

## 999: The human face of economic crisis

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As the economy continues to unravel, a series of papers published today assess the effects of the crisis on children's health, education, and rights in East Asia and the Pacific. Crisis for Children, a special issue of the journal *Global Social Policy*, asserts investments can be made that will not only advance children's rights and break the cycle of poverty, but also safeguard countries' future economic growth and human development.

The special issue is one of the first to provide an in-depth, rigorous social policy analysis of the impacts of the global financial crisis on children. Following a related UNICEF conference on the 'Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Children', held in Singapore 6-7 January 2009, the papers highlight the social policies and protection systems most needed during times of crisis.

In the Asia and Pacific region almost 650 million people live in poverty on US\$1 a day or less. Recent analysis suggests that a ten percent increase in [food prices](#) could push an estimated 105 million more people into poverty in the region - a reversal of about seven years' work of poverty reduction.

"Poorer families in Asia spend on average 40-60 percent of their income on food alone," write UNICEF East Asia and Pacific's regional director Anupama Rao Singh and Regional Adviser for Social and Economic Policy Mahesh Patel in their paper *Global Social Policy Forum: Children and the Economic Crisis*. "Add to this the fact that regional growth will slow by 4-5% - thereby creating enormous job losses - and it is apparent

how this could send millions back into poverty as the full force of these crises hit Asia."

Even before the financial crisis erupted and food and fuel prices spiked in 2008, studies had shown that millions of children were at risk, according to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) economist Ronald Mendoza in his article *Aggregate Shocks, Poor Households and Children*. He explains that some 219 million children in the world under five fail to reach their full potential in cognitive development due to poverty, poor health and nutrition, and deficient care.

The human development gap has a high price: if these children developed to their full potential as adults, their average incomes would be around 20 percent higher. Mendoza's paper maps the different channels through which the effects of the economic crisis, plus volatile food and fuel prices, may be transmitted to the developing world. He warns that this series of 'shocks' can create [poverty](#) that lasts for generations.

A further paper in this issue, *Effects of the Crises on Child Nutrition and Health in East Asia and the Pacific*, gives more detailed evidence of the serious risks that the current food, fuel, economic and financial crisis pose to child health and nutrition in the region. The authors use information on nutrition status, reportable diseases, immunization status and child mortality to estimate the impact of the current crisis. Left unaddressed, the crisis could lead to increases in maternal anaemia rates of 10-20 percent and low birth weight prevalence by 5-10 percent. What is more, childhood stunting could rise by 3-7 percent, wasting by 8-16 percent and under-five child mortality in severely affected countries from 3-11 percent. A range of low-cost and high-impact interventions exist that, if delivered in primary care settings without further delay, could mitigate or even reverse these adverse health and nutrition consequences.

"The views, evidence, arguments, and policy proposals provided in this series of papers serve as a clarion call for further discussion, debate, and action," writes Guest Editor Mahesh Patel. Amidst the overwhelming media coverage of stock market crashes and bank bailouts as this ferocious [financial crisis](#) continues, the impact on [children](#) must not be overlooked.

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