

ACC SUBCOMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
Twenty-ninth session  
Geneva, 15, 16, 19 June 1995  
Item 13 of the provisional agenda

22 May 1995

FREE EXCHANGE OF STATISTICS AND RELATED MATERIALS  
AMONG INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE IN THE SUBCOMMITTEE

Background information on previous  
discussion and agreements by the Subcommittee




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Administrative Committee  
on Co-ordination
ACC/1985/15  
July 1985

ENGLISH ONLY

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REPORT OF THE ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
ON ITS NINETEENTH SESSION
(Headquarters of the World Tourism Organization,  
Madrid, 24-28 June 1985)

## CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. MATTERS SUBMITTED TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION FOR ITS CONSIDERATION .....	1	3
II. DISCUSSION AND DECISIONS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES .....	2 - 71	3
A. Co-ordination of new work planned by each organization .	2 - 3	3
B. Co-ordination of statistical data bases .....	4 - 8	3
C. Review of data dissemination policy .....	9 - 12	5
D. Follow-up of matters raised at the twenty-third session of the Statistical Commission (February-March 1985) ....	13 - 14	5
E. Review of work done in the international statistical organizations on preparing, using and publishing estimates .....	15 - 19	7
F. Review of the co-ordination of data collection from countries .....	20 - 23	8
G. International economic classifications .....	24 - 25	9
H. National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) .	26 - 29	9
I. Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) .....	30 - 31	11
J. Assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics .....	32 - 36	11
K. Special problems of the statistically least developed countries .....	37 - 41	12

C. Review of data dissemination policy

9. The Sub-Committee discussed the item on the basis of reports on recent experiences with the policies and practices of data dissemination prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1985/5), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) (SA/1985/5/Add.1), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (SA/1985/5/Add.2) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (SA/1985/5/Add.3). Several other organizations described their policies and practices during the discussion. In addition, the Sub-Committee reviewed the existing guidelines for the exchange and dissemination of data in machine-readable form on the basis of a report prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1985/6).

10. New elements in experience in the past year included (a) the introduction and/or expansion of on-line access to the statistical data bases by users, (b) the on-line receipt of data from national statistical sources, (c) a growth in the receipt of data on tape from national statistical sources, (d) a growth in demand for statistics on micro-fiche and (e) the initial dissemination of statistics on floppy disks. Pricing policies and levels were under review in several organizations.

11. The results of surveys by users of statistical publications were reported by several organizations. It was noted that there was a continuing basic demand for statistics in the traditional hard-copy form in addition to other, newer (machine-readable) forms. Experiences and plans in promoting the dissemination and improving the availability of statistical data and methodological publications to users were discussed. The Sub-Committee reconfirmed its view that each organization should send a copy of the statistical publications considered to be of interest to the other organizations.

12. The Sub-Committee agreed that the existing guidelines on the exchange and secondary dissemination of data in machine-readable form were sufficiently broad and generally applicable and that no change in them was required. The provision of statistics on diskettes was considered similar to the provision of statistics on magnetic tape. The general principle of the free exchange of statistical data on an inter-agency basis was considered to apply also to the provision of data on a direct on-line basis so that, to the extent that an organization maintained for its own needs statistical data in a direct on-line data base, free access to those data but not computer processing should be permitted to other organizations. The Sub-Committee agreed that in general if an organization availed itself of free on-line access to another organization's data base, and also required the same data on magnetic tape, the conditions should be determined on a bilateral basis between the organizations.

D. Follow-up of matters raised at the twenty-third session  
of the Statistical Commission (February-March 1985)

13. The Sub-Committee discussed the item on the basis of a report prepared by the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat (SA/1985/8) that contained a summary of the decisions and recommendations made by the Statistical Commission that had potential implications for the work of the Sub-Committee. The report was




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**Administrative Committee  
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**REPORT OF THE ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
ON ITS EIGHTEENTH SESSION**

 (Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the  
 United Nations, Rome, 30 April-4 May 1984)
**CONTENTS**

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. MATTERS SUBMITTED TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION FOR ITS CONSIDERATION .....	1	3
II. DISCUSSION AND DECISIONS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE .....	2 - 63	3
A. Co-ordination of new work planned by each organization..	2 - 3	3
B. Co-ordination of statistical data bases .....	4 - 8	3
C. Review of data dissemination policy .....	9 - 12	4
D. Assessment of technical co-operation in statistics .....	13 - 16	5
E. Harmonization of economic classifications .....	17 - 18	6
F. National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) .	19 - 22	7
G. Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) .....	23 - 24	7
H. Local area statistics .....	25 - 27	8
I. Statistical Computing Project (SCP) .....	28 - 29	8
J. Social statistics and indicators (including those on women) .....	30 - 35	9
K. Environment statistics .....	36 - 37	10

Sub-Committee members. Several agencies described their policies and practices during the discussion.

10. It was noted that marked differences in prices for the supply of data in machine-readable form existed among agencies. These differences were not considered important because they could be explained in part by differences in timeliness, selectivity and other aspects of the products supplied and by differing policies and policy-making centres in various organizations. It was felt that inconsistency between paper publishing and electronic publishing in an organization could be more problematic than inconsistency among organizations.

11. In the light of recent developments, there was general agreement on the need to reconsider policy guidelines on the exchange of data among members of the Sub-Committee and on the secondary dissemination of data. The Sub-Committee noted that clarification and extension of the guidelines might be needed. The developments included technological developments such as more on-line access, development of networks, the provision of data on floppy disks and other factors.

12. The Sub-Committee agreed that the Statistical Office of the United Nations should clarify and extend, where necessary, the guidelines for the exchange and dissemination of data in machine-readable form, taking into account the discussion at the meeting. In particular, the free exchange of data between agencies should be re-confirmed.

#### D. Assessment of technical co-operation in statistics

13. The Sub-Committee was informed that the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination, at its tenth session (Geneva, 26-28 September 1983), had decided to postpone discussion of the proposed document on the assessment of the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics to a later session of the Commission and had requested the secretariat to investigate suitable approaches to the problem, since it was considered an important issue (E/CN.3/1985/17, para. 23). The Sub-Committee was also informed that the Statistical Office of the United Nations had carried out a limited amount of desk research on what had been done on the evaluation of technical co-operation in the United Nations system.

14. There was general agreement that a review of the effectiveness of technical co-operation was useful, although difficult to carry out and report upon. Various approaches were suggested and some organizations described their attempts at evaluating technical co-operation activities. The Sub-Committee was reminded that relevant reports had been prepared for the Statistical Commission in 1975; reviewing the various approaches contained in those reports might provide a starting point for further investigation. Since publications were a basic output of national statistical offices, it was suggested that an increase in the number of pages of statistical publications over time, as related to the technical co-operation provided in statistics, might serve as a guide to the effectiveness of technical co-operation in statistics. Any analysis along those lines should also consider the timeliness, quality and relevance of published statistics as other



Administrative Committee  
on Co-ordination

ACC/1982/24  
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REPORT OF THE ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
ON ITS SIXTEENTH SESSION

(Headquarters of the United Nations Industrial Development  
Organization, Vienna, 3-7 May 1982)

CONTENTS

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. MATTERS SUBMITTED TO THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON CO-ORDINATION FOR ITS CONSIDERATION . . . . .	1	1
II. DISCUSSION AND DECISIONS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE . . . . .	2 - 71	1
A. Co-ordination of new work planned by each organization . . . . .	2 - 3	1
B. Environment statistics . . . . .	4	1
C. Industrial statistics . . . . .	5 - 8	2
D. Income distribution statistics . . . . .	9	3
E. Evaluation of achievements in co-ordination in selected areas . . . . .	10 - 18	3
F. Policy on use of national and international sources of statistics . . . . .	19 - 20	5
G. National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP) . . . . .	21 - 24	5
H. Statistics on the situation of women . . . . .	25 - 28	6
I. Tourism statistics . . . . .	29 - 31	7
J. International trade and transport statistics . . . . .	32 - 33	7
K. Price statistics . . . . .	34 - 35	8

44. Under the heading of new technologies, several participants suggested that videotex should be considered as a new development, allowing for easy and flexible improvement in statistical dissemination.

45. The Sub-Committee followed this discussion by turning to the suggestion of establishing a technical working group on statistical data bases, as proposed in the document, prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office, entitled "Terms of reference for a technical working group on technological developments and co-ordination in data-base development and data communication" (SA/1982/9). It was decided that such a group should be established and should commence its work as soon as possible and that the International Computing Centre at Geneva should be asked to participate. It was suggested that rather than waiting to follow the sequence of activities in the draft terms of reference, practical interim steps should be sought from the beginning; failure to agree on standards for recording data in data bases should not inhibit further co-operative developments. There was general agreement to keep the scope of activities strictly within the area of statistics to avoid the possibility of any duplication of work by other bodies in the United Nations system. Close contact would be maintained with groups working on related matters.

46. It was agreed that interested members of the Sub-Committee should meet during the session to carry the proposal further. An informal group met and prepared a note on the proceedings (see annex I).

47. The Sub-Committee next considered the document prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office, entitled "Draft revised policy guidelines for the dissemination of machine-readable data" (SA/1982/10). The Sub-Committee also had before it, as background information, "Notes of a meeting on dissemination of machine-readable data, Geneva 28 September 1981" (SA/1982/10/Add. 1), also prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office. No agreement was reached to adopt the new draft guidelines presented, but the guidelines previously adopted and set out in the report of the Sub-Committee on its thirteenth session in 1979 (see ACC/1979/40, para.30) were reconfirmed. The Sub-Committee decided that this matter should be given further consideration by member organizations and taken up again at a future session.

48. The Sub-Committee next discussed the impact on sales of publications of other forms of dissemination, based on oral reports by the United Nations Statistical Office, EUROSTAT, IMF and OECD. The general consensus was that other forms of dissemination do not have a negative impact on the sales of publications, at least not in the short run, and that, moreover, by heightening the awareness of publications, the provision of tapes, microfiches and on-line access could have a positive impact on the sales of publications.

49. It was generally agreed that if, in the long run, there was to be an eventual replacement of the sales of publications by other forms of dissemination, the primary objective of the statistical agencies would most



Administrative Committee  
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ACC/1979/40  
25 May 1979

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CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANTIVE  
QUESTIONS (PROGRAMME MATTERS)  
Second regular session, 1979  
3-10 September 1979

REPORT OF THE ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
ON ITS THIRTEENTH SESSION  
(Rome, 19-23 March 1979)

CONTENTS\*

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. MATTERS BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF CCSQ (PROG) . . . . .	1 - 27	3
A. International statistical programmes, 1981-1985 . . . . .	1 - 6	3
B. International technical cooperation in statistics, 1981-1985. . . . .	7 - 10	4
C. Statistical questionnaires . . . . .	11 - 15	5
D. Review of deficiencies and achievements in statistics and goals for the 1980s . . . . .	16 - 17	6
E. National Household Survey Capability Programme . . . . .	18 - 21	6
F. Co-operation with the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (IOB) . . . . .	22 - 25	7
G. Dates, place and provisional agenda for the fourteenth session . . . . .	26 - 27	8
II. CONCLUSIONS REACHED AND SUMMARIES OF DISCUSSION ON OTHER AGENDA ITEMS . . . . .	28 - 72	9
A. Secondary dissemination of data in machine-readable form . . . . .	28 - 31	9

\* The decisions set out in this report are to be considered final unless an objection is raised by an executive head within 30 days. Inasmuch as this document was issued on 29 June 1979, the deadline for the submission of such objections is 31 July 1979.

12. Classification by age groups
13. National Household Survey Capability Programme
14. Provision of estimates of foreign trade statistics
15. Other business
16. Dates, place and provisional agenda for the fifteenth session

## II. CONCLUSIONS REACHED AND SUMMARIES OF DISCUSSION ON OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

### A. Secondary dissemination of data in machine-readable form

28. The Sub-Committee considered this item on the basis of a paper entitled 'Rationale and guidelines for a policy with respect to the secondary dissemination of machine-readable statistics' (SA/13/5), prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office. The paper dealt with policies relating to secondary dissemination by an international organization to (a) another international organization and to (b) a customer which is not an international organization. The paper also covered secondary dissemination by customers which are not international organizations. Advantages and disadvantages of secondary dissemination were outlined. The paper reflected recognition of the growing availability of and demand for machine-readable statistics by international organizations and other users of statistics. The increasing availability of statistical data on micro-fiche was also noted. The paper included a set of draft broad policy guidelines for consideration by the Sub-Committee.

29. The Sub-Committee agreed that the paper contained a balanced assessment of the issue of secondary dissemination. IMF indicated that no restrictions were placed on secondary dissemination by subscribers to the IMF machine-readable statistics. EEC provided a brief outline of the European Community On-line Information Facility (Euronet), explaining that the system comprised an international data telecommunications network and access to information data bases. Much of the information available would be of a scientific and technical character, but the Community's statistical data banks would also be accessible when the network became operational towards the end of 1979. Terms and conditions of access to the system were being developed and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (SOEC) would seek to obtain privileged access for international organizations and member States with which SOEC had exchange arrangements.

30. The Sub-Committee endorsed the draft broad policy guidelines presented in the paper, with some amendments. The amended guidelines are set out below.

(a) There should be free and unrestricted secondary dissemination of machine-readable statistics between international organizations, provided that all references to definitions and explanatory information, including the original source, accompany such dissemination;

(b) There should be no secondary dissemination of machine-readable statistics to a customer which is not an international organization where the statistics are in the form originally provided. Such requests should be referred back to the original providing organization.

(c) When the data provided have undergone a transformation, or have been combined with other data, the resultant machine-readable product may be sold to a customer which is not an international organization if the original providing organization(s) agree(s). The agreement should be reached on a product-by-product basis and cover the terms and conditions of the sale;

(d) No movement towards a uniform policy needs to be developed on secondary dissemination by customers. Organizations should continue to be free to set their own policies in this field;

(e) Microfiches should be regarded as akin to publications, and the policy and prices for them should be established in the same ways as for publications.

31. The Sub-Committee agreed that the implications of changes in technology for the collection and dissemination of statistics should be explored, especially in the light of developments described by EEC. The dissemination of statistics in the form of publications was also discussed. It was agreed that at the fourteenth session the matter should be considered further, and the United Nations Statistical Office was requested to prepare a paper based on information from the members of the Sub-Committee concerning the methods of distribution, sales, prices, promotional activities, copyright restrictions and other elements of the dissemination activity.

#### B. Provision of estimates of foreign trade statistics

32. The Sub-Committee considered the item on the basis of a progress report prepared by the United Nations Statistical Office, entitled "Provision of estimates of foreign trade statistics" (SA/13/12), in response to a request by UNCTAD at the twelfth session of the Sub-Committee. The paper indicated that computer programmes had been written and estimates prepared for the years 1962 to 1977 for the one-, two- and three-digit levels of the SITC. Estimates at the four- and five-digit levels of the SITC were being prepared. Estimates up to the three-digit levels of the SITC were being made available to user organizations. The estimates related to values only but, based on a statistical analysis of unit values, it was expected that reliable estimates of quantities could be derived in future.

33. The Sub-Committee expressed its appreciation of the work of the Statistical Office in preparing the estimates and expressed support for the continuation and expansion of this work, as outlined in document SA/13/12. The Sub-Committee emphasized that the work was of considerable benefit to the international organizations which were users of statistics. It was felt that the value of the estimates would be enhanced by having them available as quickly as possible. It was agreed that it would be useful if organizations which prepared or obtained

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Sixty-ninth session

PREPARATORY COMMITTEE  
Eighty-fifth session  
Item 18 (a) of the revised provisional agenda

REPORT OF THE ACC SUB-COMMITTEE ON STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES  
ON ITS ELEVENTH SESSION 1/  
(Geneva, 7-11 March 1977)

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1/ Note by the Office of Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination:

Paragraphs 111-112 of the report contain the recommendations of the Sub-Committee regarding dates, place and provisional agenda of its next session. In addition, the attention of the Preparatory Committee is drawn to the following passages of the report:

(a) Paragraphs 41-48 on establishing continuing household survey capabilities in developing countries and the co-operation between the Sub-Committee and the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Working Group on the World Employment Conference;

(b) Paragraphs 49-53 on the revision of the inter-agency Handbook on Household Surveys;

(c) Paragraphs 74-79 on tourism statistics and the proposal to invite WTO to participate at the next session of the Sub-Committee;

(d) Paragraphs 90-97 concerning the co-ordination of environment statistics and the desirability of including this item on the agenda of future meetings;

(e) Paragraphs 65-69 on revising and expanding the Directory of International Statistics to include the activities of WIPO and WTO;

(f) Paragraphs 98-101 concerning efforts to improve co-ordination of technical assistance at the country level;

(g) Paragraphs 109-110 on the co-ordination of the relevant work of IOB and the Sub-Committee.

The Preparatory Committee may also wish to take note of other work undertaken by the Sub-Committee on:

(a) the preparation and improvement of joint programme plans for 1979-1983 on international technical assistance in statistics (paras. 54-64) and international statistical programmes (paras. 80-89);

66. The Sub-Committee noted that the Directory, the first edition of which was published in 1975, was intended to present information on the organization, responsibility and functioning of the international statistical system, inter alia, in order to assist the Statistical Commission in its deliberations on matters of co-ordination and integration of statistical programmes and plans and to provide information to users of the output of the system.

67. The Sub-Committee was also informed that the first edition of the Directory had been very well received by countries, international organizations and the Statistical Commission which, on its nineteenth session, commended the publication of the Directory and encouraged further work to expand, improve, and keep it up-to-date.

68. The Sub-Committee agreed to update the Directory to 1978, and to expand its coverage in order to amplify its usefulness for co-ordination and other purposes and members agreed to supply the required information for the updating according to a timetable aimed at permitting publication of the second edition during the second half of 1978.

69. The Sub-Committee invited WIPO and WTO to participate in the revision programme for the Directory.

### XIII. Data banks of economic and social statistics

70. The Sub-Committee considered this topic on the basis of a paper (SA/1/5) prepared by the Statistical Office in co-operation with the specialized agencies, regional commissions and OECD. The paper was prepared following a request of the Sub-Committee at its tenth session. The paper described the current pricing and dissemination policies of international organizations and selected major national statistical offices, including policies on secondary dissemination. Considerable variation in policies was reported.

71. After extensive discussion, the Sub-Committee agreed that inter-agency exchange of machine readable data in standard format and in accordance with pre-arranged time schedules should be

free of charge, with the return of the recording medium. Exchange of other machine readable data to meet specific formats and requirements would be provided, within the limits of existing resources, on a cost basis. The Sub-Committee agreed that this policy would promote the exchange of data amongst organizations in a more economic manner, replacing where possible the old practice of exchanging manuscripts, tear-sheets and computer printouts, and contributing to improvements in timeliness, reliability and comparability of international statistics.

72. As concerns pricing policy in relation to dissemination by organizations to national governments and other users, the Sub-Committee felt that each organization should continue to set its own policies.

73. During the discussion it became clear that further study was required on policies and practices of secondary dissemination of machine readable data. It was agreed that the study should include a definition of secondary distribution, identify various classes of secondary distribution and clarify the practices and policies of organizations in this matter. It was further agreed that the Statistical Office should carry out this study, based on information to be provided by the organizations, and should prepare a report including proposals on what action might be taken, for consideration at the twelfth session of the Sub-Committee.

#### XIV. Tourism statistics

74. The Sub-Committee discussed this item on the basis of a paper (SA/11/11) prepared by the Statistical Office in co-operation with the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and other international organizations. The item was included on the agenda of the present session at the request of the tenth session of the Sub-Committee and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) was invited to attend. The paper covered (i) the result of recent inter-agency meetings relating to tourism statistics, (ii) the dissemination of tourism

