

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
GENERAL
E/ESCWA/21/8/Add.5
14 March 2001
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Twenty-first session
Beirut, 8-11 May 2001

UN ECONOMIC
FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

Item 10 (e) of the provisional agenda

10

LIBRARY & DOCUMENT SECTION
**SELECTED ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE
FOR THE FUTURE OF THE ESCWA REGION**

SOCIAL POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region faces socio-economic difficulties which impede the development process and have a negative impact on the individual and the quality of life in the region. Such difficulties, which are common to other developing countries throughout the world, include indebtedness, which is a burden borne by many countries in the region, high levels of unemployment, poverty and the consequent failure to meet the basic needs of every citizen, high levels of population growth, manifestations of violence, extremism, crime, the spread of drugs and other social ills. The resolution of such difficulties is hampered by the poor level of development of the human resources, the insignificant contribution to economic and social activity made by women, and the brain drain: the capabilities and expertise which leaves the region for abroad. All these factors increase the pressure on social services such as health, education and housing.
2. The countries of the ESCWA region have addressed these demands in their development plans, and have achieved a great deal in many fields. Rates of school enrolment, for example, have increased, and improvements have been made in health services. One of the factors that has made such improvement possible is the increased involvement of women in economic activity. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the degree of success varies from one country to another and that the sustained increase in the demands made on social services, combined with the inadequacy of resources to strengthen them, has sometimes led to a fall in the level of services and the competence of those who provide them.
3. Much remains to be done, both at present and in the future, in order to confront these challenges, which not only affect the needs of existing citizens, but also impact on future generations.
4. Therefore, while it is necessary to apply social policies to current problems, care must also be taken to ensure that those policies continue to be applied to future generations, that resources will be available and that those generations will enjoy a decent standard of living that meets the social needs of citizens in every way in all fields.
5. Traditionally, social policies have been restricted to concepts of direct social care and have visualized only the short-term benefits. Experience has demonstrated the inadequacy of such policies and the need to adopt a long-term approach to the concept of development which takes into consideration the intricate relationships between all the variables and the involvement of all the actors. In consequence, the concept of social care has become a comprehensive framework which includes social, economic and political fields.

6. When social policies are being formulated, it is also necessary to ensure that their components are complementary: the measures taken and plans adopted in the fields of education, health, housing, social guarantees and the social security network must be integrated in order to achieve the goal that is sought, namely, to reach a level sufficient to meet the needs of citizens.

7. This goal, and the social policies that must be applied in order to achieve it, must be taken into account at the overall economic policy formulation stage. It is worth noting that States that apply these policies are investing in and increasing their social capital, which will ultimately help to achieve and ensure the sustainability of economic growth itself.

8. The complementarity on the one hand and, on the other, the sustainability of social policies form a perspective that can help to place the standard of living and social interests of the population at the heart of the development process. The resources available in any given society must be devoted to satisfying the current and future needs of that society.

9. It is against this background that ESCWA has prepared the medium-term programme of work for the period 2002-2005 and the draft programme of work and priorities for the biennium 2002-2003, which are designed to address development priorities and to involve member States in work on those priorities through their national plans and programmes. Resources have been allocated and the necessary technical expertise provided for this purpose within a division that deals with social development issues and policies in the region.



**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
GENERAL
E/ESCWA/21/8/Add.5/Corr.1
4 May 2001
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Twenty-first session
Beirut, 8-11 May 2001

Item 10 (e) of the provisional agenda

UN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION
FOR WESTERN ASIA

10-05-2001

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Corrigendum

Page 2, paragraph 9, line 1

For programme of work read plan
