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## **More than 20 million people in Asia-Pacific could fall into extreme poverty, UN warns**



17 February 2010 – The global economic downturn could push an additional 21 million people in the Asia-Pacific region into extreme poverty, rolling back development gains, according to a United Nations-backed report issued today.

The publication, launched in Manila, examines the toll that the crisis has taken on progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (**MDGs**) – eight anti-poverty targets agreed upon by world leaders with a 2015 deadline – in the Asia-Pacific.

Produced jointly by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**), the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**) and the Asian Development Bank, the report calls for long-term social protection to boost the region's resilience against future shocks.

It found that across the region, only 20 per cent of unemployed and underemployed people have access to unemployment benefits and other labour market schemes, while just under one third of older people receive pensions.

Compared to other areas such as Latin America and Eastern Europe, Asia has much weaker social protection programmes in place, noted Ajay Chhibber, UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific.

"Without better protection, people fall back into poverty," he said, adding that the confluence of the economic crisis, health pandemics and natural disasters thwarts recovery and the achievement of the MDGs.

The report found that fiscal stimulus packages with a strong social expenditure component could produce a double dividend, boosting growth and also accelerating development progress.

Prior to the onset of the economic crisis, the Asia-Pacific region as a whole had been making considerable strides, including being on track to meet three key targets: gender parity in secondary education, children's universal access to primary school and halving the proportion of people living below the extreme poverty threshold of \$1.25 per day.

However, the downturn has slowed this momentum, and 21 million people – 17 million in 2009 and a further 4 million this year, roughly equivalent to the population of Australia – have been trapped into extreme poverty.

Women, constituting the majority of Asia's low-skilled, low-salaried and temporary workforce, have been hardest hit, and the demand for migrant labour, also mostly comprising women, has also taken a nose-dive.

Regional cooperation, especially through trade in food, the study stressed, can help to protect Asia and the Pacific from future crises.

Enhancing financial and monetary coordination could go a long way towards limiting the fallout from recessions, it noted.

"This report shows that while we are at a moment of crisis for the MDGs, we also have an opportunity," said ESCAP Executive Secretary Noeleen Heyzer. "As this crisis has exposed many vulnerabilities in the region, we can now address them and direct this recovery towards a stronger sustainable development path for the Asia-Pacific region."

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