



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

**ARAB FORUM: “TOWARDS A NEW WELFARE MIX: RETHINKING
THE ROLES OF THE STATE, MARKET AND CIVIL SOCIETY
IN THE PROVISION OF BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES”
BEIRUT, 19-20 DECEMBER 2012**

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the International Labour Organization, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs of the American University of Beirut, and the World Bank, organized the Arab Forum entitled Towards a New Welfare Mix: Rethinking the Roles of the State, Market and Civil Society in the Provision of Basic Social Services, on 19 and 20 December 2012 at the United Nations House in Beirut.

The overall goal of the Forum, mandated by member countries in ESCWA resolution 27/304, was to support dialogue on enhancing the delivery of social services, with a focus on accountability and transparency. More specifically, the Forum had the following objectives:

- (a) Evaluate social services provided by the State as well as by non-State actors in the region, and encourage the sharing of knowledge and experiences of State, civil society and market provision of social services in the region and beyond;
- (b) Identify the challenges and opportunities in the provision of basic social services by State and non-State actors with specific focus on equity, governance, regulation and sustainability;
- (c) Provide recommendations on a welfare mix addressing both criteria of social justice and limited State capacity;
- (d) Create a network for future regional knowledge exchange.

The Forum was structured around the following interrelated and thematic pillars: (a) introduction to the welfare mix; (b) social services provided by the public sector; (c) social services by non-State actors; (d) duties and obligations of Governments; and (e) challenges and opportunities of social service provision by different actors. Throughout the two-day Forum, presentations and discussions centred on these pillars.

At the conclusion of the presentations and discussions, the Arab Forum summarized findings and agreed on knowledge gaps as well as a way forward for the assessment of social service provision.

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Introduction

1. The Arab Forum entitled *Towards a New Welfare Mix: Rethinking the Roles of the State, Market and Civil Society in the Provision of Basic Social Services* was organized by the Social Development Division and Economic Development and Globalization Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, and the World Bank. It sought to assess the prevailing welfare mix in Arab countries, meaning the distribution of responsibilities between the State, market and civil society. The Forum was held on 19 and 20 December 2012 at the United Nations House in Beirut.
2. The Arab Forum brought together experts nominated by Governments, independent experts and experts from international organizations, civil society and academia to initiate a continuing dialogue on the prevailing welfare mix, and to identify challenges and opportunities for the provision of social services by the State, market and civil society. Findings of this Arab Forum will also inform the Integrated Social Policy Report V: *Towards a New Welfare Mix*.
3. Five key topics were discussed at the Arab Forum: (a) introduction to the welfare mix; (b) social services provided by the public sector; (c) social services by non-State actors; (d) duties and obligations of Governments; and (e) challenges and opportunities of social service provision by different actors.
4. The current report reviews the outcomes of the Arab Forum, the main topics addressed and the opening session. It also lists the meeting participants.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Participants commended ESCWA on the initiative to convene the Arab Forum to discuss the prevailing welfare mix in countries of the region. The theme and objectives were considered as very relevant to the needs of member countries and very timely with regard to current policy challenges.
6. Participants of the Arab Forum encouraged ESCWA to continue its work on the welfare mix. The Arab Forum identified a number of the challenges and opportunities presented by the provision of social services by the State, market and civil society, as well as knowledge gaps. Participants discussed and agreed to a way forward, which will be outlined below.

A. FINDINGS OF THE FORUM

7. As a result of the discussions of the Arab Forum, participants noted the following:
 - (a) Current social protection systems rest on several parallel pillars: in addition to public social services, provided by the State, traditional institutions like *zakat* and *waqf* are engaged in the provision of social services, as are commercial actors and civil society institutions. There is ample room for better synergies among these actors, who also need to be engaged in broader discussions about national development objectives;
 - (b) The State currently faces difficulties in fulfilling its role as the guarantor of social protection, especially towards poorer segments of the population. While these groups have limited access to basic social protection, relatively elaborate services exist for other segments of society, such as pensions for public sector employees;
 - (c) Several marginalized population groups receive services primarily from non-State actors, leading participants to call on Governments to increase their efforts to reach out to the most vulnerable groups;

(d) All countries in the region currently face pressure from citizens calling for better social protection. Generally, citizens have high demands of the State, but at the same time display limited confidence in it and a low propensity to pay taxes. Thus an important challenge in the near future is finding ways to bridge that gap;

(e) The private sector, whether commercial or non-profit, already provides important social services, and its potential could be harnessed in more sectors than has been the case to date. Participants also pointed to the at times significant responsibility of the private sector to provide social protection, and to honour its obligation to provide decent working conditions. At the same time, private sector actors could be better integrated into the overall social protection design and required high-quality Government regulation;

(f) The engagement of civil society and faith-based organizations in reaching out to the poorer parts of society with social services and social protection was notable. In order to ensure the quality of their services and equity of access, Governments should involve civil society actors in regular dialogue about their experiences and extend any other support that could assist their work. More targeted integration of civil society actors in the overall social protection design would allow for better complementarity and synergy.

B. KNOWLEDGE AND RESEARCH GAPS

8. Participants also agreed that there were significant data and knowledge gaps that would require further research in order to be able to design integrated and rights-based social policies. Those research needs included:

(a) Identifying the population's unmet social protection needs. In this context, collecting data on poverty and vulnerability as well as the characteristics of the poor and the dynamics of poverty would be vital;

(b) Identifying citizens' preferences with regard to social protection and social services, in order to manage expectations towards the State;

(c) Gathering information on civil society provision of social services, in particular services provided by faith-based organizations, as well as private philanthropy;

(d) Clarifying the role and reach of the private sector in the provision of social services and identifying the beneficiaries of those services;

(e) Gathering information on Government regulation of social services provided by non-State actors including discussions on priorities, strategic planning and coordination, as well as quality standards;

(f) Clarifying the limits of Government regulation in view of the overall regulatory burden of Governments;

(g) Exploring the role of foreign donors as increasingly important actors in the area of social protection in Arab countries, influencing both the policy agenda and fiscal capacities;

(h) Determining available fiscal space for Governments of Arab countries and assessing citizen's propensity to pay taxes. Devising strategies to increase that propensity by building trust in Government effectiveness.

C. THE WAY FORWARD

9. Ms. Gisela Nauk, Chief, Social Policy Section, Social Development Division, ESCWA, summarized the steps ESCWA plans to undertake in order to increase knowledge on the welfare mix in Arab countries and to carry the discussion forward. Follow-up actions would include the following:

(a) The upcoming issue of the bi-annual ESCWA report on Integrated Social Policy will be dedicated to the question of the welfare mix in Arab countries. The report will be issued at the end of 2013 and summarize discussions from the Arab Forum and additional research currently under way;

(b) In the same context, ESCWA is to hold two rounds of electronic discussions: the first on the outline of the report and the second on its first draft. It was agreed to engage the participants of the current Arab Forum as well as additional experts in both rounds of discussions;

(c) A series of studies on *zakat*, *waqf* and public and private provision of social services is to be conducted and shall be included in the Integrated Social Policy Report V;

(d) Corporate social responsibility may also be integrated into the research agenda of ESCWA. In this context, ESCWA has proposed to undertake a study on corporate social responsibility from the perspective of social protection, provided that funding becomes available;

(e) A training workshop on fiscal space for social policy is to be organized in cooperation with ILO during the first half of 2013. The workshop will expand and deepen the discussion about Government responsibility and fiscal space, initiated in session II.D of the Arab Forum;

(f) There is potential for technical cooperation between the Secretariat and ESCWA member countries, as well as South-South cooperation and regional cooperation in, inter alia, the design of a social protection system that integrates the strengths of different actors in a welfare mix. Such communities of practice may, for example, also include electronic networks among *zakat* funds and *waqf* authorities or regulatory authorities, to share knowledge and experiences.

10. Participants expressed their appreciation of the proposed way forward and expressed their enthusiasm for participating in planned follow-up activities.

II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

11. After the opening session, participants discussed the items on the agenda as they appeared in the organization of work that had been adopted.

A. THE WELFARE MIX: INTRODUCTION AND CHALLENGES

12. The session was chaired by Mr. Frederico Neto, Director, Social Development Division, ESCWA. The session included a keynote speech by Mr. Rami Khouri, Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, on the challenges to designing a welfare mix in Arab countries. This was followed by a presentation by Ms. Gisela Nauk, outlining the goals of social policy, the need for a welfare mix, and the challenges it presents. The objective of the session was to introduce the analytical framework and the economic and social context of the current Arab Forum.

13. In his keynote speech, Mr. Rami Khouri stated that social security in Arab countries was a complex issue which was of a very timely and pertinent nature for the current Arab Forum. He noted that the Arab Forum took place in a time when citizens were demanding economic and political rights, a development which had its roots in the economic and social developments of the past decades. A period of State-building beginning in the 1950s had been followed by a long period of stagnation from the 1980s to early 2000s, characterized by increasing income disparities and corruption. This stagnation, alongside the economic crisis of the late 2000s, had resulted in political uprisings. The drivers of that transformation were both material needs such as access to jobs, water and sanitation, and housing, and intangible needs for political rights such as living in dignity, political legitimacy, political participation and social justice. In order to design adequate policy responses, he pointed to the need to further analyse the causes of recent political uprisings, and the demands of participants in those uprisings, in a comprehensive manner.

14. Ms. Gisela Nauk introduced the analytical framework of the Arab Forum. She highlighted that social challenges stood at the centre of current political uprisings as well as new policy agendas. The Arab Forum aimed at contributing to those discussions by looking at how social policy was organized in Arab countries and how the setting met the intentions of Governments and the aspirations of their people. She emphasized that social policy should be inclusive, and seek to benefit society as a whole, not just certain groups; it thus possessed social, political and economic functions. In its social function, social policy should seek to reduce lifecycle risks and alleviate poverty. In its economic function, it should enhance productive capacities, and in its political function, it should act as a force for stability. She also pointed out that the concept of welfare entailed optimum resource allocation, in order to enable all social groups to benefit. A multitude of actors contributed to the welfare mix, including the State, the market, civil society and the family. In the case of Arab countries, communities, charitable networks and international organizations could also be added to the list. Finally, she outlined the strengths of those actors and highlighted the potential role of the State, which did not necessarily have to be a provider of all services, but rather a regulator and guarantor of rights.

B. PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES BY THE PUBLIC SECTOR: IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

15. The session was chaired by Mr. Rami Khouri and included five presentations, followed by a discussion. The objective of the session was to assess the current provision of social services by the public sector, to set the stage for identifying the gaps in those provisions.

16. Ms. Haneen Sayed, Human Development Coordinator for Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, World Bank, made a presentation on “Inclusion and Resilience: The Way Forward for Social Safety Nets in the Middle East and North Africa”. She noted that existing social safety nets in the region were currently under increased scrutiny for their failure to reach vulnerable groups. She outlined the main challenges for social safety nets in the region, which included that poverty rates among children and rural populations were especially high; the poor population was employed mainly in the informal sector, with percentages ranging from 82.4 per cent in Lebanon to 99.2 per cent in Morocco; the percentage of people at risk of falling into poverty was high due to low resilience to external shocks; and women, persons with disabilities and displaced persons faced inequitable access to social services and job opportunities. Most Arab countries had built social safety nets through subsidies, spending on average 5.7 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on subsidies. Generally, non-subsidy safety nets in the region were small and fragmented, with limited effects on poverty and inequality. Universal subsidies were inefficient, and fuel subsidies in particular tended to favour wealthier population strata. Responses to the 2009 crisis such as upscaling wages and subsidies were largely ineffective, as they did not reach the most vulnerable groups. She asserted that recent research had revealed that citizens wanted the State to be the main provider of social services and preferred cash-transfer programmes to subsidies. Finally, she emphasized that social safety nets required reforms in the way they reached the most vulnerable groups.

17. Mr. Ayman Sawalha, Assistant Deputy Minister of Social Affairs, Palestine, gave a presentation on Palestine’s strategy for providing social protection, which he said had been developed through a participatory process involving the Government, the private sector and civil society. According to that strategy, the State’s role was to lead efforts on social protection, for example by providing the appropriate legislative environment, standardizing the provision of social services and enhancing their quality, and providing social services to marginalized and vulnerable groups through a rights-based approach. Once the overall social protection system was put in place, the State could gradually withdraw from the provision of social services and instead concentrate on regulating its provision by other actors. The State should encourage the private sector and civil society to assume responsibilities in the provision of social services, giving citizens the possibility to decide whose services they preferred to use. According to the social protection strategy, the private sector should provide jobs, increase investment, and take over social responsibility, for example by complying with the national wage policy. The main responsibility of civil society should be lobbying and advocating for human rights. He also pointed out that when social services were provided by civil society, those services should be of quality and serve all geographic areas. Finally, he explained that the key challenges in the provision of social services by non-State actors lay in their high cost; that many services

were not standardized; and that their coverage was limited. At the same time, he acknowledged that opportunities lay in the diversity of services they provided.

18. Ms. Amira Saif, Yemen, Director of Policies and Programmes, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen, stated that Yemen currently faced a number of challenges. These included the deteriorating economic situation, political instability and food insecurity, which were a burden for the Government's budget and limited that State's ability to provide social services. She proceeded to inform the Forum that in response to these challenges, the Government had designed a transitional programme for the years 2012 to 2014 which sought to establish stability and encourage development. The plan included new public sector initiatives on education, (notably literacy classes and programmes to increase enrolment rates), health care (such as improving the quality and accessibility of services), employment and social protection. Those efforts had all accomplished significant progress in achieving social protection in Yemen, but the State still faced several challenges, including the lack of a coherent social development strategy and fiscal space, weak institutional capacities and limited resources, in addition to the lack of timely, comprehensive and reliable data. The private sector also participated in establishing infrastructure, providing vocational training, and health and education services, while civil society stepped in to fill existing gaps in areas like health services and poverty reduction. Overall, more coordination between the State, market and civil society was needed to increase coverage and access to services.

19. Ms. Widad Khalil, Ministry of Welfare and Social Security, the Sudan, focussed her presentation on the country's experience in the provision of social services. She explained that in the past, the State had sought to be the main provider of social services, but, due to budgetary pressures, had gradually withdrawn from their provision. To date, the Government was responsible for the overall planning, while social services were provided by State and non-State actors. She maintained that given budgetary constraints, the State should concentrate on providing services to the most vulnerable segments of society, such as women and persons with disabilities. Then, she explained that the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security had given high priority to poverty reduction through its various social security funds, including one for wages, one for health insurance, and one for social security and *zakat*, among others. The speaker emphasized the role of *zakat* as a social security mechanism in the Sudan, stating that it had been practiced since the 1980s as a religious obligation and was later institutionalized into a *zakat* chamber with the Zakat Law from 2001. Since then, the *zakat* office had been providing cash transfers, health insurance services, education scholarships and other support to vulnerable groups. Additionally, the *zakat* chamber also conducted projects, such as building infrastructure for water and sanitation with the help of prisoners. She concluded that civil society and the private sector should play a considerable role in the provision of social services and that Governments should encourage establishing partnerships and sharing responsibility with those partners.

20. Ms. Ola Abousteit, Diplomatic Attaché, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Egypt, highlighted social protection and social services provided by the Government of Egypt. Services provided by the Government included food subsidies, cash transfers (social security payments and pensions), the Social Fund for Development (providing access to employment and basic services), public education, and a public health system for the poor, in addition to providing services for orphanages and for persons with disabilities. The Government provided cash transfers exclusively through Government units, but shared the provision of services to certain groups such as orphans or persons with disabilities with civil society, while maintaining regulation over them. The private sector was engaged in the provision of social services, mainly through corporate philanthropy, manifested for example in the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, the Mansour Foundation for Development, the Magdi Yacoub Heart Foundation, and the Children's Cancer Hospital. Lastly, she outlined some of the challenges the Government faced in providing social protection, including high rates of poverty, increased population pressure, limited Government funds, and the calls for social justice, particularly in post-revolution Egypt.

21. In the subsequent discussion, participants emphasized the need to broaden the overall concept of social policy and its integration into a wider socioeconomic framework. Other participants suggested to expand development indicators and to include measurements of democratic development and corruption. One

participant also suggested analysing slogans from the recent political uprisings in several Arab countries, which included calls for dignity, social justice, sustainable livelihoods and freedom, as an approach to analysing the needs of the region's citizens. Some participants also raised concerns about the usefulness of the concept of social safety nets, while others argued that they had proved successful in Latin America. One participant highlighted the role that the media could play in communicating needed reforms and in raising awareness on the need for social protection.

C. PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES BY NON-STATE ACTORS

22. This session was further divided into four subsessions, namely: (1) the provision of social services by the private sector; (2) the role of philanthropy in the provision of social services; (3) the provision of social services by civil society and other actors; and (4) the role of *zakat* funds in the overall social security system.

1. *Provision of social services by the private sector*

23. The subsession was chaired by Ms. Barbara Ibrahim, Director, John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University of Cairo, Egypt. The subsession included two presentations and a subsequent discussion. The objective of the subsession was to evaluate the provision of social services by the private sector with regards to equity of coverage and access.

24. Mr. Naren Prasad, First Economic Affairs Officer for Development, Development Policy Section, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA, presented a global overview of the impact of private sector participation in access to water and water supply. According to him, private participation in water and sanitation in developing countries increased in line with a reduction in public expenditure. He presented the different approaches to private participation in water and sanitation: for one group of researchers, private participation in water and sanitation was a necessary consequence of limited public funds. For a second group, water was a public good and should not be provided by the private sector. A third group believed that water was both an economic good and a human right, and should be addressed through a combination of public and private efforts. Safe water provision was challenged by difficulties with infrastructure, limited financial resources, increasing global needs and environmental constraints, sociopolitical challenges, and managerial challenges including accountability, transparency and efficiency. As a result, some countries in Asia invited private sector participation out of necessity in order to curb budget deficits, whereas some Latin American countries sought more private sector engagement in order to reduce scarcity and corruption. He expressed the view that private sector participation remained controversial, as positive outcomes depended on the regulatory capacity of the State. Few privatization efforts in developing countries could be considered successful, due to the lack of regulatory capacity, the inability to ensure equitable coverage of the population with water services, and the lack of accompanying social policies to cushion the impact of full market prices on poorer segments of the population. Good regulation also included legal certainty, the rule of law and lack of corruption, as well as a guarantee of the right to water, which some countries had already established in their constitutions. Since private sector participation in water and sanitation was still relatively limited in Arab countries, the region could learn from the experience of other regions.

25. Ms. Allison Minor, independent social policy expert, presented her research on the role of the private sector in the provision of basic social services in the ESCWA region. According to her findings, an increasing trend of private sector participation in the provision of basic social services like healthcare, water, and education can be observed. In some cases, the private sector complemented public sector services, but in other cases it also undermined them. She differentiated between private sector participation by design, such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), and private participation by default, primarily to fill gaps in State services. This latter form of private participation was often largely unmonitored and unregulated. She expressed the view that all forms of private sector participation in basic social services required careful monitoring and regulation, as these services were essentially human rights. Despite those challenges, there were many benefits to private sector participation in social service provision. The private sector often filled

significant voids, especially in post-conflict countries. It could provide additional investments, new technology and new methods, and could improve the overall efficiency of the system. However, private sector participation included the risk of a two tier system, where higher income groups had access to high-quality private sector services, while lower income groups had to accept lower quality public services. Alternatively, if no public sector options existed, families could be forced to pay catastrophic fees for basic social services.

26. In the subsequent discussion, participants raised concerns about privatization in water and sanitation in the light of extreme water shortages in the region. It was also mentioned that in many countries, privatization was not a matter of choice, but was imposed as a condition of development loans on indebted countries. While some participants raised general concerns over privatization of public services, it was agreed to concentrate the debate on how a mix of services with different service providers should be ensured, given that few countries could afford to satisfy all their citizens' needs through public services. Thus, the main question was how the State and the market could be brought together to achieve sustainable and equitable welfare.

2. Role of philanthropy in the provision of social services

27. The subsession extended over two working sessions which were chaired, respectively, by Mr. Khalid Abu-Ismail, Chief, Development Policy Section, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA, and Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer, First Social Affairs Officer, Social Policy Section, Social Development Division, ESCWA. The first working session included two presentations, followed by a discussion. The second working session included a third presentation followed by a discussion. The objective of the working sessions was to assess how and through which mechanisms philanthropy contributed to the provision of social services and to what extent Governments should and could be involved in coordinating or guiding those services.

28. Ms. Barbara Ibrahim presented trends in Arab philanthropy, a tradition which she said was deeply embedded in the culture of Arab countries, with support mainly going towards traditional concerns such as care for orphans and widows, while areas such as human rights, culture and the arts tended to receive less attention. She stated that the ultimate goal of philanthropy was to provide a common good for the public; this could be financial, but could also mean giving time or services. She discussed some emerging trends that blur the frontiers between traditional philanthropy and business models, such as strategic philanthropy, which seeks to maximize benefits for the community through elements such as comparative advantage and harnessing economies of scale. Another emerging trend is venture philanthropy, which applied the business model of venture capital financing to charity, often investing in deep social change. She also expressed the view that philanthropy should remain voluntary and the involvement of the State should be limited, while also voicing concern that outsourcing public services to private philanthropy or civil society could negatively affect the character and the quality of those services. She illustrated this with an example from Egypt, where medical care to certain groups was outsourced to civil society organizations, which had few incentives to improve the quality of the services. However, she also acknowledged that there were successful examples where private philanthropy was used to support the public sector, such as in Turkey, where the *waqf* system had been reformed and modernized. To date, publicly provided education had been augmented by schools endowed by family funds. Because those families took a personal interest in providing quality education, the model had improved the overall quality of education in Turkey. She emphasized that the legal framework was important to enable and encourage philanthropy. For example, in Egypt, there were no legal provisions that encouraged non-profit private education, but rather a proliferation of for-profit private education institutions. In addition, under current laws, the assets of a foundation could be seized by the State, which created a potential obstacle to the growth of philanthropy. Finally, she stated that it was important to examine the strengths of each actor in the provision of social services, suggesting that, in the case of philanthropy, these were its voluntary and flexible nature.

29. Ms. Vanessa Campos-Yakan, External Relations Officer, Safadi Foundation, presented the work of the foundation in Lebanon. She outlined the history of the foundation, which began delivering emergency aid during the Lebanese civil war on the basis of philanthropic principles. These activities were formalized with the establishment of a private foundation in 2001. The foundation had gone through a learning cycle, starting with ad-hoc activities and moving toward more formalized activities with a strategic approach. She explained that to date, the foundation's focus areas included rural development and sustainable agriculture, cultural development, education and social development. The focus on rural development was based on a needs assessment in the field and after consultation with key stakeholders. Activities included the provision of technical assistance and facilitating knowledge-sharing among farmers. Cultural activities and educational activities provided users with services which were often not available in the north of Lebanon and promoted a culture of literacy and education. She also mentioned significant challenges to the foundation's activities. In agricultural activities, the main challenge was the lack of coordination, duplication and concerns over sustainability of the projects when funding from the Safadi Foundation expired. In its educational programmes, an additional challenge was the lack of qualified staff. An overall challenge was the organization's financial sustainability, and the fact that the public often associated the foundation's activities with a political figure, although the foundation itself did not work along political lines. Finally, she explained that Lebanon's relatively weak regulatory framework was sometimes an obstacle, as there were no legal structures in place to govern non-profit organizations, no tax benefits and no access to Government funding.

30. The subsequent discussion focused on the relationship between private philanthropy and the State. While several participants mentioned the need to harness synergies of all actors in private philanthropy and that the State should explore possibilities to orchestrate those efforts, given their informality and private nature, other participants expressed concerns that such synergies might be difficult to create under authoritarian regimes, while a better approach could be to reshape the social contract among stakeholders. Another group expressed the view that volunteer activities should remain ad-hoc and voluntary, and that State involvement would only discourage such activities. Generally, participants agreed that there was a need to find the right balance between having necessary regulations in place and over-regulation. Some participants also pointed to the need to promote a culture of volunteerism in Arab societies, which should also be reflected in school and university curricula. One participant suggested that this was already the case at some schools and universities in Lebanon.

31. Mr. Khaled Al-Busharah, Advisor to the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF), presented the role of *awqaf* (the plural form of *waqf*) in the provision of social services in Kuwait. First, he outlined some specific characteristics of the *waqf* system compared to other types of charitable giving: the original asset of the *waqf* must be preserved, while only its revenue can be used for social development; the founder has the right to determine the purpose and beneficiaries of a *waqf*; and the annual revenue of a *waqf* must be spent every year in line with the prescriptions of Islamic law. Next, he gave an overview of the relationship between *awqaf* and the State in Kuwait. He explained that at times in the past when the State had been weak, *awqaf* were controlled by civil society, which in some cases had led to mismanagement. Since the discovery of oil in the 1960s, the State had begun to assume responsibility for services which had previously been provided through *awqaf*. However, given that the philanthropic potential of *awqaf* remained large and the State felt the need to coordinate these efforts, KAPF was created in 1993 as a semi-governmental institution with strong governance and monitoring mechanisms. The foundation had also developed approaches to address over-supply of *awqaf* in certain sectors and to direct *awqaf* into under-served sectors by establishing two different funds; one with specific mandates and one for *awqaf* projects. The latter offered greater flexibility and allowed the foundation to initiate social projects from its side. An example of the foundation's ability to react to emerging needs was the establishment of a centre for children with autism, the first of its kind in Kuwait. The foundation also promoted scientific research and generally sought to address the needs of vulnerable groups.

32. In the subsequent discussion, participants appreciated the good practice of KAPF as a source of information and data, while pointing to a general scarcity of research and data on *awqaf* in the region. Specifically, questions in need of further exploration included how a *waqf* authority could guide *awqaf*

towards sectors with priority needs, to avoid misallocation or concentration of resources in certain sectors. The extent to which the State should act as a coordinator of *awqaf* was also a topic of discussion. Some participants emphasized that the purpose of the *waqf* had to remain within the prerogative of the founder and that the State should not interfere, while other participants expressed the view that a certain level of coordination between the State and *waqf*-driven services would be important in order to avoid duplication. Mr. Al-Busharah clarified that KAPF always respected the will of the founder, all changes to which required the approval of a judge, which was difficult to obtain. In addition, the decision-making structures in KAPF were independent from the State, but the foundation coordinated its activities with the Government. Media campaigns were designed to raise awareness on the possibility of directing *awqaf* into social sectors. Some participants raised the concern that the provision of social services by *waqf* and *zakat* funds could exclude non-Muslims, a concern responded to by others who stated that those services would be accessible regardless of faith and that many *awqaf* were also made by non-Muslims.

3. *Provision of social services by civil society and other actors*

33. The subsession was chaired by Ms. Ursula Kulke, Senior Social Security Specialist, ILO. The subsession contained three presentations followed by a discussion. The objective of the subsession was to assess social services provided by civil society and other actors with regards to their coverage, quality and beneficiaries.

34. Ms. Anne Marie Baylouny, Associate Professor of National Security Affairs, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, United States of America, gave a presentation on kin associations as social insurance through a videolink. She explained that kin associations were self-assistance associations based on group identity which provided services to their members, who were required to pay membership fees and perform certain duties in the organization. The associations were formed in response to economic hardships; in Jordan, the reduction of public expenditure, and in Lebanon the voids in State provision during and after the civil war. Kinship associations provided numerous services, ranging from loans and health insurance to informal services, such as assistance in job searches. She maintained that the principal motivation for joining those associations was that members were in need of the services they provided, which were not otherwise available to them. Research had also revealed that members would leave the organization if those services were provided by the State. She also explained that most members of the associations belonged to the middle class, as people from lower classes were not able to afford membership fees. The services of the few kinship organizations that provided access to persons from lower classes provided fewer services, because their revenue from membership fees was lower. She also noted that the management of kinship associations was mainly male-dominated and that the beneficiaries of services, especially job contacts, were also mostly men. She summarized that the opportunity represented by kinship associations lay in their provision of services that were generally difficult to access, while the main challenges were that they provided services to select beneficiaries only, based on group identity, and that the poor did not have the financial capacity to join or form kinship associations.

35. Ms. Sarah Sabry, Researcher, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, gave a presentation on poverty alleviation activities by faith-based organizations in informal areas of Egypt through a videolink. Her presentation was based on eight months of fieldwork in Egypt in one of Cairo's largest and poorest informal neighbourhoods. She stated that the role of faith-based organizations in Egypt, especially Salafi organizations, had grown significantly in recent years. Especially in informal neighbourhoods, faith-based organizations were in many cases the main actors providing social services. Faith-based organizations were motivated by religious, political and personal enrichment goals; they were mostly founded and managed by men while their beneficiaries were mostly women and children. Their most important intervention was conditional charitable handouts (cash and grocery packages); receiving them was, for example, conditional upon the attendance of religious instruction for women or religiously oriented preschool education for children. Some organizations also targeted specific groups, for example women wearing the face veil. Research had revealed that the beneficiaries of those services would prefer to receive State social assistance pensions rather than conditional cash transfers from faith-based organizations. Among

the reasons cited by beneficiaries was that fulfilling conditionalities was time-consuming and State services were considered more reliable and less humiliating. She also pointed out that many faith-based organizations suffered from poor management, poor governance and a lack of accountability towards their beneficiaries; she further stated that that they were socially and religiously divisive, and lacked financial transparency.

36. Mr. Kamel Mohanna, President, Amel Association International, introduced the work of his organization and its contribution to social services. He emphasized that Amel had started by providing services to refugees and grown to become an international non-governmental organization composed of 23 centres in Lebanon. The organization provided services such as healthcare and informal education in poor and rural areas. It maintained close contact with local communities and was thus able to directly respond to their needs. He stated that the guiding principles of his organization were solidarity instead of charity, the rejection of sectarianism, and strict secularism. He also stressed the importance of the role of women and of democratic efforts for development. In conclusion, he pointed out that non-governmental organizations should function as pressure groups and should not replace the State as providers of social services.

37. The discussion that followed focused on the role of the State and its regulation of civil society organizations. This matter was combined with the question of how the State could increase accountability and transparency within civil society organizations, especially faith-based organizations. Some participants called for a more detailed study of how faith-based organizations with extremist orientation had gained in strength in recent years, and the nature of their financial resources. In response, Ms. Sabry reaffirmed that it was almost impossible to gain insights into the financial transactions of those organizations. Some participants also expressed concern that members of civil society organizations were often elected in a non-democratic manner and sometimes prone to vested interests. In some cases, they did not even possess adequate skills to provide quality social services. In this context, some participants pointed to the need to provide training and education in social work. Several participants asserted that the State's role was to provide discrimination-free and unconditional basic social services, a responsibility that should not be replaced by any non-governmental organization. Overall, participants maintained that the State should assume the responsibility to regulate the activities of civil society organizations to ensure the quality of services and accountability.

4. *Zakat and its role in the overall social security system*

38. The session was chaired by Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer and included presentations on *zakat* and its implementation in two countries of the ESCWA region, namely Palestine and Yemen. The presentations were followed by a discussion. The objective of the session was to appreciate the services provided by *zakat* funds, their role in the overall security system of their countries, and to evaluate their mechanisms for collection, distribution and identification of beneficiaries.

39. Ms. Rasha Jarhum, independent social development consultant, focused her presentation on the role of *zakat* in the social security system in Yemen and how it was currently managed and distributed. Yemen's constitution of 1994 indicated that the State was responsible for the collection and distribution of *zakat*. The Zakat Law of 1996 made *zakat* obligatory and defined sources and beneficiaries of *zakat* and introduced a penalty for non-compliance. Through the Local Administration Law of 2000, *zakat* management was integrated into local administration responsibilities. Thus, *zakat* was viewed as a source of revenue for local administration and merged with other revenue sources to be used for development projects. A new law was currently in the legislation process that would establish an independent authority for *zakat* and social protection. She explained that *zakat* could be considered a semi-formal mechanism within the overall social protection system, because its legal and regulatory framework was still incomplete and no accountability mechanisms existed: *zakat* was currently collected by a combination of local authorities, civil society organizations and faith-based organizations. Over the past four years, *zakat* revenues had increased by 12 per cent on average and the Government's overall spending on social protection was about five times higher than *zakat* revenues. The largest proportion (42 per cent) of *zakat* revenues in 2011 came from the private sector. According to the Zakat Law, 50 per cent of *zakat* collected had to be used in the districts where they were collected, while 50 per cent had to be transferred to the governorate. On behalf of the Government, the Social

Welfare Fund was entitled to distribute *zakat*, which provided cash transfers to orphans, older persons, persons with disabilities and the unemployed, with established criteria on how these groups would become eligible to receive *zakat*. Individuals could apply to receive *zakat* with the assistance of social researchers. Selection criteria included indicators such as family size, literacy level, type of housing, or type of cooking fuel. However, an assessment from 2006 had revealed that 45 per cent of actual beneficiaries were individuals and families living above the poverty line. She concluded that *zakat* was an important component of the overall security system in Yemen, but its success in reducing poverty was still limited. She cited limited coordination between stakeholders in the *zakat* system and incomplete legislation as possible reasons for this shortcoming.

40. Mr. Jamal Yousef, General Director, Palestinian Zakat Fund, opened his presentation by outlining the history of the fund, which began as a a charity committee in 1923 and was officially licensed under Jordanian law after 1967. In 1996, it was placed under the Ministry of Awqaf of the Palestinian Authority. He stated that the fund's vision was the attainment of social justice and its mission was to provide social protection and reduce poverty. Due to economic pressures in Palestine, there was a need to provide greater social protection, a task in which the fund played an important role. He further explained that the Palestinian Zakat Fund was overseen by a board of managers representing the social, economic, religious and political spheres. He went on to discuss projects that the fund had conducted with partners in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as with international partners. The fund's work focused on four main fields, namely health, education, income generation and the empowerment of marginalized communities. The achievements of the Palestinian Zakat Fund included the establishment of two hospitals, 14 clinics, and schools (from the preschool level to institutions of higher education). Additionally, the fund conducted programmes to attract sponsorship for orphans. In total, approximately 300,000 persons benefitted from these services every year. Challenges to the fund included a lack of the financial resources needed to provide better and more innovative services; the unstable political and economic situation in Palestine; the often lengthy bureaucratic process within the Government; and the lack of qualified personnel.

41. The subsequent discussion evolved around the question how *zakat* funds could adequately target their beneficiaries. It was also mentioned that research on other countries had shown that although there were leakages to non-poor, those recipients' incomes were only marginally above the poverty line; thus *zakat* could be a mechanism to protect people from falling into poverty. Concern was also raised that it could be difficult to identify the poorest of the poor and that in reality, access to *zakat* funds depended on connections. Participants further stressed the need for improving the accountability mechanisms of *zakat* funds and considered merging *zakat* revenues with the Government's budget as problematic, because in that case *zakat* would become another form of income tax. In that context, some participants stressed the need for *zakat* funds to be independent of Government control.

D. OBLIGATIONS AND CAPACITIES OF GOVERNMENTS

42. The session was chaired by Mr. Frederico Neto, Director, Social Development Division, ESCWA, and contained three presentations followed by a discussion. The objectives of the session was to assess the obligations and capacities of Governments in providing social services, and propose ways in which Governments could fulfill those obligations in the light of their limited capacities.

43. Ms. Ursula Kulke emphasized in her presentation on "The Social Protection Floor: State Commitments and Obligations" that social protection is a human right and a State's legal obligation, as well as an economic and social necessity. Thus social services are not charity, but a legal entitlement of citizens. She pointed out that the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) established the right to social security, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to education. She further stressed that all Arab countries had ratified the Convention and thus had committed themselves to working towards social security for everyone. She stated that every human right needed to have a minimum core content, and suggested that this core minimum should be the Social Protection Floor, which was characterized, on the one hand, by social transfers (in cash or in kind to ensure basic income security), and on

the other hand, by universal access to essential and affordable social services such as health, water and sanitation, education, food security, and housing. She pointed out that it was an obligation of Governments to guarantee principles for the right to social security such as universal coverage and sustainability, and to establish a rights-based approach. She explained what measures countries would have to take to establish a national social protection strategy, and pointed to the new ILO Social Protection Floor Recommendation (No. 202). Lastly, she highlighted some successful examples of Social Protection Floors being implemented around the world.

44. Mr. Khalid Abu-Ismaïl and Mr. Naren Prasad gave a presentation on “Fiscal Space in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring”, exploring Arab countries’ financial capacity to establish a Social Protection Floor. They stated that prior to the political uprisings, the financial situation in Arab countries had been relatively favourable compared to other developing countries. However, due to increased public spending as a response to the uprisings, the fiscal situation in non-oil-exporting Arab countries had deteriorated, leading to increased budget deficits and rising debt. Social protection schemes already existed in all countries, but some of them were costly, and at the same time their coverage was limited. Nevertheless, based on costing modules developed by ILO and the United Nations Children’s Organization, which included a basic package with old-age and child benefits as well as universal access to essential health care, basic education and basic social assistance for the unemployed, the presenters concluded that social protection could be affordable for most countries in the region, with associated costs ranging between 4.7 and 6.5 per cent of GDP in most countries. Countries should consider that cost as an investment, they stated, as social protection could enhance economic growth. Moreover, current social spending in some countries was already higher than the potential cost of a basic Social Protection Floor, but was ineffective due to high leakage to non-poor groups and adverse distribution effects. For example, Egypt currently spent 9 per cent of GDP on fuel subsidies. Countries could raise additional financial resources for the Social Protection Floor through either domestic revenue mobilization, official development assistance, deficit financing or reprioritizing expenses coupled with enhancing the efficiency of current spending.

45. Ms. Sizar Akoum, a Biomedical Engineer at the Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon, illustrated how the Government of Lebanon sought to regulate the quality of healthcare services through the accreditation of hospitals. She explained that historically, and especially during the civil war, private healthcare provision had developed in a largely unregulated environment. Thus there were significant disparities in the quality of different providers, coupled with limited transparency. She stated that to date, about 80 per cent of healthcare provision in Lebanon was private, while 90 per cent of healthcare funding was public. The absence of regulations and guidelines had raised concerns over the quality of healthcare, including the lack of transparency about diagnosis and treatment, the prescription of inappropriate therapies, and the patients’ subjection to unnecessary examinations and surgery. She expressed the view that in many cases a hospital’s commercial interest had taken priority over patients’ welfare. To address those issues, the Ministry of Public Health had attempted to regulate the powerful private sector through a hospital accreditation programme that set clear quality standards. Among the goals of the programme were the encouragement of quality improvement and the reduction of public health expenditures through the increased efficiency and effectiveness of services. Although accreditation was voluntary, contracts for service provision were no longer permitted between non-accredited hospitals and public funds (Ministry of Health, National Social Security Fund, Army, Internal Security Forces, etc.). As a result of the accreditation programme, a culture of quality improvement had progressively been established. Healthcare organizations had become more actively involved in this approach and citizens’ confidence in the quality of healthcare had increased. In conclusion, she explained that in the future, the Ministry of Health intended to revise quality standards to bring them in line with international trends towards outcome-based quality standards, and to extend the practice of accreditation beyond hospitals, to incorporate other healthcare facilities.

46. The subsequent discussion focused on how countries could prioritize different spending positions in order to finance a basic Social Protection Floor. Some participants expressed the view that by shifting and reprioritizing resources, countries could afford the Social Protection Floor. Others, however, raised concerns about its feasibility, noting that 5 to 8 per cent of a country’s GDP represented a significant amount of

financial resources and could present an obstacle to implementation for many countries. Concern was raised especially over the feasibility of abolishing food subsidies, while several participants agreed that abolishing fuel subsidies could prove more feasible. One participant expressed concern that the concept of the Social Protection Floor was informed by experiences in Europe, where trust in the State as a provider of social services was high, in contrast to the Arab countries, where confidence in State capabilities was relatively low. Another participant responded that Nepal, a least developed country, was able to afford a universal cash transfer for the elderly. While recognizing the importance of a basic Social Protection Floor, several participants also emphasized that in the light of limited financial resources, Governments should also consider specifically targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups with social protection programmes.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE AND DATE

47. The Arab Forum “Towards a New Welfare Mix: Rethinking the Roles of the State, Market and Civil Society in the Provision of Basic Social Services” was held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 19 and 20 December 2012.

B. OPENING

48. The Arab Forum was opened by Mr. Frederico Neto, Director, Social Development Division, ESCWA. He welcomed all participants, and thanked the executing partners for their support in organizing the Arab Forum. He explained that the Arab region was currently in a state of rapid transformation, both political and economic. He pointed to the high unemployment, precarious working conditions and low wages that had preceded the political uprisings, while noting that, at the same time, many Governments faced increasing budgetary constraints. He emphasized that this situation called for a new development paradigm with a system that offered opportunities for all. While the region was already on an encouraging path towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals, especially with regards to health and education, coverage in provision of social services remained incomplete and of poor quality at times. Thus, non-State actors filled those voids, often in an unregulated manner. He outlined that the current Arab Forum intended to assess the impact of those patterns of service provision on the overall welfare of the country and how that situation squared with the principles of citizenship and social justice.

49. Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Director, Economic Development and Globalization Division, ESCWA, welcomed participants and reiterated the need for a new development paradigm, including social and economic dimensions, which required coordinated efforts within the United Nations bodies for a social-led macroeconomic development scheme with recommendations on the implementation of growth policies that focus on alleviating poverty. He also underscored the importance of adopting a rights-based strategy to economic development.

50. Mr. Samir Farah, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, welcomed participants and stated that the current Arab Forum was focused on a constructive debate about the roles of the State, the market and civil society in the provision of social services. Acknowledging the political and demographic challenges the Arab region was currently facing, he emphasized the need to identify a new approach to social welfare. In the past, welfare provision strategies in Arab countries had sought to ensure universal access to public services, subsidizing basic resources and employing much of the workforce in the largely inefficient public sector. Given the realities of social and economic change, countries had subsequently been forced to curtail public spending, which resulted in large gaps in service provision. He suggested that finding a new welfare mix in which centuries-old traditions of philanthropy and social solidarity could play an important role was the challenge of the near future.

51. Mr. Frank Hagemann, Deputy Regional Director, ILO Regional Office for Arab States, thanked ESCWA for the organization of the Arab Forum in cooperation with all the other partners. He emphasized

the importance of the Social Protection Floor initiative, which was a holistic approach to ensuring access to basic social services for all citizens. Essential features of the Social Protection Floor were the legal entitlements for citizens and the role of the State as a regulator and guarantor of those social services. The Social Protection Floor initiative had already made a significant positive impact in a variety of countries, but at the same time there was a need to adapt the concept to specific country requirements. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Arab Forum to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the prevailing welfare mix, with the goal of establishing a Social Protection Floor.

C. PARTICIPANTS

52. The Arab Forum was attended by 13 experts nominated by Governments of ESCWA member countries. Furthermore, 28 independent researchers and experts from civil society, academia and the United Nations system organizations were present. A list of participants is contained in annex I of this report.

D. AGENDA

53. At the first session, participants adopted the agenda as set forth below:

1. Opening.
2. The welfare mix: introduction and challenges.
3. Provision of social services by the public sector: identifying the gaps.
4. Provision of social services by non-State actors:
 - (a) Provision of social services by the private sector;
 - (b) The role of philanthropy in the provision of social services;
 - (c) Provision of social services by civil society and other actors;
 - (d) Zakat and its role in the overall security system.
5. Obligations and capacities of Governments.
6. Summary of challenges and opportunities.

E. DOCUMENTS

54. A list of the documents for the Forum is contained in annex II of this report and can be accessed at: <http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1980E>.

Annex I*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Egypt

Ms. Ola Ahmed Abousteit
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Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Cairo

Lebanon

Ms. Sizar Akoum
Biomedical Engineer
Ministry of Public Health
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Ms. Amal Karaki
Head of Social and Economic Planning Unit
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Oman

Mr. Aqeel Al-Lawati
Economic Researcher
Supreme Council for Planning
Muscat

Palestine

Mr. Ayman Sawalha
Acting Assistant Deputy Minister
Ministry of Social Affairs
Ramallah

Mr. Jamal Yousef
General Director
Palestinian Zakat Fund
Ramallah

Saudi Arabia

Mr. Hisham Abdallah Al-Mdemegh
Director, National Rehabilitation Department
Ministry of Social Affairs
Riyadh

Mr. Ali Ahmad Al-Qurni
Director, Orphan Sponsoring Department
Ministry of Social Affairs
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Ms. Widad Khalil
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* Issued as submitted.

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Senior Social Security Specialist
International Labour Organization

Ms. Christine Rouhana
Research Assistant

Ms. Haneen Sayed
Human Development Coordinator – Jordan,
Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic
MENA Region Youth Co-Coordinator
World Bank
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C. EXPERTS, RESEARCH CENTRES, FOUNDATIONS, UNIVERSITIES, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND OTHERS

Mr. Charles Abdallah
Economist of the European Union Delegation to
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European Commission
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Ms. Linda Abdel Aziz
Poverty and Humanitarian Expert
Damascus

Ms. Rima Abou Baker
Cultural Event Planner
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Ms. Anne Marie Baylouny (videolink)
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Ms. Rasha Jarhum
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Mr. Rami Khouri
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Mr. Abdallah Al Dardari
Chief Economist/Director
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Chief, Social Policy Section
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Mr. Khalid Abu-Ismaïl
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Ms. Vanessa Steinmayer
First Social Affairs Officer, Social Policy Section
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Ms. Rasha Salman
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Ms. Monique Morisse
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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

- Inclusion and Resilience: The Way Forward for Social Safety Nets in the Middle East and North Africa
- Social Protection in Palestine (Arabic and English)
- The Sudan Experience in the Provision of Social Services (Arabic)
- Provision of Social Services in Yemen (Arabic)
- Towards a New Welfare Mix in Egypt
- The Role of the Private Sector in the Provision of Basic Social Services
- The Role of Civil Society in the Provision of Basic Social Services
- Private Provision of Water and Sanitation – Lessons Learned
- Arab Philanthropy in Transition: Introduction
- Arab Philanthropy in Transition: From Charity to Social Change
- Experience in the Provision of Social Services – Safadi Foundation
- Challenges and Opportunities in Harnessing Awqaf for the Provision of Social Services
- The Role of Awqaf in Social Development in Kuwait
- Kin Associations as Social Insurance
- New Family Associations as Welfare Providers in Liberalizing Jordan
- Social Service by Faith-based Organizations in Egypt
- Responsibilities in Social Protection of the Public and Private Sector (Arabic)
- Zakat in Yemen
- Zakat in Palestine
- The Social Protection Floor
- Fiscal Space in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring
- Regulation in the Health Sector