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**Economic and Social Council**

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**Social and human rights questions: social development**

**2001 Report on the World  
Social Situation\*\***

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\*\* This is an advance unedited version of the *Report*, the final version will be issued as a United Nations sales publication.

## Preface

The *2001 Report on the World Social Situation* is the fifteenth in a series of reports on the subject dating from 1952. The content, structure and shape of the reports have undergone change, but the main purpose of the series continues to be to provide both participants in intergovernmental debates in the United Nations and a wider audience with a handy, single-volume, succinct summary of global developments seen from a social perspective.

The subject matter covered in the series has changed over the years, expanding with successive reports. The scope of the present *Report* is very wide, covering broadly the range of issues identified in the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, adopted in 1995 at Copenhagen at an event of major significance, which brought together 117 heads of State or Government and delegations from 186 countries in all.

All the reports issued since 1952 have attempted also to give prominence to quantitative indices, where these are available; but while progress has been made in compiling the material necessary for producing indices in respect of many aspects of the life of societies, there remain many gaps and shortcomings, especially in regard to information on and from developing regions, and this has made it necessary to rely heavily in describing the world social situation on the observations, interpretations and analyses of experts, academics and commentators. The statistical information cited in this introduction and overview, unless otherwise stated, is derived from data prepared by the departments of the United Nations Secretariat or specialized agencies which are recognized as the primary international source for the subject areas in question.

Access to a wide range of qualitative information is essential for assessing and evaluating social trends; such information thus continues to be given a prominent place in the *Report*. As the evaluation of social trends is of necessity subjective, it is strongly influenced by the position of the observer. Perceptions are often as important as “objective” reality in determining how people react to events and in shaping public policy. The *Report*, therefore, includes besides facts and trends based on available objective information, sketches of the policy debates and the positions, sometimes ideologically inspired, taken by various interested parties. It draws on a wide range of sources from all regions and many countries. (The sources are identified in the body of the full report.)

From the series' inception, reports have recognized the complexity of the task of describing the world social situation, a complexity that arises in part from the ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding social phenomena and social change. The fact that advances and set-backs typically coexist and that there are normally both gainers and losers, at any one time, whether countries or population groups, colours their respective views of the desirability or otherwise of any particular development. In keeping with the original intentions of the Social Commission and the Economic and Social Council, the *Report* continues the tradition of refraining from offering policy recommendations. Only in the *1957 Report* was it stated boldly and unequivocally that “the world social situation has significantly improved in vital sectors since 1952”.

What is currently popularly referred to as globalization appears already in the opening paragraph of the *1952 Report*, referred to there as the drawing together of the different parts of the world, making them more interdependent, particularly through the development of communications and transportation. This theme was revisited, for example, in the *1974 Report* under the heading “internationalisation”, in the *1978 Report* in the context of universal human rights, in successive reports since in the context of discussion of economic interdependence and cooperation, and again in the *1997 Report* with explicit reference to globalization.

The 2001 edition of the *Report* continues the tradition of selecting a theme for in-depth treatment. Nine of the previous 14 editions included an in-depth discussion of a special theme: social problems of urbanization in economically under-developed regions (1957); the interrelationship of social and economic development and the problem of “balance” (1961); practical methods of promoting social change at the local level (1965); patterns of government expenditure on social services (1978, supplement); removing obstacles to social progress (1982); forces

of social change (1985); critical social situation in Africa (1989, annex); major issues and dilemmas (1993); and poverty, unemployment and discrimination (1997). Equity was selected for special attention in the *2001 Report*. But, unlike earlier reports, which contained separate chapters or sections devoted to the special theme, on this occasion the theme runs through the entire *Report* and equity was an important factor determining the *Report's* scope and structure.

References to equity or social justice have permeated the reports from the beginning of the series and the theme has been discussed in depth on several previous occasions. The opening paragraph of the first *Report* set the tone by asserting that "to an extent which might have seemed inconceivable even fifty years ago (i.e., at around 1900), there has come increasing recognition that ... people have somehow to contrive to live together and share together the resources of the earth; that the general impoverishment of any area is a matter of concern to all areas; and that the technical experience and knowledge acquired in rapidly changing industrialized societies have somehow to be made available to those communities that are (economically) less advanced and (technically) less well equipped."

(Signed) Nitin Desai  
Under-Secretary-General  
for Economic and Social Affairs

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## Explanatory notes

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 SAR, 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 judgment about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process.

