

CO-ORDINATION OF AD HOC STATISTICAL INQUIRIES TO COUNTRIES
FROM NON-STATISTICAL UNITS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

*FOROSTAT
Added late,*

Progress report on the review procedures introduced in
international organizations

Report compiled by the United Nations Statistical Office
based on inputs from the various organizations

1. A progress report on this subject was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its twenty-fifth session (New York, 6-15 February 1989) (see E/CN.3/1989/22 paras. 13-17). The relevant paragraphs of that report are reproduced as Annex I to the present report. The progress report covered discussions of the matter in the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities at its twenty-third (1987) and twenty-fourth sessions (1988), the twelfth session of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination (1987), and the Organizational Committee of ACC (1987) and actions taken by the international organizations during 1987 and the first half of 1988. Further information on the procedures instituted and experiences reported in implementing them up to May 1989 is set out in Annex II.
2. After reviewing the report at its twenty-fifth session the Commission "recognized that considerable success had been achieved in co-ordination in ad hoc requests for statistics directed to Member States by non-statistical units of the United Nations and other international organizations."^{1/} The Commission "requested the Working Group to continue to review co-ordination of the statistical data collection activities of the international organizations, including data collection by non-statistical units of those organizations."^{2/}
3. The following organizations have now reported instituting procedures for review of these questionnaires: United Nations Secretariat, Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), World Health Organization (WHO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), ~~World Bank,~~

International Maritime Organization (IMO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Tourism Organization (WTO), and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In most cases the procedures introduced in the various organizations generally require that questionnaires and other requests to member states for statistical data must be cleared by the statistics division or a committee including representation from the statistics division, before they are sent to member states.

4. Several organizations have recently reported their experiences in implementing their review procedures. They have reported reviewing various numbers of requests, but recognize that they cannot be certain that compliance has been complete. Some of the smaller organizations have reported that they have experienced no problems with ad hoc requests to countries. The results achieved to date are considered encouraging and suggest that over time any unnecessary duplication and burden to member countries from this source will be significantly reduced by these procedures. Further information on the procedures instituted and experiences reported in implementing them up to May 1989 is set out in Annex II.
5. The Sub-Committee may wish to consider what additional action, if any, needs to be taken on co-ordination of ad hoc requests to Member States for statistics from non-statistical units of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Notes

- 1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1989, Supplement No. 3 (E/1989/21), para. 7.
- 2/ Ibid., para. 19(1).

Annex I to SA/1989/6*

Subprogramme 7: Co-ordination of international statistical programmes

13. A note by the Secretary-General concerning the data collection activities of the United Nations system and selected non-United Nations international organizations (E/CN.3/AC.1/1987/R.5) was prepared for the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination at its twelfth session.

14. Considerable progress was made towards improved co-ordination of ad hoc statistical inquiries to countries from non-statistical units of international organizations. Subsequent to the twelfth session of the Statistical Commission's Working Group in October 1987, the Organizational Committee of ACC at its meeting held on 13, 14 and 23 October 1987, on the basis of the recommendation of the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities, decided, on behalf of ACC, that a clear policy should be developed in each organization of the United Nations system requiring that the statistical unit of an organization should be consulted before any statistical inquiry is sent to a country. The Committee requested all organizations of the system to examine the proposals of the Sub-Committee and to develop appropriate procedures so as to minimize duplication and the unnecessary burden imposed on member States in the collection of statistics (ACC/1987/2 Add.3, para. 40).

15. In December 1987, as a follow-up to the above decision, the Assistant Secretary-General in the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, and Secretary of ACC and Chairman of the Organizational Committee of ACC, wrote to the heads of all the organizations of the United Nations system providing them with the relevant extract from the report of the ACC Sub-Committee on Statistical Activities and the note prepared by the World Health Organization on its mechanism for screening requests for information to Governments and institutions. The letter requested that the decision of the Organizational Committee and the material enclosed be brought to the attention of the officials concerned in each organization for appropriate action. Also in December 1987, the Director of the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat sent a similar letter to the chiefs of the statistical units of the organizations.

* Extract from E/CN.3/1989/22

16. The ACC Sub-Committee at its twenty-second session in June 1988 considered this matter further. Organizations outlined their practices and action being taken or contemplated in their organizations, and one organization outlined its experiences under new policies that had been instituted. The following organizations reported having taken action in response to the Organizational Committee's decision: Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat, Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Labour Organisation (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Some organizations, while supporting fully the spirit of co-ordination in that area, indicated that they might, at least in the immediate future, have problems in implementing the request of the Organizational Committee to the full extent.

17. The Sub-Committee considered co-ordination of ad hoc questionnaires an extremely important matter, reflecting the concern that had been expressed by the ACC through its Organizational Committee and by countries in the Statistical Commission and regional statistical bodies. The Sub-Committee expressed its satisfaction with the considerable progress that had been made on co-ordination in that area and, because of the importance of the subject, decided to include it on the agenda of its twenty-third session.

Annex II to SA/1989/6

Summary of procedures instituted and experiences
reported in implementing them up to May 1989

United Nations

Initial discussions held with the Director-General's Office to establish a review mechanism in the United Nations. Within the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs proposals for a review mechanism were introduced drawing on the experience of WHO, involving a Departmental Focal Group on Information Requests to Countries which includes a senior-level representative from the Statistical Office. Draft terms of reference for the Focal Group were prepared: these are now under active review.

ECA

Executive Secretary issued a circular requiring prior consultation with the Statistics Division.

The Statistics Division has approved two requests for collecting statistical information in agriculture, transport and communications. However, a complaint was received in October 1988 from one Director of Statistics about considerable pressure under which his office has been put in providing data to various ECA missions. Attention of all ECA Divisions was drawn to this complaint and to the existence of the ECA mechanism referred to above.

ECE

Draft note of procedure prepared for consideration of Executive Secretary.

ESCAP

Executive Secretary issued a circular memorandum containing an instruction that the Statistics Division be consulted before any statistical inquiry is sent to countries.

Following this circular memorandum of the Executive Secretary, a number of contacts have already been made by the various Divisions of the secretariat with the Statistics Division before enquiries were sent to the countries or other United Nations organizations. For example, two contacts were made by the Social Development Division regarding selected statistical data and indicators on the status of women. Transport and Communications Division has requested clearance of this Division before statistical enquiries were sent to member countries. The same Division also sought the help of the Statistical Division in requesting information from the United Nations Statistical Office regarding energy data and world development statistics. Natural Resources Division has been regularly requesting clearance from Statistics Division before sending statistical enquiries to member countries for information

related to water resource development. While not certain of complete adherence to the Executive Secretary's memorandum, these are considered encouraging developments and justify confidence that over the years unnecessary duplication and burden to member countries will be significantly reduced.

ESCWA

Oral instruction issued requiring co-ordination with the Statistics Division.

ECLAC

To date ECLAC has not adopted any formal procedure to avoid the duplication of requests for statistical data from countries but ECLAC does devote special attention to the matter. Have reviewed procedures and established that problems of this nature (duplication) are not being faced by ECLAC. There are joint groups made up by members of the Division of Statistics and Projections and of other divisions working in the substantive areas concerned with the updating of the data banks. On-going review is being undertaken.

UNCTAD

Programmes and divisions of UNCTAD have been asked to submit for clearance questionnaires containing a statistical component of any size to the Central Statistical Service.

UNFPA

Oral instructions issued that all inquiries should be co-ordinated with an Internal Group and with the United Nations Statistical Office.

ILO

Circular issued requiring that officials at ILO headquarters should obtain the visa of the Bureau of Statistics for all requests to government authorities for national statistical data (except for data relating to social security) whether they take the form of a letter or questionnaire. Requests for project-specific and other sub-national data need not be visaed by the Bureau of Statistics though the Bureau should provide advice upon the formulation of the request if the responsible chief asks for it.

The Bureau of of Statistics has received a number of requests (for visa) but cannot be certain that all statistical requests to countries are routed through it. In addition, the circular does not cover direct requests to countries by regional teams in the field as, clearly, it would be impractical to co-ordinate field activities of this type from headquarters.

FAO

Administrative circular issued requiring that questionnaires and other requests for statistical information must be cleared in draft form by the Statistics Division. This procedure applies also to any changes in the requests cleared previously and to requests prepared by the Regional Offices.

When FAO units intend to collect statistical information from countries through questionnaires, they continue to send draft questionnaires for clearance to the Statistics Division. The Statistics Division scrutinizes carefully all the drafts received and approval is granted only if the requested information cannot be made available from other sources.

UNESCO

Issued an item of the UNESCO Manual of Procedures instructing the relevant units of the UNESCO Secretariat to obtain clearance from the Office of Statistics before any questionnaire requesting statistical data is reproduced and sent to a Member State.

ICAO

Note taken of the issue. Has not experienced a problem in this area.

WHO

The WHO Manual requires that units or divisions which intend to send a questionnaire and/or textual requests to governments or institutions should, before preparing any detailed text, send to the Focal Group on Questionnaires a brief outline stating, (a) the addressees, (b) the type of information which will be asked for, and (c) the purpose for which the information is being collected and how, once analysed, it will be relevant to Member States and to the achievement of the programme objectives of WHO. If the proposal is approved in principle by the Focal Group, the questionnaire can then be formulated in detail by the unit/division concerned. Before issue, the draft of the questionnaire should be sent for final review by the Focal Group. The Focal Group includes representation from the health statistics area. A similar focal group has also been set up in each regional office of WHO, to screen questionnaires to be issued by the regional office. As most questionnaires issued by headquarters are forwarded to countries through the respective regional offices, the regional focal group also sees to it that each headquarters questionnaire has in fact been cleared by the headquarters focal group.

The Focal Group was successfully established in 1977 and has continued to function with good support from senior management and co-operation from technical programmes. While a detailed assessment of the effectiveness of this mechanism has not been conducted, the following can be reported:

- a. the number of proposed ad hoc enquiries from the WHO headquarters has dramatically diminished (from 20-25 in 1977 to 5-6 per year currently).
- b. alternatives to standard questionnaires are used more frequently for data gathering purposes (e.g. document review, country visits by staff and consultants)
- c. the quality/understandability of instruments has improved
- d. fewer unauthorized enquiries are occurring
- e. complaints from Member States, WHO country and regional offices about requests for information are rare.

In fact, at the current time (early 1989) it is rare that a proposed questionnaire or enquiry is totally disapproved. The existence of the FGQ seems to have had the desired effect of discouraging all but the most necessary ad hoc enquiries. Thus, the functioning of the FGQ now places less attention on screening/approving questionnaires, with more emphasis on improving their design and administration.

IMF

During the past year, the IMF has stepped up its efforts to enhance internal integration of its statistical data bases and to achieve greater co-ordination of statistical inquiries to member countries. A plan is being developed within the organization to integrate to the maximum extent possible the data collected by the Bureau of Statistics with data gathered by the organization's area and other departments in the course of the IMF's work with countries in the context of Article IV consultations and the programs supported by use of the Fund's resources. At the same time, electronic and other data support systems are being reviewed with a view to facilitating the data integration effort. The IMF's management has been fully supportive of these efforts and the Executive Board has been informed of progress in this area. Given the comprehensive and varied data requirements of the IMF, however, it is expected that the co-ordination efforts will be prolonged.

WORLD BANK

Because of unique organizational circumstances in the Bank, it is difficult to co-ordinate this matter. Supports fully the spirit of co-ordination in this area but might, at least in the immediate future, have problems in implementing the request (of the Organizational Committee) to the full extent.

IMO

The relevant material was brought to the attention of the relevant members of the IMO Secretariat. The relevant activities of IMO in the past eighteen months have been reviewed. IMO continues to receive from Member States a certain amount of statistical data (casualty statistics, marine pollution violations, etc.) which are required by the competent technical bodies of the Organization. Have not experienced any difficulty or problems with internal co-ordination in this field.

UNIDO

Letter from the Secretary of ACC and Chairman of the Organizational Committee circulated within UNIDO. Although no formal system of clearances of such enquiries has been established, the level of informal co-ordination with the Industrial Operations Department and other areas has expanded.

GATT

The GATT Statistical Section does not send questionnaires to Contracting Parties, as extensive use is made of statistics made available by other international organizations. In order to monitor the development of agreements signed within the framework of GATT such as those on textiles, government procurement, civil aviation, meat and dairy products, questionnaires are designed by the bodies in charge of these agreements. Contracting Parties to these agreements are requested to fill in those questionnaires. There is thus no duplication of work and the burden of reporting is kept to the minimum required for implementing the work of the GATT.

WTO

No problem experienced in this area. All statistical questionnaires are sent by the Statistics Section. The small size of the Organization facilitates control in this respect.

OECD

Note taken and the issue is being studied within OECD.

