

**Population Policies and Inclusive Development
In the Syrian Arab Republic**

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Prepared by Dr. Moustafa Mohammed Al-Abdallah Al Kafry
Head of Economics and Planning Department
Faculty of Economics – Damascus University

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Population Policies and Inclusive Development

In the Syrian Arab Republic

Dr. Moustafa Mohammed Al-Abdallah Al Kafry

Each country follows a specific policy to regulate the behavior of its population in demographic terms now and in the future, and this policy includes a set of actions, plans and programs aimed at influencing population variables and the structural composition of the population in quantitative and qualitative terms, in a way that suits the needs of society and the requirements of its growth and the well-being of its citizens. Population policy not only addresses the problem of rapid population growth but also includes programmes to stimulate population growth in some countries, regulate population migration and movement, balanced spatial distribution of populations, regulate the movement and distribution of the labour force and women's contribution to economic activity and social empowerment. This policy also aims to improve the standard of living and well-being of the population, and to narrow the civilizational gap between the countryside and the city and everything related to demographic behavior in general.

I - Population policies:

We can define population policy as the policy of a state to regulate the behavior of its population demographically in the present and future. A country's population policy includes a set of actions, schemes and programs aimed at influencing population variables and the structural composition of the population in quantity and quality, to suit the needs of society, the requirements of its growth and the well-being of its citizens. Population variables include everything related to the size of the population, its growth, distribution, composition, and characteristics.

Every country must have a clear, specific and coherent population policy. It was necessary to integrate population policy into the comprehensive development agenda, so that attention was given in each sector, through the effects of population changes not in terms of whether or not they constituted an obstacle to overall

development, but as an indicator of manpower planning. The interdependence between population policies and comprehensive development requires the strengthening and development of development policies to enhance the capacity of society to absorb current and expected births in society, especially in societies of developing countries characterized by a high annual population growth rate. This, in turn, leads to the creation of economic and social conditions that encourage the transition to a smaller family. ¹

The trend in the Syrian Arab Republic, until recently, was to leave the freedom of the family to have children and limit the number of children. There is some legislation that encourages reproduction, for example the prevention of trafficking in contraceptives. A decree was also issued providing for the award of the Order of the Family to a family with more than 12 children. The Syrian Penal Code also prohibits abortion if it is for non-medical or health reasons and punishes those who perform abortions with imprisonment and a fine (see articles 523, 524, 52, 536 of the Penal Code). These legislations may seem like features of a population policy, but the reality is that these laws are neglected in Syria and are not implemented, where contraceptives are sold in pharmacies and are used among those who wish, and we even note that the media is promoting family planning and the use of various contraceptives in this area. Abortions are also performed in some private hospitals and clinics normally.

Some laws in force in Syria still oppose the idea of family planning and prohibit any activity related to it. These include the penalty of imprisonment and a fine for violation, the State grants family compensation, pays childbirth wages, and the period of maternity leave has been increased to two and a half months. Through these legislations and procedures, it may come to mind that Syria encourages reproduction. However, the actual practice,

¹ - See, Rafael Salas, World Population Aid - The First Ten Years, translated by Akef Abadir al-Najal, Al-Ahram Commercial Press, Cairo, 1981. pp. 187-188.

attitudes and general positions of the State in Syria on population issues, especially rapid population growth, are incompatible with the above-mentioned measures. The Syrian Ministry of Health, in cooperation with international organizations, provides and imports family planning methods. The State also allows the Family Planning Association to be active and work to provide services in this area in coordination with government agencies. Since 1986, the Syrian government has also stopped awarding the Family Medal, which was awarded to families with more children than a certain limit, and has stopped granting incentives to the most conceived mothers.

II - The beginning of the interest in the population issue in Syria:

Interest in the population issue in Syria began at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. "The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has worked to address the population problem by linking demographic variables to economic and social developments, and making the population factor an integral part of the planned development process at the overall and detailed levels."²

Economic and social policy is expected to bring about many changes in the expected demographic indicators in the foreseeable future, particularly on the subject of the geographical distribution of the population and the distribution of the labour force among the various economic sectors.

1- General principles of the National Population Policy in Syria:

Chapter III of the "Contents and Objectives of the National Population Policy" sets out the general principles of the National Population Policy of the Syrian Arab Republic as follows:

- The human person is the most important and precious resource, and the Constitution guarantees him all fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination.

² - From the letter of President Hafez al-Assad, President of the Syrian Arab Republic, to the Population Conference held in Mexico City in 1984, from Views on Population — Statements of World Leaders, UNFPA Publications, New York 1985, p. 85.

- The family is the basic cell of society.
- National political population is an integral part of the process of socio-economic development.
- The need to empower women and promote gender equality and parity with a view to integrating women into the development process in a correct and effective manner.
- Emphasize the right of children to care for and grow and promote parity between male and female children at all stages of life.
- Maternity care and taking appropriate measures to ensure safe and healthy maternity conditions for mothers and to combat the factors of asthenia, disease, infection and the risk of high and close reproduction, especially for mothers of early and late ages.
- Human resources development is the fundamental pillar of sustainable socio-economic development.
- Promote sustainable production and consumption patterns and protect the environment and its resources.
- Promote the positive side of cultural heritage and reduce negative influences and practices on reproductive health, the role of women in development and their active participation in reproductive health decision-making, the number of children, the timing of births, the duration of breaks between pregnancies and the use of family planning methods.

Quantitative population objectives do not conflict with the choices of spouses and their freedom to have children within the family and responsible parenthood, to access health care, family planning services and to combat sexually transmitted diseases, nor do they conflict with their right and choice to determine the number of children, the spacing period between pregnancies and to obtain information, education and the means to do so.

2- General objectives of the National Population Policy in Syria:

In order to balance economic and social growth with population growth to meet the growing needs of the population, which are to ensure the level of well-being to which they aspire, to develop the economic, social, health, educational and cultural level of the family, to empower women, to promote gender parity and to provide health care, including family planning services, within the framework of the freedom of reproduction within the framework of the family, responsible parenthood and the right of the family to determine the number of its children, the spacing of pregnancies, the affirmation of the rights and development of children and attention to mothers, and the protection of the population from the effects of deterioration The environment around them and from inappropriate production and consumption patterns and control of critical points in water and energy budgets and other repercussions related to population growth.³

After the development of an action plan for the formulation of population policy, task forces were formed that included many specialists to study all issues related to the population, especially development, economic situation, policies, strategies and trends of the population in Syria, reproductive behavior and its socio-cultural determinants. Family planning, general population health and reproductive health. Provides housing, food, water and energy. Geographical distribution of the population, education and labor force. In 1995, a number of interim objectives of population policy were proposed, the most important of which are:

- Reducing the annual rate of population growth from 3.31 percent in 1995 to 2.5 percent in 2015.
- Reduce maternal mortality from 105 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1995 to 50 deaths in 2015.

³ - See chapter III of the National Population Policy entitled (Contents National Population Policy and its objectives)
State Planning Commission, Damascus 1996, p. 35.

- The annual infant mortality rate was reduced from 32 per thousand in 1995 to less than 20 per thousand in 2015. It reduced under-five mortality to less than 30,000 live births.
- Increased the use of family planning methods from 40 percent in 1995 to 64 percent in 2015.
- Increase women's contribution to economic activity from 16.6 percent in 1995 to about 26 percent in 2015.
- Reducing the illiteracy rate among women from 30.6 percent in 1995 to about 13 percent in 2015.
- Limit the growth of the unplanned urban population.
- The duration of the compulsory period of basic education until the end of the preparatory stage and for both sexes.
- Increase the effectiveness of information, education and population communication and coordinate all efforts in this field to achieve the objectives of the population policy in Syria.⁴
- He raised the expectation of life at birth to 72 years for females and 70 years for males in 2015.

One of the most important factors that help to formulate and implement a national population policy, and to follow up on the linkage of the population to socio-economic development, is to promote the effective participation of the legislative branch (People's Assembly) and popular organizations, especially the General Women's Union, the General Confederation of Trade Unions, the Federation of Youth of the Revolution and all concerned parties, including non-governmental (non-governmental organizations). Develop the capabilities and capacity of agencies related to population policy at the central level or in the governorates. Encourage scientific research related to population policy and develop the skills and capabilities of specialists,

⁴ - See Memorandum of Understanding (Draft No. 2) submitted by the Population Programme Review and Strategy Development Mission 15/5/1995-15/6/1995, UNFPA, Damascus 1995, p. 9.

technicians and staff involved in the formulation and implementation of population plans in the center or governorates. This requires the Government's support and support for the formulation of a comprehensive and integrated multidimensional population policy and the strengthening of its implementation and development mechanisms and the working mechanism of the Standing Committee on Population.

III - Comprehensive development (development of things and development of the human person):

Economic growth alone no longer means development, but development must be inclusive of all aspects of life, be it economic, social, cultural, political or otherwise. This means that there is a difference between development and growth. Development in its comprehensive sense means building an "integrated civilizational project, in which there is a balance between economic, social and cultural aspects. It is not permissible today to ignore the social, historical and cultural content of both development and underdevelopment." ⁵

What matters most in this area is the radical relationship between overall development and population, especially human resources, but also between the development of things and human development. Comprehensive development and its continuation can only be achieved through attention to and development of human resources and the opening up of their various potentials, in addition to other resources, in order to achieve self-development and contribute to the building of human civilization through the preparation of a new and effective human being.

Since the early seventies, the food problem has become at the top of the list of topics and problems suffered by developing countries in general, and Arab countries in particular, and this issue

⁵ - Human Resources Development Policies in the Arab Countries (Population - Labour Force - Employment - Education) Edited by Dr. Nabil Khoury Damascus University Presses in cooperation with the International Labour Organization, Damascus 1992, p. 107.

has taken a prominent place in the economic policies of developed and developing countries alike. International and regional bodies direct a large part of their efforts to examine that problem and to make proposals and solutions to it. Despite this great interest, the real achievements in this regard at the international, Arab and local levels are largely modest, especially if measured by the magnitude of the problem and its future dimensions.⁶

It is useful to alert developing and Arab countries and determine the magnitude of the risks they face in the field of food security. The new international variables pose important challenges to the development of the agriculture and food production sector with the aim of increasing the amount of agricultural production, developing and raising marketing efficiency and improving the level of food security. This necessitates new patterns in agricultural policies, investment and technological methods used, which are in line with the needs and benefit from the new disk in the area of trade liberalization and in the field of biological sciences and communication technology.⁷

The availability of possibilities in some areas makes it possible to secure a decent food level for the population at present. But to ensure the continuity required for the future requires a more realistic consideration of the resources available, their scarcity and the importance of preserving them and their continuity for future generations. It requires serious attention to investment and the harnessing of modern science to that end, and most of all, it necessitates the search for guaranteed alternatives that are in fact much closer than imagined. These alternatives are neglected farmland. It is not a question of aid, but of providing decent livelihoods by providing production and development possibilities

⁶ - Dr. Hassan Fahmy Jumaa, *The Agricultural Question and Food Security in the Arab World*, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, 1985, p. 23.

⁷ - See, the needs of the development of agriculture and food production in the Arab countries, A study prepared by Mai Damascene Sarhal, General Secretariat of the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of the Arab Countries, 1997, p. 3.

in disadvantaged agricultural areas, and of establishing sustainable agricultural livelihoods that are needless and avert the risks of food security. ⁸

The abundance of goods and food products, and the demand for people to buy them or their inability to buy, does not negate the existence of the food crisis, which lies in the dependence on imports to provide goods and products. The seriousness of the food crisis lies in the increasing dependence on imports to secure the population's need for foodstuffs. The importer cannot control the prices of imported materials, (they may be difficult to provide at all times, and may be used as a means or tool to pressure the country to take a certain position). ⁹

The historical experience of man has demonstrated, and always demonstrates, that when human resources grow and prosper, they can overcome the lack of other material resources necessary for the production process, thanks in particular to science and technology. For example, there is almost no energy running out until human innovation replaces it with new energy. Clearly, the best investment is to invest in the human mind. Hence some researchers viewed the gap between developed and underdeveloped countries as a gap in the organization and optimal employment of the human mind. ¹⁰

IV - Compatibility between socio-economic and population policies:

The process of comprehensive development requires compatibility between different policies. Socio-economic and demographic This is a very important issue and is not easily realized. It is therefore imperative to take into account that human resources are the most precious possessions of the nation. Raising the standard

⁸ - See, Dr. Mustafa Al-Abdullah Al-Kafri and Dr. Essam Khoury, Issues on Population and Development in the Arab World, Publications of the Ministry of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, Damascus 1993, p. pp. 183-212.

⁹ - Muhammad Ali al-Farra, The Reality of Arab Food Security, Journal of the World of Thought and the Second Issue 1987, p. 16.

¹⁰ - Ibid.

of living and achieving the well-being of society were the most important goals pursued by development, and any change in population growth rates in turn led to a direct change in the demand for and consumption of the basic needs of the individual. While we note that any change in the rate of population growth does not affect the size of the labor force and contribute to social and economic development. Only more than 15 years after the date of such change. It is the period between the date of birth and the date of the possibility of carrying out productive work.

The question of the implications of population growth on the social and economic system has been of interest to traditional population theories, whose analysis of population issues has been limited to their components and consequences. For her, population policy was also a policy of population growth limited to determining growth rates, size and intensity. The optimal population was one that aligned the policy of population growth with the policy of available economic resources and considered poverty to be the result of that imbalance between the two previous elements. ¹¹

V - Relationship between population and development:

There is a strong relationship between population and development (that is, between the population, its characteristics, demographic reality and quality of life on the one hand and development programs and plans aimed at achieving economic progress and social development on the other). This is because population variables are organically linked to the elements of comprehensive development as they represent the structural change in the components of the socio-economic system of any society. This means that the concept of development has gone beyond mere "economic growth" that has always been the focus of attention to include other fundamental transformations at the social and cultural level besides economic growth.

¹¹ - International Symposium on Population and Development and the Importance of the Statistical Number, Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus 1983, p. 45.

This change in the concept of comprehensive development has been accompanied by a radical change in the quality of development plans and programs, where the focus of these plans was primarily on the quantitative aspects of the economy and concerned with increasing production, consumption, accumulation and investment, and with the new concept the plans became more comprehensive to give social, cultural and political aspects, where they also focused on the qualitative aspects of improving and raising the status of women, attention to maternal and child health, youth welfare and democracy issues, recreational programs, and other areas that are related to improving the quality of life for the total Population.

The evaluation of the results of development plans and programs and their effects is no longer limited to economic indicators only, but has also been extended to include social, cultural and political indicators that reflect the extent of change in the quality of life and society. The formulation of population policy within the framework of the comprehensive development plan aims to eliminate malnutrition and famine, provide better employment opportunities, health and education services, provide adequate shelter, reduce inequality in the distribution of income and material goods, empower women and increase their contribution to economic activity.

Dr. Moustafa Mohammed Al-Abdallah Al Kafry

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The number of inhabitants in Syria and their distribution
between rural and urban areas
And the number of them employed in the agricultural sector
During the period 1922-1999 (thousand inhabitants)

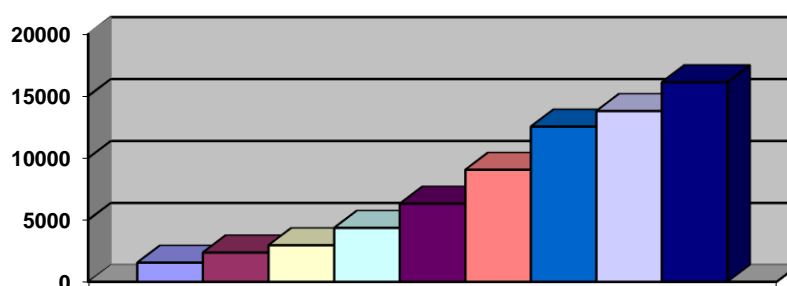
Statement	Total population	Rural population	Ratio of rural to total population %	Number of people working in the agriculture and animal husbandry sector	Ratio of agricultural workers to total economically active %
1922	1547	-	-	-	-
1937	2367	-	-	-	-
1946	2950	2006	68.0	683	-
1960	4353	2668	61.3	514	52.1
1970	6305	3564	56.5	747	49.4
1981	9046	4790	52.9	495	24.2
1991	12529	6194	49.4	924	28.0
1994	13782	6732	48.6		24.6
1999	16110	8136	50.5	1306	31.9

Source:

- HANNA BATATU, Syria's peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics. Princeton University Press 1999, P.6.
- Annual Agricultural Statistical Collection, Ministry of Agriculture, Damascus, 2000.
- Data of 1922, 1937, 1946, 1991, 1999, forecast.
- Data for 1960, 1970, 1981, 1994 census.

Evolution of the population of the Syrian Arab Republic
During the period 1922-1999 (thousand inhabitants)

1999 1994 1991 1981 1970 1960 1946 1937 1922



Some economic indicators in the Syrian Arab Republic
(at current prices)

Statement	1997	1998*
Existing GDP (billion dollars)	14.6	16
Inflation rate %	1.9*	1.1
Total imports (billion dollars)	3.6	3.4
Total exports (billion dollars)	4.1	3.2
Current Account Balance (Billion USD)	0.564	-0.023
Total external debt (billion dollars)	21.2*	21.3
Official Rates: \$ = S. P		
Official Price	11.23	11.23
Customs Price	23	23
The price of neighboring countries	45	46
Market Price \$= S. P	50	50
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Damascus.		
• Estimates of the Central Bureau of Statistics.		
- Import and export figures are calculated based on the official exchange rate of \$1 = 11.23 S. P		

Components of Syria's GDP for 1996

Component	Agriculture	trade	Industry & Mines	Transport & Communications	Other
%	27	22	20	20	11

