

DEPARTMENT FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INFORMATION
AND POLICY ANALYSIS

**REPORT ON THE
WORLD SOCIAL
SITUATION
1997**



UNITED NATIONS • NEW YORK, 1997

NOTE

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures.

E/1997/15
ST/ESA/252

UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION
Sales No.: E.97.IV.1
ISBN 92-1-130182-3

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PREFACE

The 1997 edition of the *Report on the World Social Situation* surveys the current socio-economic situation, with a specific focus on core issues of social development. The report was prepared at the request of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Social Development.

The *Report* was prepared by the Microeconomic and Social Analysis Division of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, with the collaboration of the Macroeconomic Division, the Population Division and the Statistics Division.

The *Report* has also benefited from consultations with the World Bank, the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Development Programme. The report draws upon data and analysis from the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and national Governments, as well as academic institutions.

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FOREWORD

The 1997 edition of the *Report on the World Social Situation* is devoted to the central issues considered at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995. The Summit was an integral part of the continuum of world conferences convened by the United Nations in the 1990s to address human rights and key development issues and represented a turning point in our collective consciousness regarding social issues. Inspired by a renewed spirit of solidarity, Member States pledged to fight the threats from common enemies: unemployment, exclusion, rural decline, urban decay, deterioration of the environment, and new and re-emerging diseases.

Following a presentation of current economic patterns at the global and regional levels and an overview of sectoral social issues, the report examines selected aspects of the three main themes of the Summit: eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration. Policy issues and options are analysed from both the national and international perspective. The report takes heed of the Summit's strong advocacy of a systemic, holistic approach and puts forward a broad view of social policy which recognizes the interplay of social, economic and cultural factors.

Development programmes must, to be viable, have a strong focus on people. This focus must be coupled with empowerment so that individuals and social groups can choose their own destiny in full knowledge of the consequences of their acts for present and future generations. The capacity to generate, disseminate and utilize knowledge and information is fundamental in this regard, as has been shown in societies which have succeeded in maintaining their cohesion, respecting human rights, sustaining democratic structures and promoting participatory and equitable development.

The report provides an opportunity to ponder and reflect on these crucial issues in the closing years of the twentieth century. The intent is to generate further ideas as well as actions that will contribute to the realization of the Programme of Action of the Summit—our blueprint for social development into the next century.



(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN
Secretary-General



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Explanatory notes

A full stop is used to indicated decimals.

A comma is used to distinguish thousands and millions.

The term "billion" signifies a thousand million.

The following symbols have been used in tables:

Two dots (..) indicate that data are not available or are not separately reported.

A dash (—) indicates that the amount is nil or negligible.

A minus (-) sign before a figure (-2) denotes a deficit or decrease, except as otherwise indicated.

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add to totals, because of rounding.

The following abbreviations have been used:

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CEETEs	Central and Eastern European transition economies
CFA	Communauté financière africaine
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EGS	Employment Guarantee Scheme
EPZ	export processing zone
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	foreign direct investment
GDP	gross domestic product
GNP	gross national product
ICP	International Comparison Project
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMR	infant mortality rate
LFS	labour force survey
NAIRU	non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment
NGO	non-governmental organization
NMP	net material product
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPP	purchasing power parity

Project LINK	International Research Group of Econometric Model Builders, with Headquarters at the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis of the United Nations Secretariat
SEZ	special economic zone
SNA	System of National Accounts
TFR	total fertility rate
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UN/DESIPA	Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis of the United Nations Secretariat
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
YLD	years lived with a disability
YLL	years of life lost

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of its frontiers.

The term "country" as used in the text of this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following country classification has been used:

Developed economies:

North America (excluding Mexico), Southern and Western Europe (excluding Cyprus, Malta and former Yugoslavia), Australia, Japan, New Zealand.

Economies in transition:

Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and the former USSR, comprising the Baltic republics and the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Developing countries:

Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Pacific (excluding Australia, Japan and New Zealand), Cyprus, Malta, former Yugoslavia. For some analyses, China has been shown separately.

Developing countries have been subdivided into the following groups:

Mediterranean:

Cyprus, Malta, Turkey, former Yugoslavia.

West Asia:

Bahrain, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

East Asia:

Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Republic of Korea. China has usually been shown separately.

South Asia:

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.

South-East Asia:

Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam.

South and East Asia:

Unless otherwise stated, South Asia, South-East Asia and East Asia, excluding China.

Least developed countries (48 countries):

Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zaire, Zambia.

Sub-Saharan Africa:

African continent and nearby islands, excluding North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Western Sahara). In some analyses Nigeria and South Africa have been excluded.

North Africa:

Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Western Sahara.

Arab States:

Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen.

The designations of country groups in the text and the tables are intended solely for statistical or analytical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process.

INTRODUCTION

1. As the twentieth century draws to its close, the world social situation challenges societies with its diversity and complexity. Progress achieved on many fronts coexists with setbacks and even reversals of gains made earlier. Opportunities for social advance seem boundless but many expectations remain unmet. Despite enormous uncertainty and ambivalence, however, the present period represents a time of remarkable social change, and of intense striving and hope. This hope for a better future amid a widespread sense of urgency, reflecting the current challenges confronting individual nations and the international community, permeated the landmark World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen from 6 to 12 March 1995.¹ The *Report on the World Social Situation 1997* appears nearly two years after the Copenhagen Summit. The priority subjects discussed by the Summit constitute the core of this edition of the *Report*, and are used as the starting point and touchstone of the present analysis.

A. THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND MAIN THEMES OF THE REPORT

2. The Summit, including its preparatory process, contributed substantially to an increased level of international awareness of social issues. The *Report* has gained from that discussion, which broadened the social agenda and led to a comprehensive evaluation of what has been achieved, what is still required and which new priorities must be set. The international community recognized that no country, however rich, is immune from social problems. And in those countries where social issues are most pressing, not only the welfare but often the survival of a large part of the population is at stake. The 1997 *Report* documents this situation by describing different facets of social development in health, nutrition and education. Increased migration flows as well as diverse trends in fertility and mortality are also discussed. The *Report* illustrates the fact that many contemporary social problems are global in nature, their solution requiring concerted and well-coordinated efforts on the part of Governments, civil society and the international community.

3. The Summit played a catalytic role in renewing the quest to better integrate economic and social facets into the development process. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development² reflected both national and international developmental efforts, recognizing that while social development remains a national responsibility, the support, collective commitment and efforts of the international community are essential for achieving the goals set out in Copenhagen. A search for a consensus on an appropriate balance between national and international action became an important policy goal forged during the Summit.

4. In analysing the multidimensional nature of social reality, the Summit acknowledged the progress achieved

in many areas of social and economic development. But it also underscored that there are disadvantaged and vulnerable groups within many societies whose interests need to be addressed to make a people-centred framework for social development the norm. The political and social costs of neglect, passivity or inaction are very high. The three-pronged approach adopted by the Summit committed the States Members of the United Nations to eradicating world poverty, promoting full employment as a basic policy priority and achieving social integration based on respect for human rights, as well as on non-discrimination and maximal participation of all people in decisions affecting their well-being. By admitting both the difficulties and challenges facing the international community, at national and international levels in the social field, the Member States took a major step forward in tackling socio-economic development, while charting new priorities for social action.

5. Social development cannot be isolated from ongoing political, economic and cultural changes. Diversity and democratization, which have expanded since the end of the 1980s, have powerfully affected governance and civil society. The end of the cold war and the disappearance of the East-West ideological divide have given rise to numerous economic and social expectations that have yet to materialize. Though economic restructuring in the transition economies has been set in motion, more sizeable economic gains have not matched advances in democracy and freedom. At the same time, the constraints and structures previously held in place by the ideological and military confrontation of the cold war have fallen by the wayside, making the world much less predictable. As a result, some ethnic, national and religious animosities, which remained dormant for decades, have surfaced in different regions, particularly in nation-States that have disintegrated. In their most extreme manifestations, the pent-up frustrations and animosities have led to bloodshed and war.

6. Both new and old threats plague the international community. Major environmental problems put human well-being at risk. Terrorism continues as a major, insidious threat. Corruption, criminality, cross-border crime and the drug trade, supported by organized crime, present an ever-increasing danger. Escalation of violent conflicts, genocide and abuses of human rights affecting large groups of the population have become factors of renewed concern to the international community. Global issues have become more important to multilateral bodies, replacing old issues related to the ideological East-West confrontation. The post-cold war era permitted, and even compelled, the United Nations to shift its focus to those issues.

7. One of the major factors affecting social policies is the globalization of the world economy. While not addressing this broad issue specifically, the report highlights some of its social facets. The premise of the report is that globalization widens the opportunities for eco-

conomic growth, but the process of globalization has risks and costs, including social costs. Increased trade, investment and financial flows have made it more cumbersome for Governments to achieve their policy objectives, sometimes narrowing the range of options available and increasing the cost of policy failures. In certain cases, globalization may have contributed to, or aggravated, existing social ills, such as unemployment, or led to increasing income inequality. It affects all countries, though certain nations, some developing countries in particular, have not yet benefited from the opportunities it provides, including poverty reduction. East Asia is a region that has gained the most to date from globalization. Across Latin America the situation is somewhat ambivalent, though signs of tentative progress have been visible. Sub-Saharan Africa, however, has remained largely on the sidelines.

8. The benefits of globalization are spread unevenly within and among developing countries. Clear understanding of current globalization trends coupled with political will may help the international community to prevent the appearance of new divisions, including that of countries marginalized by the global marketplace. As economies and societies become increasingly interdependent due to the unceasing growth of international commerce, investment and finance, as well as growing communications and transport linkages, social problems become globally diffused. But transnational forces that propel global changes, in particular mobile investment and finance, are weakening the ability of national Governments to influence economic and social outcomes, often putting fulfilment of even the national political commitments, not to mention the ability to influence global trends, beyond the reach of elected national representatives.

9. International cooperation based on a perceived convergence of views on major international issues has served as a powerful tool with which to confront emerging problems. Coordination of social policies at the international level may be as important for achieving positive outcomes as is local adaptation to the challenges of globalization. Autarky and isolation are not viable options, since integration into the world economy brings the potential for shared prosperity and opportunities. Societies that choose to stay on the sideline pay a huge price in terms of missed economic growth.

10. Another major theme that the report highlights is the social consequences of economic restructuring. The thrust of economic policy changes have become similar throughout the world. The economies in transition are, of course, a significant case in point, primarily because of the sheer extent of their systemic transformation agenda. In practice, the transition process has imposed a much heavier social toll than was anticipated at its outset, including increasing poverty and polarization. In developing countries, economic liberalization amid structural adjustment has sometimes increased the risks of instability and marginalization for some social groups, although a number of countries have seized the new opportunities emanating from technological advances, the increased mobility of production factors and a more open trading system. However, given the complex relationship between economic growth and the social fabric of society, it would be desirable to redefine the term "structural adjustment" to include not merely macroeconomic balances

and productive structures, but also the distribution of resources and assets, access to employment and earned income, and the creation of social policies that contribute to human security and stimulate the growth of productive skills.³ This task, at the same time, would make it imperative for policy makers to formulate credible policy responses based on a broad knowledge of national settings and available resources and well-attuned to the challenges of globalization.

B. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT AND DATA USED

11. The *Report on the World Social Situation 1997* consists of two parts. Part one provides an overview of sectoral social issues, emphasizing living conditions. It starts with a presentation of current economic patterns at the global and regional levels. As part of its appraisal of population trends, the *Report* examines the size and growth of populations, both globally and regionally, along with the demographic components of fertility, mortality and international migration that determine these trends. The chapter on health covers two issues: the concern that life expectancy has fallen in sub-Saharan Africa and the transition economies, and an assessment of the largest risks to global health, including new and infectious diseases. The *Report* also provides an assessment of world trends and patterns of hunger and malnutrition, and it elucidates policy issues in this field. Part one closes with a brief discussion of some salient issues in education, including those pertinent to formal education, adult illiteracy and the quality of education systems.

12. Part two of the *Report* addresses the three core themes of the World Summit for Social Development in the order put forward by the Summit's Programme of Action: eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and social integration. This order reflects the priorities set by the Summit, as well as the wishes of the Commission for Social Development, expressed at its thirty-fourth session in 1995 and its special session in 1996. Each chapter discusses policy issues and options, domestic approaches and international instruments, where appropriate.

13. The chapter on poverty examines major trends in absolute poverty worldwide and its relationship to world economic growth. The *Report* makes a tentative assessment of the progress towards eradicating global poverty, along with an overview of key elements in a comprehensive strategy for poverty reduction.

14. The chapter on employment and unemployment focuses on the magnitude of the problems in developing countries, as well as in transition and developed market economies. It addresses issues of economic restructuring and employment, the place of vulnerable groups in labour markets, inequality and the structure of labour markets. The concluding chapter examines discrimination, a subject closely linked to social exclusion, which in many ways is related to social integration. It covers the anatomy and patterns of gender and minority discrimination.

15. The *Report* is based on data collected by national statistical offices and submitted to the United Nations; statistics provided by the regional commissions of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional and international bodies; and databases managed by the Department for Economic and Social Information and

Policy Analysis of the United Nations Secretariat. The chapter on poverty alleviation relies to a large extent on data provided by the World Bank. Whenever possible, the most up-to-date national sources have been used, as long as data quality and comparability with other national and international statistical collections were adequate. The *Report* also relies on national studies that highlight social policy issues. In addition to a wide range of academic literature, the public debate under way in many countries is also used.

NOTES

¹ See *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8).

² *Ibid.*, chapter I, resolution 1.

³ Calls for such a redefinition were made specifically at the International Seminar on Economic Restructuring and Social Policy, held in New York in 1995. See United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, *Report of the International Seminar on Economic Restructuring and Social Policy* (New York, 1995).