



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

---

Distr.  
GENERAL

E/ESCWA/14/7  
19 February 1987  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: ARABIC/ENGLISH

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA**

Fourteenth session  
4-5 April 1987  
Baghdad

Item 9 of the provisional agenda

**DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE ISSUES**

- (a) **INTERREGIONAL CONSULTATION ON DEVELOPMENTAL  
SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

Note by the Executive Secretary



**INTERREGIONAL CONSULTATION ON DEVELOPMENTAL  
SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

1. The Economic and Social Council, in paragraph 1 of its resolution 1985/26, requested the Secretary-General to proceed with the organization of the interregional consultation on developmental social welfare policies and programmes to be held in the autumn of 1987 when regional preparations would be completed. These preparations include a number of meetings organized within different regions where attention could be more easily focused on specific issues of concern to each area. The results of the various regional meetings will then be analysed and considered in the final preparations for the interregional (global) consultation along with views expressed by interested non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations.
2. Following the example provided by the 1968 International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare, many regional ministerial conferences have been held over the years throughout the world to deal with social welfare policies and programmes. The work of the conferences held since 1985 is directly relevant to the consultation.
3. In Africa, the Fourth Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs, held at Addis Ababa from 18 to 26 March 1985, recommended that a document on the African social welfare situation be prepared for the interregional consultation by the Economic Commission for Africa and the Organization of African Unity. It is proposed that this document should be considered by the Fifth Conference of African Ministers of Social Affairs in early 1987.
4. The Third Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Welfare and Social Development, held at Bangkok from 9 to 15 October 1985, recommended active participation of the member States of the region in the interregional consultation. The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific will prepare a paper on the Asian and Pacific social welfare situation for the interregional consultation.
5. The Pan-Arab Regional Conference on Social Welfare Policies held in October 1985 at Tunis resulted in the Arab Declaration on Social Welfare Policies. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia has commissioned a paper for the interregional consultation, a summary of which, under the title "Major trends in developmental social welfare policies in the countries of Western Asia", is annexed to the present document.
6. The next step in preparation for the interregional consultation is in the European region, where the Government of Poland has informed the 34 States members of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and three other participating States of its intention to convene in Warsaw from 6 to 11 April 1987 a conference of European ministers responsible for social affairs as the

Annex

MAJOR TRENDS IN DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL WELFARE POLICIES  
IN THE COUNTRIES OF WESTERN ASIA

(SUMMARY)

INTRODUCTION

1. The full report, entitled "Developmental social welfare policies in the countries of Western Asia", is about 200 pages in length. It contains a general introduction, six chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter is devoted to a single topic, as follows:

- I. Social policies of the countries of Western Asia: general overview of the present and future situation;
- II. General trends in social policies relating to disabled persons;
- III. The situation of the elderly in Western Asia;;
- IV. Migrant labour: policies and practices;
- V. The situation of women in Western Asia;
- VI. Youth and Arab social policies.

The present summary restricts itself to the following: a general overview of social policies in the countries of Western Asia; policies relating to disabled persons; the situation of the elderly; and migrant labour.

2. The full report does not address other topics, no less important than those listed above, such as poverty, destitution and unemployment. Neither does it take up the topics of narcotic drugs and juvenile delinquency. These phenomena are an increasingly aggravated aspect of the global social scene in the countries of Western Asia as a result of the same structural forces and the same socio-economic factors that bring into being the phenomena and marginal groups dealt with in the report. This situation requires greater study and the formulation of new, alternative social welfare policies within the framework of a global developmental perspective, and it is to be hoped that the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) will give its attention to such matters in its programmes for the next few years.

I. SOCIAL POLICIES OF THE ARAB COUNTRIES OF WESTERN ASIA

3. The International Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Welfare was held in 1968. It acquired particular importance from the fact that it was the first such conference organized by the United Nations at the decision-making level. Moreover, the Conference addressed itself to important dimensions which were new to thinking at that time. It brought out the

importance of social factors in the economic development process, stressed the importance of participation and called attention to certain marginal groups, such as women, the elderly, youth, disabled persons and juveniles, and the need for attention to matters of concern to them.

4. The Conference proposed a concept of welfare which was not acceptable to certain participants, especially those from the developing countries, who considered that that concept reflected the needs and desiderata of the Western societies, which were associated with questions of lifestyle more than with basic needs. The relevant international instruments, however, stress the fact that, however welfare policy is to be precisely defined, its essential ingredient is the impetus towards development. Accordingly, the concept calls attention to a "developmental" function allotting a place to the role of the human being in development and a "preventive" function oriented towards groups that might be negatively affected by the development process. A third function implicit in the concept of welfare is of a remedial nature and is oriented towards marginal groups. The last major function is that of bringing about integration and complementarity together with comprehensive development.

5. It is to be noted that, at the Arab regional level, the term "welfare policy", where the term "welfare" has a connotation of positive well-being or even prosperity, is not in current use. At the same time, a number of concepts are in circulation which are used to convey the same substantive meaning, despite the fact that there are differences among them. They include the concepts of "social policy", "social development", "social service", "social action" and "social welfare" (where "welfare" has the connotation of care for the needy).

6. A number of pan-Arab instruments of relevance have been adopted, such as the Strategy for Social Action in the Arab World (1979), the Arab Strategy for Comprehensive Social Development (1980) and the Arab Declaration on Social Welfare Policies (1985). Such instruments and others reflect the various concepts mentioned above. The Arab Declaration on Social Welfare Policies, however, adopted the concept of social welfare in a sense corresponding to the use of the Western concept of welfare policy. An analysis of the concept of social welfare as contained in the Declaration shows that there is a high degree of concurrence between the two concepts. Both are oriented towards coping with the negative consequences of the process of social change and towards specific groups, such as youth, women, disabled persons, the elderly, juvenile delinquents, etc.

7. This being the case at the level of instruments and concepts, Arab practices in this field, which will be termed "social policies", reflect the general trends which mark the interaction of those policies with particular social issues and social dimensions. These trends can be shown in three areas: first, the manner in which social policies are administered; secondly, the issues that interact with them; and thirdly, the difficulties impeding effective action.

8. With regard to the administration of such policies, it is to be noted that regional institutions are beginning to appear which concern themselves with certain social policy issues. Among the most important are the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, established by the League of Arab States with the objective of promoting Arab co-operation in the fields of social development and social action. There is also the Council of Arab Ministers of Youth and Sports, which was also established by the League, and the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Arab Gulf States, which formulates policies and draws up plans for implementation in the social and labour fields and seeks to promote inter-Arab co-operation in the Gulf in that domain.

9. With regard to action at the country level, the administration of social policies is undertaken by a large number of ministries and official bodies, chiefly ministries of social affairs (in some countries a ministry of social affairs and labour and in others a ministry of social development). They include ministries of health, which play a prominent role in matters relating to disabled persons and the elderly in particular. Ministries of labour and manpower have a direct interest in employment, the creation of job opportunities and retirement schemes. In some cases, the ministries of the interior come to the fore when it is a question of juvenile delinquency and the problem of narcotic drugs. In the Arab countries under consideration, ministries of education also play a part in the administration of social policies, since they play a fundamental role in the education of youth, in matters relating to disabled persons and in special education. Finally, one country (Iraq) has a ministry of youth and a number of others (Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) have supreme councils for youth welfare and sports.

10. Alongside the major and ancillary governmental institutions, there are certain voluntary efforts, although they vary in value and in the role they play from country to country and according to the nature of the social issues involved. In Egypt, for example, non-governmental activity goes back to 1968 and there are a total of 9,949 voluntary associations. In the Gulf countries, on the other hand, such activity goes back only to the beginning of the 1970s, and there are only 204 non-governmental voluntary associations. This means that there is an enormous disparity in the activity that goes on on a voluntary basis in the Arab countries, and it is to be noted that its general orientation is towards fields of a humanitarian nature or of interest to special groups such as disabled persons, women, etc.

11. With regard to priorities among those issues dealt with by social policies, the general trends reveal appreciable development. In addition to the traditional issues linked with the establishment of ministries of social affairs (family and child welfare, social assistance, etc.), new issues have emerged in certain countries which are linked with economic and social development, and they reveal disparities at the global level. Such, for example, is the issue of family planning in Egypt and the fact that it occupies a prominent place in the social policy agenda. Other issues have risen to the surface as a result of growing international and regional

interest, such as those relating to women, disabled persons and narcotic drugs. The United Nations has undoubtedly played an important role in stimulating interest in these and other issues by, inter alia, proclaiming International Women's Year, the International Year of Disabled Persons, etc. There are, finally, important and serious issues which have risen to a level where they can claim the attention of framers of social policies in Western Asia. Among the most important of such issues are those relating to labour problems, whether in labour-importing countries or labour-exporting countries, the economic, social and political consequences of which must compell the intervention of social policy in planning, legislation, supervision and regulation. This has, however, not come about to an extent commensurate with the gravity of the problem.

12. The most significant of the problems and difficulties that have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of social policies in the Arab region are those relating to the issue of co-ordination. There is a notable weakness in the integration and complementarity of social policy and pan-Arab development as a whole. Such policies have a tendency to deal with problems in a piecemeal fashion and to deal with special categories and groups on a purely sectoral basis. There is also notable deficiency in co-ordination among governmental institutions and bodies in matters relating to social issues as well as between governments and voluntary organizations.

13. Another major problem encountered by social policies is that of the training, effectiveness and efficiency of the human resources required for the administration of those policies. The nature of the problem varies from one part of the Arab region to another, some countries suffering from shortcomings of a qualitative nature and some from a quantitative shortage. Furthermore, there are problems relating to the provision of the financial resources necessary if social policies are to be effective.

14. Finally, the limited place allotted to research on matters relating to the administration of social policies cannot be ignored. The relation between research on the one hand and planning and implementation on the other is seriously deficient. There is a shortage of Arab social research centres, and researchers lack precise, up-to-date data on which to base a realistic understanding of social issues and problems.

15. A grasp of those general trends which characterize Arab social policies will make it possible to propose a programme of work for the future that anticipates change in the philosophy underlying such policies and in the methods and mechanisms by which they are formulated and implemented.

16. The philosophy of Arab social action is in need of review. It takes as its point of departure the humanitarian rather than the developmental dimension, particularly as regards special groups, and is a fragmentary philosophy lacking integration and complementarity with pan-Arab policy. It is a sectoral philosophy oriented towards some sectors rather than others; the city rather than the countryside, students rather than the other youth sectors, etc. Any future change in that framework presupposes the

establishment of a global, integrated approach dealing with social issues within a framework that is all-embracing and that takes account of the extent to which such issues are interlinked.

17. The approach of the year 2000 requires that Arab social policies should tackle and resolve certain important issues. They include the development of the Arab village, illiteracy and participation. There is also a need to come to terms with certain problems that have become aggravated in recent years and with which most such policies have been reluctant to deal directly and frankly. The most important of them are the problems of narcotic drugs and migrant labour, particularly Asian labour. The formulation of outlines for a programme for the year 2000 will require a high degree of regional and international co-operation. The convening of the interregional consultation in the autumn of 1987 under the auspices of the United Nations will undoubtedly give rise to much discussion and will produce important ideas. It will also be a review and assessment of the social policies implemented over the years.

## II. SOCIAL POLICIES AFFECTING DISABLED PERSONS

18. The adoption in 1982 by the United Nations General Assembly of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons was one of a series of efforts to place the problem of disabled persons among the priorities of social concerns and issues. The Assembly had previously proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons, with the theme "Full participation and equality".

19. The inter-Arab instruments dealing, inter alia, with the issue of disabled persons grew in number and some of them, such as the Strategy for Social Action of 1979, called for the establishment of social welfare, special education and rehabilitation institutions. In 1981, the Kuwait Regional Conference on Disabled Persons adopted the Arab Declaration on Action for Disabled Persons, which embodied the principles of equality of opportunity and fairness in education and employment. Finally, the 1985 Arab Declaration on Developmental Social Welfare Policies criticised the efforts made for the welfare of special groups, including disabled persons, and stipulated that their rights should be promoted and their situation improved.

20. According to 1981 United Nations estimates, there were more than 500 million disabled persons in the world, 80 per cent of them in the developing countries. It is difficult to estimate the magnitude of the problem in the Arab world with any degree of accuracy owing to the lack of precise statistical surveys in many Arab countries. The problem is also ignored or disregarded in some countries. The 1981 Arab Declaration on Action for Disabled Persons estimated that there were 15 million disabled persons in the Arab world, an estimate that may be well below the actual figure.

21. The United Nations has defined "handicap" as follows (A/37/351/Add.1, annex, para. 6): "A disadvantage for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role



that is normal, depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors, for that individual."

22. Arab definitions of the concept vary between the very narrow and the very broad in order to reflect the differing economic and social framework. Some address other forms of disability linked not only with physical and mental impairment but with incapacity to participate fully in economic activity and in society.

23. The search for the major factors linked with disability in the Arab region reveals that they fall into three groups. The first group includes social and environmental factors, and the most important of them reflect the relationship between poverty and disability. This relationship is confirmed by the high incidence of disability in Arab villages which suffer from adverse economic and social circumstances. In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, 64 per cent of disabled persons live in the countryside as against 34 per cent in the cities. One study has estimated that, in Egypt, 65.9 per cent of disabled persons live in rural areas as against 34.2 per cent in cities, despite the fact that the total population is evenly divided between the two. There are also indications that there are large numbers of disabled persons among expatriate workers, a phenomenon to be found in the countries of the Gulf.

24. The second group of factors responsible for disability in Arab societies includes certain values, standards and practises, the most significant being the encouragement of marriage between close relatives, folk medicine and the attitude of the family towards disabled children. The last group comprises those individual and medical factors in which disability is due to hereditary or congenital considerations.

25. Despite the recent origin of concern for various categories of disabled persons in the Arab countries, general trends in the way the phenomenon of disability is handled can be discerned. Basic responsibility for the administration of matters relating to disabled persons is centered in the ministries of social affairs. In most cases, a special department is assigned for the care of disabled persons, sometimes called the "social rehabilitation section" (as in Bahrain) or the "department of social rehabilitation" (as in Egypt). In some of the Arab countries, responsibility for matters relating to the problems of disabled persons is not concentrated in the ministry of labour and social affairs but is shared by the ministries of health, education and social affairs (as in Saudi Arabia and Qatar). Despite the fact that, by law, such responsibilities are assigned to some authorities and not to others, in practice matters affecting disabled persons are basically shared among three ministries: those of social affairs and labour; education; and health.

26. Administrative experience in dealing with Arab social policies regarding disabled persons differs from one country to another. In some countries, such as Egypt, such experience is of long standing and goes back to the 1930s, while in others, such as most of the countries of the Arabian Gulf, it has its origin only in the 1970s. This important dimension affects the perspective in

which the matter is handled, the extent to which it is handled effectively and the nature of the problems encountered.

27. The concern of social policies for disabled persons in the region focuses on the role of social welfare. The goals of welfare are to assist disabled persons to make use of their physical, mental and social capacities and aptitudes and to return those who are capable to society reconciled with themselves and with others. Welfare procedures vary between complete and partial institutionalization and in accordance with the nature of the handicap (mental, partial or sensory handicap). Most Arab countries of the region have special departments of social rehabilitation which provide rehabilitation and educational programmes for disabled persons in order to facilitate their integration into society. Such welfare institutions are ideally required to undertake their activities in co-operation with the ministry of health, which has special expertise in regard to medical treatment, and the ministry of education, which oversees the education of certain categories of disabled persons, for example in mental development schools, in special education and in schools for the deaf and dumb.

28. Alongside the official institutions, there are voluntary institutions or non-governmental organizations which play a role in this domain. These efforts reflect varying experiences. In Iraq, the General Federation of Iraqi Women oversees the non-governmental institutions that concern themselves with the issue. In most of the countries of the Arabian Gulf, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, there are non-governmental associations that are involved in matters affecting disabled persons. In Egypt, there are dozens of such associations whose establishment is historically linked with humanitarian goals in the field of welfare for the handicapped, and 144 associations are active in this domain.

29. The administration of matters relating to disabled persons raises a number of important problems that call for attention. The first is that of co-ordination. There is a notable lack of co-ordination and complementarity in the functioning of official and voluntary institutions and an inequitable distribution of resources and responsibilities among the centres and parties concerned. It is thus necessary to extend voluntary and governmental services to the countryside. Another problem is that relating to legislation affecting disabled persons. Although such legislation ensures a minimum level of attention to the problem and extends to the areas of employment, education, rehabilitation, training and services, much of it is of a disparate and non-complementary nature, and it suffers from shortcomings in a number of respects. A welcome initiative in the field was that taken by Egypt in 1975 when the various legal provisions relating to disabled persons were brought together in a single Act, the Social Rehabilitation Act, No. 39/1975. The Kuwaiti Government has also endeavoured to promulgate a Disabled Persons Act and to establish a Supreme Council on the Handicapped. The third and last problem associated with social policies for disabled persons is the limited opportunities for disabled persons themselves to participate in decision making in matters directly affecting them.

30. With regard to the principle of equality of opportunity for disabled persons, the actual policies and practices of the Arab countries reveal a deficiency and a gap between principle and reality. Although there is a stipulation that disabled persons have a right to education, some Arab countries have serious shortcomings in their capacity to absorb this group, as is the case in Egypt for example. Some do not provide for such a right at all, and some provide services and opportunities of a very limited nature. The fact that legal provisions are in place that assist disabled persons in finding employment does not necessarily mean that they are in force. Manpower offices in Egypt have found jobs for only 3 per cent of the disabled persons registered with them. In the Gulf region, no such departments helping to provide work for disabled persons exist at all. With regard to equality of access to social, health and welfare services, some social policies do not provide such services in adequate quantity or of an appropriate quality. Most require a greater degree of integration and complementarity among health, education and rehabilitation services.

31. Finally, Arab social policies with regard to disabled persons must undergo a change in philosophy and approach. The approach to the problem must go beyond the humanitarian concept and take account of the developmental concept based on the integration of disabled persons in society. Disabled persons must, in future, be given the opportunity to express themselves and to promote the idea of their participation in decision making as it affects them. Research occupies an important place in the strategy to be adopted in coping with the situation, since forward planning cannot be carried out without accurate statistical surveys and genuine data. The institutions themselves also emerge as being in need of reform and their lack of co-ordination, planning and complementarity adversely affects their effectiveness.

32. An Arab regional approach will no doubt represent an important resource in providing some of the major requirements for coping with the problems of the handicapped. Inter-Arab co-operation and complementarity in the field is capable of matching financial with human resources within the framework of successful regional projects, such as the manufacture of appliances appropriate for disabled persons, the establishment of special training centres at the regional level, and so forth.

33. The prolonged wars in Western Asia (the Gulf war and the war in Lebanon) continue to leave behind them thousands of disabled persons. There is also an increase in disability rates brought about by industrialization, the increasing use of machinery and of modern means of transport. All of this, alongside the traditional sources of disability, is aggravating the problem at present and will continue to do so in future. It therefore requires urgent attention.

### III. THE SITUATION OF THE ELDERLY IN THE COUNTRIES OF WESTERN ASIA

34. There are numerous definitions of the concepts of aging and the elderly, and there is sometimes confusion between those concepts and that of the aged.

The latter term normally refers to those over the age of 80, and the "elderly" is the age level before that, usually determined as beginning at 60. The term "aging" has been chosen by the United Nations to indicate the continuing process of change accompanying the later stages of human life, and the operational definition adopted by the relevant international instruments is that of the age group of 60 and above. There can be no doubt that the constant increase in the size of that group in recent decades has made it an important segment of society.

35. The International Plan of Action on Aging adopted by the 1982 World Assembly on Aging laid down a number of goals which together form an interwoven texture of humanitarian and developmental dimensions. The former are oriented towards meeting the needs of the elderly in the fields of health, nutrition, housing, employment and so forth. The latter are oriented towards the equilibrium between population structure and social, economic and environmental factors.

36. In another respect, the successive Arab instruments and declarations have also stressed concern for the elderly. The framework within which the issue is posed, however, indicates a linkage with the humanitarian rather than the developmental dimension. Such instruments call attention to the importance of the welfare of the elderly and their integration into every-day social life. It must, however, be pointed out that the document issued in 1985 under the title "Arab Declaration on Developmental Social Welfare Policies" marked an advance in the philosophy underlying the manner in which the issue of the elderly has been handled. The Declaration states that the changes taking place in population structure must be taken into account together with the social priorities and changing orientations that they entail.

37. In practice, recent years have clearly mirrored important changes in the economic and social structure of the Arab countries. Those changes are attributable to a number of factors, the most significant being oil wealth and the social changes and the changes in values that it has brought about. On the one hand, the traditional concept of the extended family has, in the Gulf countries, undergone changes which have had a negative effect on the situation of the elderly. On the other hand, the migration of Arab workers has been concentrated basically in the youth sector, leaving behind a great number of old persons in the labour-exporting countries. It can also be said that successive wars in the region continue to affect population structure. These factors have undoubtedly accentuated a problem whose appearance had been delayed by Arab culture and Arab values and by the nature of agricultural activity in most Arab societies.

38. United Nations estimates indicate that the proportion of elderly persons in the population structure of the developing countries is high, having recently reached 6.3 per cent of the total population. By 1975, the world figure had risen to 350 million. The number of elderly persons in the region of Western Asia was estimated at 5,648,000 in 1980, out of a total population of 97,838,000. The basic observation to be made in this regard is that there is a disparity in fertility rates among the countries of the region, those characterized by low fertility having a large elderly sector and vice versa.

39. Certain Arab countries of the region do not consider that present trends in estimates of numbers of elderly persons represent a danger to them. Such countries include those of the Arabian Gulf area where the elderly account for 4.9 per cent of the population as against a figure of 6.23 per cent for Egypt, for example. The fragmentary data available for the Arab region confirm the prevailing world-wide trend for the number of elderly in the countryside to be greater than that in the cities. The statistics available for the Arab countries indicate that the trend for there to be a greater number of elderly females than males is not a universal one since in some of them, such as those of the Gulf, elderly men outnumber elderly women.

40. There are a number of bodies and institutions in the Arab world that are concerned with the elderly as a population group requiring special attention. The most prominent include the ministries of social affairs that assume responsibility for their welfare by providing social assistance to those in need and running homes for the elderly and supervising the services they provide. It is notable that many of the Arab countries include welfare for the elderly in the framework of that for disabled persons (as is the case in the Gulf countries), thereby affecting the statistics relating to each group. Generally speaking, the trend in Arab societies towards the establishment of homes for the elderly is not a marked one and, except in Egypt, is limited over all. Some countries, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia, do not have such homes since they regard them as counter to the values implicit in parental respect and filial piety.

41. Ministries of labour, where their functions are separate from those of ministries of social affairs, play a role in regard to their responsibilities for employment and for retirement schemes. Ministries of health and ministries of national insurance (or insurance boards) also deal with matters concerning the elderly.

42. National insurance and social security laws provide the minimum laid down by law for the welfare of the elderly. Some Arab constitutions, such as those of Egypt, Kuwait and Bahrain, provide that the State has a responsibility to provide disability insurance for its citizens, including disability arising from old age. Others, such as the interim Constitution of the United Arab Emirates and the interim Basic Law of Qatar, as amended, stipulate no such direct responsibility on the part of the State. National insurance is the legal form prevailing in the Arab countries and is channelled to workers as a regular stipend following retirement. The predominant trend is to set the age of retirement at 60; Bahrain is an exception in that it makes retirement voluntary and sets no upper age limit. Most Arab countries have something resembling the Public Assistance Act in Kuwait or the Social Security Act in Egypt, targeted at groups that do not benefit from the National Insurance Acts.

43. Health insurance services in the countries of the region do not conform to a single trend but vary from one country to another. The legal provisions themselves and numerical estimates of beneficiaries do not, however, give a true picture of health insurance. The qualitative dimension is important to any evaluation and qualitative indicators reflect the modest level of health services. General trends in social policies relating to educational,

promotional and social services are for the most part limited and do not rise above the experimental level or that of pilot projects in some of the countries concerned.

44. The general trend in retirement policies in the Arab countries of Western Asia is to set the compulsory age of retirement at 60. There are a growing number of voices calling for a review of retirement and employment policies in the Gulf States in keeping with ongoing economic and social changes there. They consider the age of 65 as more appropriate for retirement since the labour market is largely dependent on foreign workers and full use must be made of local expertise.

45. The basic observation to be made with regard to the approach of Arab social policies to the elderly is that their basic premiss rests on humanitarian considerations and the absence of any dimension relating to the integration of the elderly in society and their participation in production. This can be explained in part by the fact that the present attitude towards old people in Arab society is relatively encouraging in the light of Arab and Islamic culture and values, and the care of the elderly continues to be regarded as the prime responsibility of family and offspring. The question of the elderly therefore either does not appear in the scheme of concerns of some Arab governments or occupies a place of lesser importance and is handled in a piecemeal manner.

46. The question of aging and the present and future situation of the elderly requires to be addressed anew, and renewed consideration needs to be given to their place in the scheme of Arab social policies. The starting point for such an approach is the adoption of a scientific method capable of establishing the dimensions of the phenomenon and planning for it. Accurate statistics and data are a basic requirement in determining the magnitude of the phenomenon and identifying indicators of its future development. The philosophy underlying the manner in which the question of aging is handled must be subject to change, since to regard this population group within the framework of social welfare provided to special categories implies a negative approach to its capacity to function and to participate in society. Legislation is one tool that can play an important role and there is a need to review retirement, employment, vocational rehabilitation and national insurance policies. A major precondition for effectiveness is that social policies should be flexible, since the elderly do not represent a single, homogeneous demographic category. They include men and women, rural and urban inhabitants, and so forth, and each subgroup requires special handling. Voluntary efforts naturally complement those of governments, and they represent an important field for innovation and initiative and a fertile area for the exchange and development of Arab expertise, particularly with regard to the idea of continuing education, training and rehabilitation.

#### IV. MIGRANT LABOUR: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

47. The number of migrant workers in the world is estimated at 20 million, 5 million of them in the Middle East (Western Asia). In other words, a region

with a population of no more than 100 million and representing less than 1 per cent of world population accounts for about 25 per cent of the world's migrant labour. Most such migrant and expatriate labour is concentrated in the Gulf countries, namely Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

48. Despite the importance of expatriate labour in the economic and social life of the Gulf countries, detailed statistics on the elements of which it is composed are not available for all countries. With the exception of Kuwait, which gathers and publishes detailed data, the other Gulf countries do not publish reliable or detailed information. Extrapolating from the figures for Kuwait, it is possible to say that one half of the expatriate workers in the oil-producing countries of Western Asia are Arabs and one half from non-Arab Asian countries. In some of the Gulf countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, the number of Asian expatriates is greater than the number of Arabs. Egyptian workers account for about 40 per cent of all expatriate Arab labour.

49. A phenomenon worthy of note is that the drop in the revenues of the oil-producing countries did not coincide with a drop in the size in the expatriate labour force. After the expatriate labour force reached its peak in 1980 and 1981, oil production and oil prices gradually began to decline. The expatriate labour force did not, however, decline in the same proportion. This situation can be explained on a number of grounds. The decline in revenues may have brought about a drop in wages while the absolute size of the expatriate labour force remained approximately the same. The impact of the decline in revenues may take a number of years to make itself felt and may only become apparent towards the end of the 1980s. In any event, expatriate labour remains a phenomenon of considerable magnitude and will continue to be an important part of the socio-economic map of Western Asia. This makes it necessary for attention to be paid to the phenomenon from the social policy point of view.

50. Migrant labour being such a vital and important phenomenon, international interest in it began to grow, taking a variety of forms. Alongside the United Nations and the organizations of the United Nations system, particularly the International Labour Organisation (ILO), regional efforts are under way and there are collective and bilateral agreements to regulate migration and ensure a minimum of legal protection and social welfare for migrant workers. In the 1980s, the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council have focused on improving the conditions of migrant workers and their families and on helping them adjust to and cope with new problems. Reports have also called for the review of agreements and conventions on the legal and administrative rights of migrant workers.

51. ILO is one of the major specialized agencies of the United Nations system concerned with the status of migrant workers and has issued some hundreds of instruments relating to international migrant labour. One of the most important of all is the ILO Migration for Employment Convention of 1949 (No. 97), which was revised in 1975 to take account of changing conditions in the world economy. None of the Gulf countries other than Oman, which is not a member of ILO, has signed the Convention, and this fact has had a negative

impact on ensuring the legal commitment and providing the moral imperative for the establishment of the necessary programmes and services for migrant workers and their families.

52. At the Arab regional level, interest in the issue of migrant labour goes back to about 10 years before the oil boom. It came about as part of the attempts at Arab economic integration that commenced with the Arab Economic Unity Agreement of 1964. The Council of Arab Ministers of Labour discussed the question of the movement of workers within the Arab world. In 1967, Convention No. 2 was adopted, stipulating that the contracting parties would undertake to facilitate the movement of labour, to give priority to Arab workers and to grant them the same rights and privileges as those enjoyed by their counterparts in the receiving Arab countries. Only six Arab States ever ratified the Convention, none of them among the members of the Gulf Co-operation Council which together account for the greater part of expatriate Arab labour. In 1977, Convention No.9 was signed but was no more successful than its predecessors, being once more ignored by the major labour-importing countries. Alongside these formal and collective efforts, there are no less than 13 bilateral agreements among labour-sending and receiving countries. The Gulf countries seem to prefer such agreements to collective agreements and are parties to a number of them.

53. Despite certain differences among the labour-receiving countries, they do not, with the exception of Iraq, consider themselves "countries of migration" and regard migrant labour as a temporary phenomenon for which there will eventually be no need. There are therefore no population policies aimed at integrating expatriate workers into the local population. Many receiving countries, and especially the Gulf countries, have adopted strict policies to control migrant labour and to restrict the natural growth of migrant stocks by withholding permission for workers to be accompanied by spouses and children. In order to perpetuate the temporary nature of this situation, the receiving countries, as of 1983, no longer grant the right of permanent residence to expatriate workers. At most, a five-year residence permit is given for employment in the State apparatus or in the public sector and a two-year permit for employment in the private sector. The receiving countries have also imposed restrictions on the freedom of expatriate workers to change jobs and have denied them the right to organize trade unions or professional associations.

54. There are no periodic survey studies to monitor the working conditions of expatriate workers, and there is no evaluation or follow up in the workplace. Unskilled and semiskilled workers in the private sector are virtually excluded from the application of the labour laws. The few studies that have been carried out (1982) indicate that contracts for such workers are of a merely formal nature. The real terms of the contract are rarely stipulated in writing and are not subject to any rules. There is no minimum wage for expatriate workers in either the private or the public sector, and there are thus wide disparities in wages for the same work according to the nationality of the worker. Expatriates from the Western countries come at the top of the pyramid, followed by the local people, then Arab expatriates and finally, at the base



of the pyramid, the Asian workers. There is a similar disparity within each of the regional groupings of expatriate workers; among Arab expatriates, Lebanese and Palestinians are in a better position than workers from Egypt, the Sudan, Yemen and Somalia. Working hours vary with skill, and there is an inverse relation between level of skill and number of hours worked.

55. Among expatriate workers, the feeling that their residence is of a temporary nature reflects on their living conditions. Housing is one of the most important aspects that requires to be addressed. The situation became aggravated in the second half of the 1970s when the flow of labour was taking place at a more rapid rate than housing stocks were increasing. Property rents were increased when the governments of each of the Gulf labour-importing States permitted the owners of new properties to do this every five years, and the value of older properties also rose. This situation led to increased overcrowding of expatriate workers in residential units.

56. Adverse working and living conditions are reflected in the health situation of migrant workers, particularly that of the unskilled majority. The situation is deteriorating because of the fact that employers do not provide health insurance for their employees. For their part, workers are reluctant to spend on health services in their desire to save. Some also arrive from their home countries with infirmities of one kind or another.

57. Most of the labour-receiving Gulf countries have a compulsory education system to which, in theory, the children of migrants have access. However, in those cases where migrant workers are permitted to be accompanied by their families, they find numerous difficulties in enrolling their children in government public schools. One such difficulty is that they can only find places in schools far from their places of residence. Asian workers have a particular difficulty, that of the language difference. The ultimate outcome as it affects the legal status and the living and working conditions of migrant workers is that they are below the level required by the standards established by the relevant international and regional organizations.

58. Future probabilities indicate that the expatriate labour force will continue to be a large one despite the contraction in oil revenues. Revenues fell by more than 50 per cent between 1980 and 1985, while the expatriate labour force was reduced by only about 10 per cent. This means that wage levels and working conditions will deteriorate in comparison with the late 1970s and the early 1980s, a situation that will require a set of remedial and protective measures in the interests of expatriate workers.

59. The first set of recommendations contained in the full report is addressed to the present and future management and regulation of expatriate labour. In that context, there emerges a need for action to limit the migration of qualified Arabs to the industrialized countries, to provide support to the specialized Arab organizations that play a role in matters relating to employment and labour and to orient the various Arab development funds at the country level and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development towards direct involvement in human resource development and

training. Recommendations at this level are also directed towards the formulation of uniform policies for employment procedures in the Arab labour-receiving countries and the promotion of contacts and the exchange of information on available job opportunities between those countries and the labour-sending countries concerned. There here arises the importance of ratifying the Arab labour conventions and ensuring their implementation in conformity with declared Arab commitments. Bilateral co-operation and ongoing consultation among the Arab parties can also play an important role in devising unequivocal solutions in keeping with the strategies and recommendations of the inter-Arab labour conventions.

60. The second set of recommendations is addressed to the problem of return migration. The legitimate interests of sending and receiving countries must be taken into account, and joint activities must be undertaken in vocational training and in upgrading the labour force. In coping with the problem of return migration, there is a need to establish production enterprises in the sending countries in order to employ those workers who may return home. Individual and collective grants might also be provided in order to assist returning workers to embark on a new and productive life. Co-operation among all parties is essential with a view to bringing about the rational replacement of non-Arab by Arab workers. Such a step would be of importance in promoting co-operation and security and ensuring the stable development of the Arab countries.

#### V. CONCLUSION

61. A reading of the full report would perhaps corroborate most of the statements made in chapter I with regard to developmental social welfare policies in the countries of Western Asia. Despite the magnitude of the sectors targeted by those policies and despite the abundance and complexity of the problems encountered by each such sector, the level of response to them continues to fall below the minimum required in terms of conceptualization, policy, organization, performance and results.

62. From the conceptual point of view, there is still confusion and obscurity, if not incoherence and inconsistency, in the definition and tenor of "social development", "social welfare" and "social well-being". The lack of conceptual clarity must inevitably give rise to breakdowns in the formulation of policy and thence in organization, performance and results. The author of the report has striven to define the concept of development<sup>1/</sup> without adopting the traditional separation of "economic development" from "social development". The global meaning of development is the provision of unrestricted opportunity to human beings (individuals, groups and societies)

---

<sup>1/</sup> See Sa'd al-Din Ibrahim, Al-Nizam al-Ijtima'i al-Arabi al-Jadid, Beirut, Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdah al-Arabiyyah, 1982 and "Nahw nazariya ammah fi al-tanmiyah" in Abhath al-Mu'tamar al-Thalith lil-Iqtisadiyin al-Misriyin, Cairo, Al-Jam'iyah al-Misriyyah lil-Iqtisad wa-al-Tashri' wa-al-Ihsa', 1977.

to develop their innate aptitudes and acquired abilities to the optimum extent. In operational terms, that means organizing so as to achieve equality of opportunity on the one hand and to enhance the number of opportunities available in society on the other. Such social organization can be provided by the State or by bodies formed by the citizen community (such as non-governmental organizations) or by both in partnership. In the societies of Western Asia before the contemporary era, it was the traditional groupings, such as the extended family, the clan, the tribe, the guild, the confessional group and the administration of religious endowments, which undertook to provide most of the social welfare required by their members. Although this practice continues to exist in part, most such welfare activities seem to have vanished or to have become dispersed among the institutions of the modern nation State on the one hand and the new bodies established by the citizen community on the other: it is this that causes policies to falter.

63. Although the societies of Western Asia are among the oldest in the world, if indeed they are not the oldest, the establishment of the modern State in the region is a relatively recent development going back no more than four decades in most of the countries concerned. The concept of "the State" itself varies, and consequently that of its functions. There is the Western model, where the functions of the State are restricted to limited and specific tasks and where activities of a social nature are left to the new bodies established by the citizen community, such as trade unions, political parties, corporations and voluntary associations; the socialist model, in which the State assumes all functions relating to production and services; and the "Welfare State" model which prevails in the Scandinavian countries. It can be said that all the countries of Western Asia adopt a blend of all three models, not in a balanced, clearly demarcated and co-ordinated way in the division of functions, but in a random and improvised fashion. This is reflected in development policies in general and in social welfare policies in particular. The success of such policies has come to depend not on their soundness, coherence or clarity or on the institutional mechanisms used in their implementation so much as on the fortuitous availability of public resources in a given society. In those Gulf countries that are affluent because of oil revenues, there may be a high level of social welfare not because of mandated social policies in the narrow sense of the word but in spite of such policies. In the countries that do not have such large resources, deprived groups receive very little indeed from State social welfare programmes. A social worker in one such country has estimated the per capita share in the budget allocated to the ministry concerned with such programmes at less than one United States dollar a year in the mid-1980s.

64. In the countries of Western Asia, the modern State does not, moreover, allow or encourage to a sufficient extent the growth of the non-governmental sector in the field of developmental social welfare. Even in countries where the non-governmental sector had an early and promising start, such as Egypt, it has been impeded, on regulatory grounds, by many bureaucratic governmental restrictions. In most of the countries in question, the establishment of voluntary associations has, over the years, become more and more difficult and governments are zealous in their desire to control, codify and supervise all

citizen activity. Accordingly, the government bureaucracy in the social field has become inflated far beyond the requirements of the social services it provides. The writer of the report here summarized was informed by a worker in the social field, on the basis of officially disseminated figures, that in the budget of the ministry responsible for "social development" salaries and remuneration account for two thirds of annual appropriations while direct services to targeted groups account for only one third.

65. The position is, then, that the institution of the State is provided with conceptual clarity neither with regard to its functions nor the meaning of "developmental social welfare". It does not allow or encourage the establishment of bodies by the citizen community (the non-governmental sector) so than they may undertake the required developmental welfare tasks. The position is further complicated by the lack of organizational capabilities in the State apparatus in general and by the low standard of co-ordination among the governmental institutions responsible for developmental social welfare in particular, as is pointed out more than once in the report. There is, in one respect, a fragmentation that does violence to the concept of development, in another respect, a division of responsibilities for the groups targeted for welfare and, in a third respect, a lack of co-ordination.

66. The situation would be better if that were the whole story, and if the governmental institutions concerned had, each of them, a reasonable degree of competence in actual performance. All the evidence, however, indicates that the situation is otherwise. Some of those institutions lack financial resources, some lack qualified personnel and some lack both. The absence of scientific information and studies, or the lack of use made of them, interacts with the shortcomings previously mentioned to make the overall performance of such institutions poor and to make the ultimate outcome of all the efforts made in the social field extremely meagre.

67. This entire situation is out of keeping with the enormity of the challenges facing the countries of Western Asia. Some of those challenges are inherited and of long standing, some are new and unexpected and some are the result of a pathological interaction between the inherited and the new.

68. It is not the intention of this conclusion to repeat the statements made in the first and subsequent chapters dealing with particular sectors and groups or to repeat the long lists of recommendations made in the international, regional and pan-Arab declarations on development and social welfare. One matter must, however, be stressed in this connection, and that is that citizen community bodies in the countries of Western Asia must be given the opportunity in the coming decade to take shape and to become active.

69. A number of considerations dictate that this recommendation should be stressed, some of which have already been mentioned either implicitly or explicitly. There can be no harm, however, in mentioning others. The first such consideration is that the institution of the State in Western Asia is overloaded with functions. It seems that, in a region in which prolonged wars and conflicts reign, considerations of "national security" absorb much of its

concern and the greater part of its resources. Even the oil-producing countries among the countries of the region will not benefit in the coming decade from the financial resources from which they prospered in the last. Moreover, some of the countries in question are currently burdened with external debt (Egypt, Democratic Yemen, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) and some, which are involved in ongoing wars (Lebanon and Iraq), will have to cope with their physical reconstruction when those wars come to an end. In brief, the countries of Western Asia will face the next decade or two in a situation where the State will be materially unable to maintain expenditure on developmental social welfare programmes at the same level as previously, and that at a time when the pressure of demand on such services is growing. Normally, when a State, even one of the more developed States, is obliged to reduce or rationalize expenditure, the first victim is precisely such programmes.

70. The second consideration is that, even in the best material circumstances prevailing in those countries over the last four decades, the effectiveness of the governmental apparatus has been below the standard required for co-ordination and performance. There therefore remains a realistic hope, in the best case analysis, for a partial and slow improvement in governmental institutions. The greatest hope lies with the non-governmental institutions, or what has been termed the citizen community bodies. The specific observation to be made is that some of those institutions provide their members or the groups that they target with services that are relatively better, such as the insurance, pension, social welfare and health programmes provided to members by trade unions and professional associations or the services provided by sectoral associations or local community associations to certain deprived groups.

71. The third such consideration is that one sense of development as understood in the context of the global concept, and of social development in the strict sense, is that of the organization of the participation of citizens in the development process. There is here no better operational embodiment of that meaning than that involved in promoting self-help among citizens by their establishing citizen associations and institutions managed and controlled by themselves and offering services of benefit to them and their families. In the literature and practice of development, the strategy of self-reliance and the strategy of satisfying basic needs intersect and complement each other in that regard.

72. Fourth and last; the nature of social development programmes, especially those for deprived groups, implies an extremely acute humanitarian sensitivity. By their nature, governmental institutions, regardless of how well intentioned those in charge may be, are formal and impersonal, are governed by rigid, even if reasonable, rules and are characterized by slow routine. It is perhaps here that citizen and voluntary institutions are superior to their governmental counterparts.

73. To sum up; if there is a hope for a field in which notable qualitative and quantitative progress can be achieved in developmental social welfare

programmes in the countries of Western Asia in the coming decade, that may be principally in the non-governmental sector.

74. What of the role of the State and the responsibilities of the governmental institutions? Whatever the State can do now and in the future will continue to be required since, regardless of the opportunities given the non-governmental sector, the process of stimulating it and getting it under way might take some considerable time. The role of the State, within the limits of its capacities, will therefore remain necessary in the short and medium term. The most significant role of the State, however, in the view here presented and in the light of the recommendations made, is that it should:

- (a) Remove the bureaucratic impediments and restrictions imposed on citizen initiative;
- (b) Provide training programmes for those working in developmental social welfare institutions in the non-governmental sector and those that continue to exist in the governmental sector;
- (c) Provide material and technical assistance to such institutions whenever possible and required;
- (d) Undertake studies and research relating to the activities of such institutions and gather, classify and analyse information and statistical data and make them available to those institutions;
- (e) Mobilize community efforts to tackle existing and newly arising problems through the information media, educational programmes, conferences and seminars.

75. In all of the above, ESCWA has a decisive role to play: firstly, because the proposals made here might appear new and thus at first sight unpalatable to official bodies in the countries of the region; secondly, because they require more detailed examination, discussion and dialogue before they can take final form and become capable of translation into policy; and thirdly, because they require numerous technical inputs from comparative world experience and from the specialized agencies of the United Nations. The Commission can contribute to overcoming these obstacles and to providing these requirements.

-----



