



**General Assembly**  
**Economic and Social Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

A/40/65 + add 1  
E/1985/7  
4 January 1985

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
Fortieth session

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL  
First regular session of 1985

National experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic  
changes for the purpose of social progress

Report of the Secretary-General

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its thirty-eighth session, the General Assembly considered the report of the Secretary-General on national experience in achieving far-reaching social and economic changes for the purpose of social progress (A/38/64 and Add.1) and on 22 November 1983 adopted resolution 38/25, in which, inter alia, it requested the Secretary-General to prepare, in consultation with Member States, a further report on the subject for submission to the Assembly at its fortieth session, through the Commission for Social Development and the Economic and Social Council.
2. Accordingly, in a note verbale dated 22 March 1984, the Secretary-General invited Member States to submit information on their relevant experience by the end of September 1984. As at 1 November 1984, replies had been received from the following States: Austria, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Denmark, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. 1/ The present report summarizing the information contained in the replies is presented under two headings: (a) recent changes in social policies; and (b) overall objectives of national development efforts.

## II. RECENT CHANGES IN SOCIAL POLICIES

3. Information on recent changes in social policies was contained in the replies received from Austria and Denmark.

### A. Austria

4. The Government of Austria reported that labour market policy and social security policy were currently key areas of its social policy. The Government considers that opportunities for as many people as possible to earn their living and a guaranteed income or appropriate assistance for people not gainfully employed are indicators of social progress. The introduction of new technologies, which leads to increases in productivity and often entails a danger of rising unemployment, is regarded as one of the crucial challenges for a successful social policy.
5. Active labour market policies in Austria encourage optimal use of existing employment opportunities. Owing to structural and technological changes, the demand for skilled labour is increasing and must be met by appropriate vocational training. Training programmes are designed to facilitate the introduction of new products, materials and techniques and to increase the internal mobility of workers. Financial assistance is given to individuals, companies and training institutions. Since the adoption of the Labour Market Promotion Act, part of the financing has been provided by unemployment insurance. Particular attention is given to juvenile marginal groups. Training programmes for these groups are created to improve their chances of placement by strengthening their work motivation and changing positively their pattern of behaviour. Special target programmes include "Action 8,000", an attempt introduced in 1984 to find employment

for 8,000 young or chronically unemployed people by providing financial and other forms of assistance for training. Labour market youth programmes comprise measures to prevent youth unemployment through incentives for vocational training. Assistance is also available to companies for apprentice training. An important aspect of Austrian labour market policy is to encourage equality of opportunities for women. This includes assistance for entry into professions with a traditionally low proportion of women. As part of an experimental labour market policy, assistance is given to companies run by workers along co-operative lines and to self-help organizations set up to create and preserve jobs or to facilitate the integration of individuals into productive employment.

6. Changes in demographic patterns, notably the aging of the population, are affecting social security schemes in Austria. The activity rate is declining for structural reasons, among which later entry into working life and earlier retirement are important. The shortening of the individual's total working life is regarded as social progress but creates difficulties in financing the pension insurance system. The prevailing insurance schemes are insufficient to meet the cost of pensions, and grants from the Government's budget remain high. Under a reform of the pension insurance system, which will take effect from 1985, a longer period will be used as a basis for determining pensions, and, instead of the previous basic amount plus progressive increments, pensions will in future be computed on a linear increment. New provisions were also adopted on eligibility for pension, benefiting, in particular women who had interrupted their careers to raise children.

#### B. Denmark

7. The information provided by the Government of Denmark emphasizes a more efficient use of resources in the social sector. A reappraisal of the public sector services provided to the individual citizen is considered necessary. The Government believes that changes must be made in the public institutional-care system, which has so far been characterized by professional and often bureaucratic solutions to social problems and has in the long run restricted the possibilities of the individual to organize and manage his own life. As a result, the individual's responsibility for his own actions has diminished while essential help for the needy has to some extent not been recognized.

8. Local governments, which are in a position to apply differentiated solutions to social needs, should have an even larger say in social policy. To that end, amendments to the relevant laws were adopted in Denmark, effective from 1 January 1983. Given the limited resources available, it is seen as essential that local governments do not freeze them by systematically maintaining the existing structure of social services. Recommendations to local authorities have included, for instance, a halt to the expansion of day-care institutions and homes for the aged until the completion by those authorities of a comprehensive programme. The Government believes that such local programmes and plans must be simplified and renewed in order to become more flexible tools for management. Local governments are being given a greater opportunity to focus on a specific set of problems.

9. The Danish Government considers it essential to find solutions by which individuals, groups of citizens and voluntary organizations can participate in social tasks. A Social Committee was set up in 1983 to promote contacts among public authorities, voluntary organizations and other persons involved in social work. The underlying idea is to reinforce the mobilization of resources that already exist in the immediate environment of individuals so as to increase their ability and will to solve their own problems, rather than turning to the public sector for assistance. In the context of a changing social situation, marked by notably greater financial constraints, high unemployment and evolving family patterns, the Government of Denmark emphasizes "debureaucratization", the restructuring of social welfare programmes and increased responsibility and involvement on the part of the individual.

### III. OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

10. The replies received from the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic contained information on the overall objectives of national development efforts.

#### A. Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic

11. The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic reported that, since the creation of the Republic, a drastic socio-economic transformation of society and the overcoming of inherited backwardness has been made possible through the joint efforts of the people, under the leadership of the Communist Party. Before the Second World War, the Byelorussian SSR, had already become one of the most industrialized republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The national economy, devastated by the war, was rebuilt during the next five years. At present, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic has a high level of economic and social development made possible by the socialist transformation of the social structure through public ownership of the means of production, the elimination of exploitation of man by man, the establishment of institutions based on a planned economy and the introduction of socialist principles of income distribution. This includes free education at all levels and free health care, the provision of housing at public expense and the involvement of workers in the management of public affairs at all levels. Real income increased significantly - almost twofold during the past 15 years. The prices for basic food items, meat and meat products, butter, milk, and other products have remained unchanged for more than 20 years.

12. The Byelorussian SSR has continued to implement large-scale programmes for the development of modern industrial and agricultural production. In order to ensure more productive utilization of the economic potential of the Republic, efforts are being made in the fields of science and technology and education, including vocational training. In recent decades, the economic potential of the Republic has doubled every seven years. Industry accounts for approximately 60 per cent of the gross national product. The plan for 1981-1985 envisages a 26 per cent increase in industrial production. Agriculture remains one of the priorities in socio-economic development. Some 60 years after the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics, agricultural production in the Byelorussian SSR has increased almost sixfold. The technical base of agriculture has been modernized, while the scale of land reclamation and the use of fertilizer have also increased.

13. Constant attention is paid to the production of quality consumer goods. The per capita level of food consumption, especially meat and meat products, has risen, and the diet of the population has been improved to include more fruit and vegetables. A comprehensive food programme covering the period up to 1990 is an integral part of the food programme of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

14. The importance of public consumption funds, which are used for the provision of free or concessional social services, such as health care, education and social security, remains high. The payments and benefits provided from those funds in the Byelorussian SSR totalled 4,609 million rubles in 1983, compared with 1,282 million rubles in 1965. Pensions were increased recently and benefits for people eligible for pensions but who prefer to work have been established. In addition to regular health care provided by specialized and preventive institutions, there is increasing emphasis on the development of such facilities as sanatoriums, simultaneously permitting medical care and recreation. The network of tourist centres, holiday homes and other health-improving facilities is being expanded. Special attention is given to maternal and child welfare and to the improvement of working conditions for women. The housing needs of the population are increasing as its well-being improves. The rent paid by the population covers only one third of the total cost to the State for housing and communal services. The right of citizens to housing has been incorporated in the Constitution of the Byelorussian SSR.

#### B. Iraq

15. The Government of Iraq reported that, after the revolution of July 1968, the economy of the country underwent important evolutionary changes directly relevant to ensuring the transition to socialism. Central planning was adopted for administration of economic and social activities. In the 1970s, a transition from a traditional agricultural economy to a modern agricultural-industrial economy took place, which involved a reduction in dependence on the exports of raw materials, the development of productive sectors and the use of surpluses accrued to finance the development process. Rapid growth rates were achieved and reflected in urban development and construction activity, in the development of social services and in changed patterns of consumption and life-styles: the average per capita income increased at an annual rate of 23 per cent between 1968 and 1980.

16. Basic public services were developed quantitatively and qualitatively. Education at all levels became free of charge in 1974. The number of pupils in kindergarten and primary schools increased significantly, and substantial progress was made in vocational training and university education. Health services have also been expanded, and the number of doctors increased from 1,759 in 1968 to 5,518 in 1981. Most health services and pharmaceuticals are provided free of charge. Serious efforts have been made in the development of electric power and the water supply system, especially in the rural areas.

17. Significant changes in the structure of the gross domestic product are envisaged as an objective for the achievement of economic independence. Gross fixed capital formation increased (at current prices) from 154 million dinars in 1968 to 3,471 million dinars in 1980. Accordingly, the relative share of gross fixed capital formation in national income rose from 19.7 per cent in 1968 to 22.7 per cent in 1980. The share of the public sector in the gross domestic product rose from 24.5 per cent in 1968 to 81.4 per cent in 1980, while its share in total investment increased from 35 to 80 per cent over the same period. At the same time, the emphasis placed on the socialized sector has not been detrimental to the role of private enterprises, which have, on the contrary, increased their contribution to a balanced process of development.

### C. Syrian Arab Republic

18. The overall goals of the fifth five-year economic and social development plan of the Syrian Arab Republic consist of increasing the income of citizens and raising their standard of living and level of education; modifying the structure of the national economy in favour of the commodity sectors; achieving economic liberation through increasing levels of self-sufficiency; and ensuring justice in income distribution so as to achieve a better life for the general population. The plan also encourages the private and mixed industrial and agricultural sectors and the support they provide, particularly through investment, to the public sector and the achievement of development programmes.

19. Priorities of the plan include optimum implementation of existing economic projects, extensive and rapid rural development and reduction of urban-rural differences. Other objectives of the plan are to reconcile patterns of consumption with production capacities, increase the proportion of educated persons and specialists in the total work-force, eradicate illiteracy, provide suitable housing, carry out administrative reforms, set production prices in the light of economic costs, and establish wages, salaries and incentives based on both the costs of production and the cost of living. A 7.7 per cent annual growth rate of the gross domestic product is planned. The development plan of the Syrian Arab Republic includes provisions for each sector of economic activity and provides specific measures in the domains of education, health care, culture, social affairs, labour, housing and public amenities.

### Notes

1/ In addition, Brazil informed the Secretary-General that it was unable to provide information. Canada, emphasizing that it had abstained on resolution 38/25 and did not favour the proliferation of reports, informed the Secretary-General that it did not intend to prepare a report on the subject.

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