and  
Member of the Committee for Development Policy

Dr. Alberto Palloni  
Professor of Demography and International Studies  
Northwestern University (confirmed)

Ms. Joy Phumaphi, Vice-President for Human Development,  
World Bank (tbc - likely to be Ariel Fiszbein, Chief  
Economist, HDN, World Bank)

Ms. Marcia Metcalfe (confirmed)  
Global Manager, Microfinance and Health Protection  
Freedom from Hunger

Respondent:

Dr. Manuel Carballo, Executive Director, International  
Council on Migration and Health (confirmed)