

16 September 2002

United Nations Expert Group Meeting on The Scope of Social Statistics

Date: April 2003

Host: United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

Place: New York

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Website: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/...>

Purpose

The 2000 Millennium Summit¹ and International Conferences² held in the 1990's clearly and explicitly emphasized the importance of social development. Sound statistics and information play an important role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of social policies. The increasing demand for policy-relevant statistics on an ever-growing number of social issues calls for an integrated approach to social statistics that recognizes the links among the various areas of social concern.

In this context, the Expert Group Meeting will examine the need for a framework to set the scope of social statistics. The Group will review the System of Social and Demographic Statistics (SSDS)³ and other frameworks⁴ and react to UNSD's proposal for a social statistics framework. The meeting will then identify the essential components of a framework for social statistics and consider ways to make it operational. The meeting will also propose a programme of work for furthering the development of the framework, with a view to presenting it to the Statistical Commission.

Key issues

The expert group will focus on the following key issues:

1. The current state of social statistics and the need for a framework

Existing programmes in social statistics reflect great differences in terms of objectives, organisation and coverage.

- How are social statistics programmes organized at the national, regional and international levels?
- What offices are responsible for collecting and disseminating various types of social statistics?
How are these different statistical activities coordinated?
- How do statistics training programmes define social statistics?
- What are the characteristics of a strong statistical system? How could a framework contribute to the development of a responsive statistical system?

¹ See <http://www.un.org/millennium/summit.htm>.

² For example The International Conference on Population and Development 1994, The World Summit for Social Development 1995, The Fourth World Conference on Women, etc. For a list of all conferences see <http://www.un.org/events/conferences.htm>.

³ *Towards a System of Social and Demographic Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.74.XVII.8).

⁴ *Improving Social Statistics in Developing Countries: Conceptual Framework and Methods* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.XVII.12); *Studies in the Integration of Social Statistics: Technical Report* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.XVII.4); Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Measuring Social Wellbeing: Frameworks for Social Statistics* (2001).

2. Rethinking social statistics frameworks

The SSDS and subsequent efforts in social statistics have laid the groundwork for an integrated approach to social statistics.

- What attempts have been made to develop integrated frameworks for social statistics?
- Which of these have been most effective and which have had a limited impact and why?
- How can we build on these experiences?
- What are the essential elements of a coherent framework of social statistics?
- How should area-specific frameworks (e.g., in population, education, health and labour) be taken into account?

3. Making a framework operational

The successful implementation of a framework requires certain operational considerations, which are illustratively listed below.

- *Country commitment:* What are the necessary steps to ensure support for a framework for social statistics at the national level?
- *Statistical capacity:* What factors need to be considered with respect to different levels of statistical development?
- *Statistical coordination:* What institutional arrangements and division of responsibilities are required? What should the coordination mechanisms be at the local, national, regional and international levels?
- *Producer/user collaboration:* What are the mechanisms for effectively engaging producers and users of social statistics in a dialogue, in the process of implementing an integrated framework?
- *Harmonization of concepts, definitions, methods and standards:* What are the trade-offs between ensuring comparability and maintaining relevance? How can a balance be established?
- *Training in social statistics:* What are the implications of a framework for social statistics on training programmes? What changes have to be introduced?
- *Other considerations.*

4. Next steps

- What actions need to be taken to further develop the proposed framework?
- What steps are required at the national and international levels to make the framework operational?
- What role should UNSD play in the development and implementation of the framework?