

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

REPORT ON THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION 2003

Social Vulnerability: Sources and Challenges



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NOTE

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Preface

The *2003 Report on the World Social Situation* (RWSS) is the sixteenth in a series of reports on the subject dating back to 1952. Over the years, the report has served as a background document for discussion and policy analysis of socio-economic matters at the intergovernmental level, and has aimed at contributing to the identification of emerging social trends of international concern and to the analysis of relationships among major development issues which have both international and national dimensions.

In its resolution 56/177 of 15 December 2001, the United Nations General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to change the periodicity of the *Reports on the World Social Situation* from a four-year cycle to a two-year cycle. The present *Report* is the first produced on a biennial basis. This is not, however, the only change to the *Report*. Its content should be seen as part of the new initiatives put forward by the Secretary-General in his quest to renew the capacity of the Organization to provide a space for genuine dialogue and to serve as a catalyst for effective action.

There are two new main features in the 2003 RWSS compared to previous reports. First, by taking a thematic approach as its starting point, the 2003 RWSS addresses in depth one priority theme: the issue of *social vulnerability*. The objective of the *Report* is to develop a frame of reference for identifying the sources of social vulnerabilities as well as discussing strategies to reduce vulnerabilities of selected social groups. The second new feature of the 2003 RWSS is an attempt to increase its policy relevance, putting forward explicit policy recommendations. Every effort has been made to address these issues in a concise way, making the RWSS a more readable, shorter and better focused document.

The *Report* was prepared by the Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

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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 the present report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

Unless otherwise indicated, the country classification set out below has been used:

Developed market 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.

Least developed countries (49 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, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Sudan, Togo, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Yemen, Zaire, Zambia.

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.