Contemporary Issues in the Circumpolar North: Comparative Policy Analysis and the Circumpolar North University of the Arctic

Module 6: Social Policy in the Circumpolar North

Developed by
Asgeir Solstad
Department Social Sciences, University of Nordland
Bodø, Norway

Overview

This module provides an introduction to social policies. After defining social policies and social problems, this module examines different welfare state models and how they are applied in the High North. It then examines social policy matters and social problems in the High North. Finally, challenges in comparative social policy development in the Arctic are evaluated.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to:

- 1. Identify links between social policy and other policies in the circumpolar North.
- 2. Identify links between social policies and political ideologies in the circumpolar North.
- 3. Explain concepts of welfare and equalization policies and how they relate.
- 4. Explain the main types of social policy models.
- 5. Identify different forms of social policies in the circumpolar North.

Required Readings (including web sites)

Rasmussen, R. O. et al. (2011). *Public-Private Relations*. **Megatrends**, Rasmussen, R.O. et al. Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, pp. 124-147. http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/development/megatrends/fundamental-changes-in-the-nature-of-arctic-economies_9789289330718-6-en#page1

Key Terms and Concepts

- Living Conditions
- Quality of Life
- Risk
- Social Policy
- Social Policy in the High North
- Social Problem
- Welfare State

Learning Material

6.1 Introduction: The Links Between Social Policy and Other Policies in the Circumpolar North

The most important employer in a town is closing. Many people are losing jobs in a community where few other possibilities for work exist. The people need alternative income. Some people may require assistance getting a new job either in town or elsewhere. In a society without social policies there are no support systems or agencies ready to respond to such needs. However, in many countries a number of systems and agencies work to reduce negative effects such a closure might impose on workers and the community. These are the consequences of social policy.

Social policies do not always successfully serve as tools to prevent poverty or effectively empower people in difficult situations. The experience of some Indigenous peoples is illustrative. In order to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the mainstream population of a country, children of Indigenous peoples were frequently sent away to schools to learn the national language and culture. One objective was to integrate Indigenous people into modern society and free them from the boundaries of tradition, but this did not work well. However, it notably increased opportunities for political control of Indigenous peoples. We now consider such policies tools of oppression that contributed to the impoverishment of peoples and their cultures, but it provides a useful example of the many consequences – good and bad – that can arise from social policies.

6.2 The Concept of Social Policy: Welfare Policy and Equalization

Social policy works like any other policy. It provides services that are necessary to people and it represents a tool for political control and power. The field of social policy consists of health, education, taxation, aspects of labour and working conditions, housing, family matters and similar policies. These policy fields are important to the welfare of citizens. They involve matters of access to material goods or services and are also important in establishing and securing social justice. Social policy includes an element of redistribution of wealth among citizens of a state. Finally, social policy includes facilitation of a decent quality of life.

Finnish researcher Erik Allardt describes three dimensions of welfare: to have, to love, to be (Allardt,1975). Successful social policy therefore facilitates citizens' abilities to develop their personality and creative potential. Accordingly, social policy should, in addition to securing a certain level of material goods and services, assist people to develop and reach their full potential as individuals. Put another way, social policy is about the way society handles social problems.

6.3 A Social Problem – What Is It?

European colonizers viewed the fact that Indigenous people lived in traditional manners guided by traditional values as a social problem. To a colonist, Indigenous peoples lacked the blessings of a Christian faith and the advantages of modern, western culture. Forcing western lifestyle and culture on Indigenous peoples allowed colonists to feel they were helping Indigenous peoples out of their misfortune, while allowing colonists to gain political and economic control over Indigenous people and their resources.

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The definition of a problem can often be a matter of power. Generally, the dominant society defines the problem, but those included in the definition may or may not perceive it as a problem. In other cases, those who experience problems may struggle long and hard before their problems receive proper support from people or institutions with power to make necessary changes. For example, Indigenous peoples have had a long struggle to obtain acceptance of their definition of social problems and access to resources needed to cope with them.

Individuals alone cannot solve social problems. Social problems "call for collective action to solve" (Worsley, 1970). The basic struggle is to achieve necessary public support needed to influence political bodies to allocate resources by law and/or money to cope with problems.

Acceptance of something as a social problem requires many people to experience it as a problem. Either a large group must see something as a problem or if the problem is experienced by only a few, its consequences must cause risk to many.

Many social problems are risks people try to avoid or consequences of actions or events to be minimized. Many people have imperfect job security, which means many are vulnerable to instability or poverty should they lose their job. Poverty is an individual tragedy, but if many become poor, it becomes a social tragedy. To prevent such consequences many governments offer unemployment benefits and other job programs to minimize risks.

Job loss risks are evident. A social policy difficulty is the limit of risk from which citizens should be protected is frequently pushed leaving the collective with increased responsibility for individual problems. This leads to an increased number of situations seen as abnormal or dangerous (crime, alcohol and domestic abuse, poverty and homelessness), leaving more people victims.

Others observing increasing privatization and limitation of public services worry a growing number of responsibilities that were previously collective are now private, individual matters. They fear this leads to an interpretation of poverty as a social problem outside the ability or responsibility of the collective to address. An example may be placing limitations on how long or how much money individuals can receive from different public benefits.

Two key phrases that describe social problems are *living conditions* and *quality of life*. Unsatisfactory living conditions are indicators of social problems. Aspects of normal living conditions include:

- income level
- labour and working conditions
- education
- recreation and culture
- housing and residential conditions
- health
- social contact and family relations
- participation/ political rights
- safety concerning life and property

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These indicators are used to explain social problems. They have in common the ability to be measured by relatively reliable and objective quantitative means. Low scores on several indicators are often used to explain poverty and often correlated with social outcomes and problems such as high crime rates.

In poverty studies there are *two main concepts of poverty*. The first is *absolute poverty*, which is a description of poor living conditions regardless of the society in which a person lives. It describes an absolute minimum of income, housing condition, food supply, among other things. The United Nations (UN) defines absolute poverty.

The other concept, *relative poverty*, attempts to capture the situation that exists when a segment of people in a society lack the resources to have the diet, housing and other necessary avails to the degree they are excluded from normal social life and activities in that society. This concept is important to discussions concerning poverty in the Arctic. Few people in the circumpolar region live under conditions of absolute poverty. The concept of relative poverty indicates important consequences of poverty, such as social exclusion and a lack of necessary material goods, also occur in rich societies.

However, these indicators and quantitative measures that describe them cannot answer important questions such as is your quality of life good or are you happy. Indicators other than those described above also affect people's lives and conception of problems. This fact gave rise to

quality of life research, which examines how satisfactory people's quality of life is and not how different living conditions can be measured and described. The focus of this research uses alternative indicators such as community life, political situation, climate and geography, and gender relations, among others.

Knowledge gathered from a combination of these approaches informs researchers about the material and social framework of something regarded as a social problem. For example, how are certain problems, and the bigger picture of which they are a part, experienced by those affected by the problems?

ABSOLUTE POVERTY:

Poor and inadequate living conditions in whatever society the person lives.

RELATIVE POVERTY:

Captures the situation one has when people in a given society lack resources to have the diet, housing and other necessary avails to the degree they are excluded from normal social life and activities.

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As stated, social problems are political problems. To deal with these challenges, circumpolar states have established different forms of welfare states. The following section will examine these different political arrangements.

Discussion Question 1:

Describe and discuss the types of social problems most prominent in your region. **Discussion Question 2:**

Do qualitative or statistical measures, such as education levels, unemployment, household income, etc., aptly describe the condition of your community or do quality of life indicators provide a better picture?

6.4 Emergence of the Welfare State: Welfare Policy and Equalization Policy

Social policy has always been part of politics. During the Viking era, laws outlined obligations people had to help the poor. The national welfare state is a recent phenomenon. Historically, the idea of a welfare state is often connected to 19th century German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who introduced a social insurance system where the state, employers and workers shared the costs of a welfare scheme delivered through unions.

The German case also illustrates social policy as a tool of political power and control. By establishing a welfare scheme, Germany achieved a stable and reliable working class with shared values that led to increased national wealth. This made the economy strong and generated faith in the unification of Germany while it became a rich and powerful European state with a wealthy capitalist class.

This demonstrates another important feature of welfare states. The German welfare scheme redistributed wealth from the rich to the working class through the state. This became an important feature in subsequent models of welfare states.

The beginning of the welfare state in Germany was an important impetus for the development of welfare states throughout Europe. At that time, industrialization had spread across Europe. The working class depended on salaries from factories to survive and were vulnerable to unemployment, often as a result of bankruptcy by their employer, and unsafe working conditions on factory floors. Workers needed regulations to protect them from the harms of industrialization, the capitalist means of production.

The working class represented a political power able to threaten the new social order which capitalism, the economic development tool of nations and processes of modernization, relied on. The origin of the welfare state was a result of the dominating class's need to maintain stability within society and within the labour force in order to secure its position. The welfare state was also the result of the struggle of the working class for security amidst the instability of capitalism and for political power within society.

Another perspective is that modernization, which is a broader phenomenon than the means of production and economy, contributed to the development of the welfare state. Modernization includes new types of cultural development and increased respect for human rights and

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democracy. This created an ideological basis for welfare policies, which secured life and health and included different degrees of income redistribution.

The 19th century was a period of new political organization. Europe changed from monarchies to elected parliaments as bases of power and political parties were established. Among the political parties were strong socialist and social democratic parties that struggled for the political support of the working class. Strong unions that worked for the same interests also supported these parties.

A welfare state is based on a strong, involved state, which is both able to and designed to interact with market and the civil society in order to guarantee provision of services and redistribution of income.

The golden era of welfare state development occurred in the post-World War II period. The devastating consequences of the Great Depression, the important role poverty and social dissatisfaction played in the lead-up to the war, and the recognized need after the war for strong and fast economic development were fundamental to this political development. The welfare state was seen as protection against poverty and social dissatisfaction, and an economic development driver. The socialist movement, which gained strength from the global communist movement, also saw the welfare state as a tool to achieve working class political power.

Discussion Questions:

What events accounted for the rise of the welfare state in Europe and North America? Identify situations in which state assistance might be necessary. What situations are more common in your particular area? Why? What situations are more common in northern Arctic based economies and societies than in southern economies? Why?

Which welfare model is used in your region? What are some of its advantages? What are some of its problems?

6.5 The Concept of the Welfare State

A welfare state is based on a strong, involved state that is able and designed to interact with the market and civil society to guarantee provision of services and redistribution of income that prevents citizens from experiencing poverty. The welfare state depends on people's willingness to demonstrate solidarity and experience a certain level of collectivism. It also relies on legal tools and access to resources that make its aims possible.

Gösta Esping Andersen (1990), an important welfare state researcher, claims welfare states are tools for decommodification. Normally people earn money from selling their labour; they commodify their capability to work to earn income and secure their welfare. However, there are situations that make it impossible to rely on such income, like unemployment, illness, homelessness, childcare, retirement and old age. People therefore need to be decommodified, which means being protected from market forces by having an income unassociated with daily work. This is what the welfare state offers.

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There are fundamentally two eligibility principles in welfare states. The first is to develop a system that identifies groups in special need of assistance and establish effective programs to help such groups become eligible to enter (or re-enter) the labour market or receive income assistance. This principle requires objective measures to set out who qualifies for the program.

The second principle of the welfare state is universality, which means everybody in a particular situation, such as having a child, reaching retirement age or suffering a disability receives access to an equivalent level of support irrespective of class or market position.

6.6 Welfare State Models

By definition, designing a welfare state model involves creating something different from the real world. Models can be ideal structures or products that emphasize certain aspects while leaving out others. Welfare state models may be criticized in such terms, but models remain useful in their capacity to clarify dominating and important features such as differences, strengths and weaknesses.

There have been several attempts to describe typologies of welfare states. The most well known and interesting is from Esping Andersen (1990). After investigating eighteen welfare states, Andersen identified three models.

- 1. The **Liberal Welfare State** is based on means-tested assistance and fewer universal transfers to citizens (e.g. only categories of groups that meet predetermined criteria receive assistance). In a liberal welfare state target groups are normally low-level working class and what Esping Andersen calls "state dependents". The dominating ideology reflects traditional, liberal work-ethic norms in which state benefits are of poor quality and contain a certain stigma, thus encouraging dependents to seek a market-solution (e.g. find a job). The United States and Great Britain are examples of nations that fit into this model.
- 2. Conservative-Corporatist Welfare State models have a low redistributive effect (e.g. they do no attempt to redistribute wealth from rich to poor) and rely heavily on social insurance programs, such as old age pension, health, unemployment and accident insurance. This model tends to reward stability and long-term service, while those who are unemployed or work in part-time or casual positions frequently fail to meet requirements for access to generous insurance programs. Germany fits the profile of a classic conservative-corporatist welfare model.
- 3. The **Social Democratic Welfare State** model is built on universality and includes all citizens. Benefits are graduated according to income. This model results in low levels of poverty and reduces social inequality; however, it is complex, expensive and carries a high tax burden. Scandinavian countries are the best examples of this model.

High North states traditionally represent the liberal welfare state model, found in the United States (Alaska) and Canada, and the social democratic model, found in Scandinavian countries. Russia has been undergoing a transition from a social policy model, which was a mixture of the

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conservative-corporatist and social democratic models of the Soviet era, to a liberal welfare model.

6.7 Welfare States Are Changing

The transition of the Russian welfare system after communism is an example of the challenges facing almost all welfare states. According to economic principles (Snower, 2010), costs associated with the welfare state throughout the world are outpacing the rate of inflation. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) claims "growth in health spending has outpaced economic growth in almost all OECD countries in the past 15 years" (OECD, 2010). In addition, the global economic recession of 2008-2009 limited the ability of many countries to fulfill their welfare obligations.

There is widespread criticism of welfare state models for being ineffective primarily because they provide incentive for people to rely on benefits rather than seek stable employment. Also, globalization has proven to be a challenge to welfare states because manufacturing and other jobs are lost to countries with lower salary and other costs. Loss of income and increasing costs that result from globalization are threats to the welfare state.

Demographic developments are challenging welfare states. A United Nations report (United Nations, 2010) concluded the ranks of the elderly are expanding 2.6 percent a year or three times faster than humanity as a whole because people are living longer and having fewer children. This will lead to increasing costs for the welfare state as an aging population requires pensions for longer periods and more health care services, while the labour force, which pays taxes that support the welfare system, is shrinking relative to total population size.

The ideological and political response has been widespread support of neoliberal based solutions, which include reduction and redirection of public spending and reduction in taxation. This reduction is expected to lower public costs so more money can go to investments that increase jobs and income. Through privatization of public services individuals can expect more cost-effective services and lower public costs. Social policies will subsequently change from a universal eligibility principle to a targeted means-tested principle, which focuses on reinforcing poor peoples' ability to work, the liberal welfare state model.

There are many critics of this welfare policy approach. One criticism is this kind of welfare policy leads to more reliance on voluntary and informal provision of services, which imposes more responsibilities and burdens on families. Many fear privatization of services will exclude those who need services the most. The strongest criticism is that in countries where this model of welfare provision exists, poverty rates have increased and many people have been excluded from the labour market.

Whatever welfare policy states choose, rapid increases in costs associated with welfare schemes are challenging the ability of rich states to maintain benefit levels and the ability of less developed states to establish comprehensive welfare models that tackle poverty and combat social injustice.

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6.8 Social Policy for the High North: Common Challenges

Social policy models vary widely across the High North and different states face many common challenges. Further, many Indigenous peoples recognize delimitations other than established political borders as construing their homelands. Consequences of decisions made by one state may affect policy options available to a neighbouring state in the same policy area; therefore, this underlines the need for dialogue and cooperation in social policy.

There are lifestyle commonalities across the High North, which differ from lifestyles in southern regions of circumpolar states. In the High North, people live in sparsely populated areas with long distances between communities and political capitals, markets and centres of power are far from the communities. In the North winters are long, cold and dark. Many businesses directly depend on harvesting from nature, including fishing, fish farming, hunting, agriculture, reindeer herding, forestry and mining. Recently, the North has embraced the possibilities and challenges of a growing oil and gas industry. The circumpolar North also has a greater proportion of Indigenous people than other areas.

Commonalities in the Arctic:

- Widespread and sparsely populated
- Ongoing urbanization
- Far from power centres
- Dependency on harvesting from nature

Northerners have some developments in common. Extensive urbanization is occurring throughout the area. This is a two-step movement as people first move to regional centres then to southern regions. Many economic and cultural activities are vulnerable to climate change, an on-going phenomenon posing a special challenge for the North. Finally, poverty problems are severe in many areas of the region.

There is much contact and cooperation, formal and informal, between people and organizations of different states in the High North. Indigenous peoples have long

established many organizations that work across national borders. Among formal structures the Arctic Council plays an important role. In the last few years, the Council has focused more on culture, health and living conditions, and has frequently identified the University of the Arctic as a "partner to promote sustainable development in the region" (Arctic Council, 2010).

In addition, there is growing informal contact as a result of the Internet, travel opportunities and impulses to evaluate similarities and differences across the Arctic region.

6.9 Social Problems in the High North

Social problems of the circumpolar world are largely similar to those in other parts of the world. People grow old and need pensions. People need medical care following injury, disease, disability or other similar situations. Problems of poverty in all countries arise from unemployment, disability, mental illness, and drug and alcohol abuse. People suffer from family violence, crime and sexual abuse in the North as in all parts of the world. However, compared to southern populations of circumpolar states, northerners tend to experience these problems more frequently and severely.

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Research shows that Indigenous populations experience a lot of poverty and social problems. *The Survey of Living Conditions in the Arctic* (SLiCA) investigation looked at living conditions and quality of life in regions of Greenland, Alaska, and Canada and found "even though most are satisfied with life in their communities, Indigenous people also cite widespread problems: unemployment, alcoholism, suicide and family violence" (SLiCA, 2010).

In Sweden, Finland and Norway it is recognized that most Sami people live in northern communities dominated by unemployment, migration and a weak economy. In Norway, a lack of grazing possibilities and structural changes in reindeer herding have forced many to leave this livelihood. For some this is a personal tragedy as reindeer herding was not only a job but a way of life integral to the Sami identity.

There are complex reasons why certain groups struggle with social problems more than others. Indigenous peoples of the High North have experienced tremendous cultural change and exploitation by dominant White societies. The consequences of colonialization are an important aspect to any explanation. In a document concerning health and social services for Sami people, the Norwegian government reflected on the challenges Sami youth face within broader Norwegian society:

In several fields one can see that values from the traditional Sami society clash with the requirements from the modern Norwegian society. This may concern family functions, values about respect for elderly and listen to their advice, show restraint in relations to other people, don't talk directly against others, etc. These are other values than what children and youth meet in school and work place. If it is not explicitly said, most often it is these other "Norwegian" values that are rewarded (Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, 2010).

The government points to the on-going individualization in Norwegian society that requires the ability to handle different roles and be alone with one's choices in life as values different from those traditionally practiced in Sami culture. It is a huge challenge for Sami youth to handle these contradictory values. Government fears drugs and alcohol are used as a release value for emotional stress.

When analysed in terms of living conditions, a clear risk of unsatisfactory situations for Indigenous people can be identified. Although the definition of living conditions may vary, they are normally associated with income level, labour and working conditions, education, recreation and culture, housing and residential conditions, health, social contact and family relations, participation/political rights and safety concerning life and property.

The consequences of this cultural clash may lead to lower education levels that make well-paid work and satisfactory levels of income less accessible. This affects housing options and increases risks to health due to limited knowledge and a weak economy. Dilemmas of cultural clash and individualization may affect social contact and family relations as risks of domestic splits and conflicts increase.

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As in many global regions, the relationship between economic development, environmental change and ecological imbalance versus social problems can be close. The Arctic is attractive for development for several reasons and most importantly of late is the anticipation of significant amounts of undiscovered and untapped oil and gas resources. In addition, fish stocks are large and of critical importance to a number of regions. The possibility of newly accessible passages for Arctic shipping provides new business opportunities. At the same time, the Arctic is vulnerable as evident by how environmental change affects nature and living conditions for humans and animals.

There is reason to believe that increasing industrial activity will lead to increased population in the Arctic. This likely will lead to further urbanization and an increased threat to the lifestyles and cultures of Indigenous peoples. For example, the oil industry in Nenets in northwest Russia has demanded more land for exploration putting pressure on an already marginalized Indigenous culture. Decreased land availability has led to fewer options for reindeer herding, hunting, fishing and gathering, which are part of the Nenets' way of life. Climate change is also imposing difficulties as unpredictable weather makes traditional knowledge less useful and cultural practices more difficult (Berg, 2009).

Urbanization is a key trend impacting northern living conditions and social problems. Urbanization describes two related processes. First, people move from rural to urban areas. People either move to an urban place within the region from which they come or to urban places in southern regions of their country. There are multiple reasons for this, including access to jobs, education and contact with cultures of special interests. Urbanization is one of the most important social and cultural changes occurring in the Arctic.

Second is urbanization of rural life, where urban culture is shaping rural societies. Many processes contribute to this phenomenon. First, some technological reasons such as more effective transportation as a result of better roads, cars, planes, etc. explain this. Television and the Internet allow people to share events, cultural and political agendas independent of where they live. Government and public services also use this infrastructure to be more involved in the lives of rural people and communities. Paradoxically, while improved communications and computer technology make it more convenient to live in rural areas, they also make it easier and more attractive for people to leave rural areas. This paradox may partly be explained by the lack of jobs in rural areas and better opportunities for work and education in urban areas. However, it is the urban way of life and its possibilities that attract people.

Urbanization has generated social problems. Urban areas are under pressure from the growing number of inhabitants and have increasing problems in the areas of housing, crime, healthy physical environment, ethnic tensions, unemployment and poverty. Alternatively, rural areas have greater problems related to aging populations, lack of employment leading to poverty, and difficulty recruiting professionals such as physicians, nurses and social workers. This is a significant challenge to local cultures especially the Indigenous societies.

6.10 Social Policy Development in the High North

Northern regions of all circumpolar states share several problems. Welfare models vary significantly in the region from liberal models in the United States and Canada to the

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Scandinavian social democratic model and the developing model in post-communist Russia. There are also notable differences in welfare policies practiced by the states. States have tried different methods to cope with the problems.

Conclusion

It is clear there is a lack of knowledge concerning social problems in the High North and appropriate measures to cope with them. The Arctic Council in its 2009 Tromsø Declaration pointed out the need "for a better understanding of the major drivers of change and likely challenges and opportunities for Arctic communities in the coming decades." Northern communities and their governments will continue to be challenged to devise better social policies for the North.

Discussion Questions

- 1. Why is it difficult and maybe not desirable to imagine a situation where all social problems are solved?
- 2. Social policies can either be developed to assist people in particular need of help or are necessary for the wellbeing of society as a whole including those who have special needs. How should future social policies be devised? Why?

Study Questions

- 1. How can social policies contribute to the oppression of people?
- 2. The two dominant social policy models in the High North are the liberal welfare model and the social democratic model. How do these models differ in terms of redistribution of income?
- 3. What are the main threats to welfare systems?
- 4. What social political challenges arise from urbanization?
- 5. In most Arctic states there is some degree of political will to facilitate and promote development of Indigenous cultures. Yet, social problems pose important threats to these cultures. How can this be explained?

Glossary of Terms

Decommodification: Refers to the fact that in the work force each individual is a good that can be sold or commodified. Decommodification involves policies that provide security for the individual when they cannot participate in the workforce for reasons such as age or health problems.

Indigenous People: People, communities and nations who claim a historical continuity and cultural affinity with societies predating contact with Western culture.

Living Conditions: These are conditions important for welfare and quality of life. Important conditions are: income level, labour and working conditions, education, recreation and culture, housing and

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residential conditions, health, social contact and family relations, participation and political rights and safety concerning life and property

Poverty: A situation where people lack the necessities needed to achieve physical and mental wellbeing for a prolonged period of time. Absolute poverty refers to missing necessities to such a degree that life may be threatened (e.g., starvation, exposure). Relative poverty refers to a situation where a person has far less access to such necessities than what is normal in his or her society.

Social Policy: Politics concerning all types of welfare, including health, education, taxation, aspects of labour and working conditions, housing and family.

Social Problem: A situation that affects a person or the welfare of a group in a way that reduces the person or group's quality of life or represents a challenge to moral values.

Urbanization: The movement of people from rural areas to cities. It can also refer to the impact that urban culture has on rural cultural life.

Welfare: Those aspects of life needed to achieve material security, physical and mental health, spiritual well being and social fellowship.

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