
(Translated from Arabic)

Summary of document dated 30 January 2011 from the Ministry of Economy and Trade of the Syrian Arab Republic

The Ministry of Finance, the State Planning Commission and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour have detailed responses to most of the questions raised in the questionnaire. To avoid repetition, the Ministry of Economy and Trade has focused on the areas that come under its purview.

The Syrian Government has sought to balance the workings of the market with the fulfilment of the country's economic and social development needs – a process which has seen it intervene in times of economic crisis and public disaster and when market mechanisms have failed and it has been necessary to stabilize the economy and guarantee citizens' access to basic goods and services.

The Ministry takes direct and indirect measures to balance supply and demand, and consumer protection associations have been established to combat monopolistic practices and price hikes which hit low-income households particularly hard. There are five such associations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Efforts have been made to empower women economically and socially under poverty eradication policies and employment generation programmes. The Ministry is working with the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs on a programme to include more women in economic activity, promote greater gender equity, develop poverty eradication policies and procedures and link macroeconomic policies to social support policies. Efforts are being made to encourage young people to set up businesses and mechanisms are being developed to support women's economic activities.

In early 2011, legislation was enacted establishing a social assistance fund for marginalized groups and low-income families. Through the fund, and in cooperation with a wide array of civil society organizations, the Government is seeking to raise living standards for families, empower women economically and deliver programmes in target rural areas with the aim of diversifying income sources and providing a range of services. For women, business support services are delivered through training courses on all aspects of running an enterprise. Advice is provided prior to the start-up phase and financial, credit and marketing services are offered. These programmes are run in parallel with business incubator projects and support schemes for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The Ministry set up a department for SMEs in 2006 and has developed a strategy to provide SMEs with technical, advisory and financial support and other facilities. A credit institution is being set up, together with funds for SMEs, capacity-building programmes and other support projects. Special loans mechanisms for women have been established and emphasis is placed on small and microenterprise development as a means of improving living standards for Syrian households and those without access to sources of income. A decree was enacted to put in place related credit mechanisms and various non-governmental organizations provide facilities and services to assist inter alia women and young entrepreneurs. Business incubator schemes offer a range of incentives and services, and civil society is also involved in supporting women's employment and improving their economic prospects.