

United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Statistics Division

ESA/STAT/AC.91/L4
February 2004

English only

Expert Group Meeting to
Review the United Nations *Demographic*
***Yearbook* System**
United Nations Statistics Division
New York, 10-14 November 2003

Report of the Expert Group Meeting to Review the
United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* System

* This document is being issued without formal editing.

Contents

A. Introduction.....	2
Background and objective of the Meeting.....	2
Opening session.....	2
Organization of the Meeting.....	3
B. Summary of discussions	3
C. Conclusions and recommendations	7
General comments	7
Data collection.....	7
Review of the current <i>Demographic Yearbook</i> questionnaires	8
Coordination	9
Dissemination	10
Capacity building.....	11
Improving response rates.....	12
Specific recommendations on questionnaires of the <i>Demographic Yearbook</i>	13
Specific recommendations on current layout of the <i>Demographic Yearbook</i>	15
Proposed activities.....	16
Annex 1. Information Note on the United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review the <i>Demographic Yearbook</i> System.....	18
Annex 2. List of Participants.....	20
Annex 3. Organization of Work	22

A. Introduction

Background and objective of the Meeting

1. The Expert Group Meeting to Review the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system was convened in New York, 10-14 November 2003. The Meeting was organized by the Demographic Statistics Section, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Meeting was planned in response to the growing demand for demographic and social statistics and the need to improve the collection and dissemination of statistics on population, in view of the availability of new technologies, and taking into account of the Statistical Commission's expressed concern regarding the burden of providing data and meta-data to international organizations.¹

2. The main objectives of the Meeting were to (i) assess the level of performance and achievement of the *Demographic Yearbook* system with respect to its collection of official national statistics and meta-data; the level and quality of responses from countries, and trends over time; and the content of its outputs; and (ii) on the basis of these assessments, make recommendations for improving the content and coverage of the data collection, and enhancing the *Demographic Yearbook* and related outputs in content and form, for a wider audience. (Information note on the Expert Group Meeting is presented in Annex 1).

3. The Meeting brought together representatives of national statistical offices and academic/research institutions, as well as sub-regional, and international organizations. Experts from 13 countries – Brazil, Canada, Hungary, India, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Saint Lucia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Sweden, Thailand and the United States of America – the Regional Institute for Population Studies, Ghana (RIPS), the Caribbean Community Secretariat, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the World Health Organization participated in the Meeting. (See Annex 2 for the list of participants.)

Opening session

4. The Meeting was opened by Mr. Willem de Vries, Officer-in-Charge, United Nations Statistics Division. In his opening statement, Mr. de Vries invited the group to review in depth the process of collection and dissemination of demographic statistics by the *Demographic Yearbook* system, identify specific issues relating to improving the coverage and completeness of these statistics, and advise on ways of enhancing cooperation between the United Nations Statistics Division and national statistical authorities.

5. Ms. Mary Chamie, Chief of the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, United Nations Statistics Division, welcomed the participants. She underscored the important contribution the *Demographic Yearbook* had made to the academic and research

¹ E/CN.3/2002.31 para. 60.

communities, as well as to national statistical agencies, through its compilation and dissemination of a wide range of demographic and social statistics. She expressed the need to adapt the *Demographic Yearbook* to the changing needs of users and the persistent demand for more timely and electronically accessible data.

Organization of the Meeting

6. As laid out in the Organization of Work (Annex 3), the Meeting was structured along the following main topics:

- Overview of the current *Demographic Yearbook* system;
- *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process;
- Improving coverage and completeness of country responses to the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests;
- *Demographic Yearbook* data dissemination.

7. The Demographic and Social Statistics Branch introduced each session with one or more presentations highlighting the main findings from an internal review of the activities of the *Demographic Yearbook* system, including analyses of the problems and constraints. The presentations were followed by general discussion, and the session concluded with a summary of the main points raised in the deliberations. Background papers contributed by the experts provided additional information, and presented national and international perspectives on the benefits and challenges to the *Demographic Yearbook* system. (See Annex 3 for papers presented at the Meeting.) The papers are available on the UN website http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/workshop/EGM_dyb/index.htm.

8. The session on *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process included a review of the questionnaires used in the data collection, which was conducted in working groups – one group reviewed the population estimates and international travel and migration statistics questionnaires; a second group reviewed the questionnaires covering fertility, mortality and nuptiality; and the third group dealt with the population census questionnaires.

9. The Meeting was co-chaired by Ms. Rosemary Bender, Ms. Suzann Evinger and Mr. Edwin St. Catherine. The Rapporteurs for the Meeting were Mr. Mansoor Khawaja and Ms. Annika Klintonfelt.

B. Summary of discussions

10. The salient issues that emerged from the discussions are summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

Overview of the current *Demographic Yearbook* system

11. The experts viewed the dissemination of national demographic statistics at the international level as an important contribution by the United Nations to promote international comparisons, fuller utilization and further development of statistics. The Meeting took note of the continued impact that the *Demographic Yearbook* system has had on the development of methods and standards for collection of population data, such as on population and housing censuses, civil registration and surveys, and called for maintaining, improving and broadening the scope of this system, in particular with respect to diversifying its outputs and audience. It was also pointed out that for many countries with inadequate statistical capacities, the *Demographic Yearbook* was often the primary vehicle for disseminating national population data.

12. The experts pointed out that the current *Demographic Yearbook* system, which had been improved in the past several years, needed additional structural and operational enhancements. The *Demographic Yearbook* system could be an invaluable service to countries as a portal through which individuals and organizations could access official national demographic and social statistics. This service could greatly reduce and possibly, ultimately eliminate the duplicate requests for data received by national statistical agencies.

***Demographic Yearbook* data collection process**

13. The experts discussed in some detail the data collection process, covering the design of the questionnaires, their dispatch, feedback provided by the United Nations Statistics Division to national authorities, the use of new technologies for and approaches to capturing data, and the paradigms for reducing the burden on national statistical offices.

14. The experts provided specific comments on several *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires² and underscored the need for a more systematic review by technical groups. The content of the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires would need to be examined from several different angles, including: compliance with international principles and recommendations for population censuses and vital statistics, the needs of users, capacities of national authorities to provide data, use of contemporary technologies for data capturing and the predominant use of data in the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection system.

15. The current scope and volume of the questionnaires were a deterrent to their completion from two perspectives: countries with limited data were discouraged from completing the questionnaires since the amount of information they could provide was often small in comparison to the amount of information being collected; and those that could provide more information found the completion of the questionnaires to be a very expensive and time consuming exercise. Moreover, for many of the tables data had to be obtained from sources external to the national statistical office, such as other ministries, and required great effort and coordination. The experts agreed, in light of the current policy needs, that the *Demographic Yearbook* system should explore the possibility of enlarging the scope of its data collection to cover topics related to housing, from housing censuses, and disability. It

² Presented in paragraphs 33-34, and 40-44.

was emphasized that broadening of the scope of *Demographic Yearbook* data collection should be further evaluated by task forces involving subject-matter specialists, and rationalized with current demands and burden on countries.

Improving coverage and completeness of country responses to the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests

16. The discussion under this topic focused on three major issues: (a) improving response rates from national statistical authorities, (b) coordination between international collectors of population statistics and United Nations Statistics Division, and (c) cooperation between national statistical authorities and the United Nations Statistics Division, including national capacity building in the area of population statistics.

17. The experts noted that low response to the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires lessened the potential value of the service that the system could provide to its stakeholders. For example, only about half of the national statistical authorities responded to any of the three annual questionnaires less than four times or not at all, in a period of 10 years (1992-2001). Enhancing the efficacy of the system required an assessment of its feedback mechanisms and level and frequency of interaction with its data providers. Given that the provision of data had been largely due to the goodwill of national statistical authorities, it was necessary to motivate and keep countries (and other data providers) engaged. To this end, the experts emphasized the need to maintain continuous communication with national and international partners and provide feedback on the availability of data and other services. The need for building strong partnerships in all aspects of the data production, as opposed to seeking cooperation with selected institutions was highlighted.

18. The Meeting noted with concern that national authorities were experiencing an increasing demand for the same or similar data from different agencies at regional and international level and strongly recommended that better efforts be made towards joint collection and sharing of data. The Experts recognized that the efforts in coordinating data collection activities between the United Nations Statistics Division and other data collectors at the international level in recent years, had reduced the proliferation of questionnaires and the concomitant burden of response on countries in some regions, most notably in Europe, where a joint United Nations Statistics Division /Eurostat/Council of Europe questionnaire was in use. The experts called for replicating this arrangement in other regions.

19. The experts emphasized the role of sub-regional and regional intergovernmental organizations in bridging the gaps in the data and recommended that the United Nations Statistics Division establish closer and more efficient partnerships with these institutions, as they were usually closer to national statistical authorities. The examples of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat in the Caribbean region, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), in Pacific region, AFRISTAT in French-speaking Africa, etc., were presented as possible links between national authorities and United Nations Statistics Division.

20. Another issue for consideration was the strengthening of national statistical systems to participate and contribute effectively to the *Demographic Yearbook* system. In this context, experts identified the need to conduct regional workshops aimed at training national

statisticians in the concepts and methods of compiling and disseminating statistics, at a more general level, and in the specific framework of the *Demographic Yearbook*. These workshops would also be used as testing ground for various *Demographic Yearbook* instruments, as well as exchange of knowledge in collecting, processing and disseminating population data at the national level. The compilation of vital statistics was identified as one of the areas for capacity building, given that almost half of the world's statistical systems were not covered in the vital statistics presented in the *Demographic Yearbook*. These workshops might initially target the regions with low response rates for the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests.

***Demographic Yearbook* data dissemination**

21. For many years population data collected by the United Nations Statistics Division were disseminated in the annual publication, the *Demographic Yearbook*. In recent years, the electronic media of dissemination, such as CR-ROM and Internet presentations, have also been introduced.

22. The experts stressed the need for making *Demographic Yearbook* statistics available to a much broader audience by taking advantage of the Internet and data made available to users free of charge. It was the experience of several countries that free access to data on the Internet led to increased request for data at a cost. It was suggested that as a first step, the *Demographic Yearbook* 2001 would be posted as a PDF file on the website.

23. While recognizing that the diversity in methods applied at the national levels necessitated the use of footnotes, the experts indicated that the amount of footnotes presented with the data made the *Demographic Yearbook* less user-friendly. They suggested that the footnotes currently used in the *Demographic Yearbook* be drastically reduced by exploring different ways of conveying the information, and presenting the metadata.

24. In this context, the discussion focused on the primary users of the *Demographic Yearbook*, with the experts concluding that it would be extremely challenging to meet all current and emerging needs, whether in the form of book, CD-Rom or Internet presentation. Rather, a combination of all these media needed to be developed taking into consideration accessibility, reach and users' needs, as well as the means at the disposal of the United Nations Statistics Division.

25. It was noted that there were many other different issues related to the dissemination of data, such as those linked, for example, to the use of information technology, the use of mass media, or addressing user needs. The experts agreed that there was need to consult major users on an on-going basis to better understand their requirements and adequately address them. It was also necessary to study the *ad hoc* requests for data, with a view to determining the characteristics of the users and the range of information they required.

26. The experts emphasized that in order to address the issues and concerns raised by the Meeting, and fulfill the potential of the *Demographic Yearbook* system, the United Nations Statistics Division would need to develop a list of priorities by order, in both the collection and dissemination of demographic and social statistics.

C. Conclusions and recommendations

General comments

27. The experts requested that the United Nations Statistics Division continue its efforts to revise and update the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection system with the aim of making it easier for the countries to supply the data, and promote wide and effective dissemination of the data.

28. National data producers also called for the establishment of continuous feedback mechanisms so that they could more actively engage in a dialogue with the United Nations Statistics Division about the data they provide to the *Demographic Yearbook* system, the standards and methods adopted, the validation process and the dissemination of the data. In this respect, the Meeting recommended that the United Nations Statistics Division move from cooperation to partnership in its mode of operation, while also proactively interacting with countries, with a view to *inter alia* investigating and reaching solutions for the main problems that statistical offices face when collecting and compiling data.

29. The Meeting also called on the Statistics Division to make the *Demographic Yearbook* user-friendlier and widely accessible to users, taking advantage of new technologies to better meet their specific needs. In this context, it was suggested that every effort be made to reduce the number of footnotes in the *Demographic Yearbook*. In addition, beginning with the 2001 issue, the *Demographic Yearbooks* are to be posted on the website and made available on-line and free of charge, in Portable Document Format (PDF).

30. The experts stressed the need for developing a comprehensive website that would enable the exchange of data, information and update on developments, between the United Nations Statistics Division and national statistical offices and other partners, as well as users at large. Furthermore, the United Nations Statistics Division should create a directory of users' and producers' e-mail addresses for effective communication.

31. As part of the meta-data system, the Meeting invited the United Nations Statistics Division to make national census questionnaires available on the *Demographic Yearbook* website. It was also suggested that the United Nations Statistics Division consider a review of national census practices in archiving at the forthcoming Symposium to review preparations for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.

Data collection

32. Experts called for re-examining the means of data collection with the primary aim of reducing the burden on national statistical offices, and to consider the addition of other electronic forms of data collection besides the ones already in place. Specifically they requested that the United Nations Statistics Division:

- a. Explore different approaches to the collection of data from national statistical offices, including establishing country domains on the United Nations Statistics Division servers, and allowing countries to fill in data on-line; improving existing electronic versions by making them more user-friendly and providing a list of

tables at the beginning; setting up expert technical teams to assist in developing a framework for building national databases capable of generating outputs that can feed data directly into the *Demographic Yearbook* system; and testing other electronic formats and their suitability for data collection.

- b. Identify a multi-tiered system, highlighting a minimum set of statistics that could serve as a framework for countries.
- c. Explore different approaches related to the periodicity and frequency of dispatching the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires to national statistical offices in order to improve the exchange of data.
- d. Closely monitor the timing and seasonality of the mailing of the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and the receipt of country responses.
- e. Provide data from previous years so that countries can update and validate their own data.
- f. Consider maximizing the use of complementary sources of data in the *Demographic Yearbook* collection system in order to improve country responses, especially in the case of countries that have limited information, such as those without strong vital statistics systems, or who have not conducted population and housing censuses in recent decades.

Review of the current *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires

33. On the content of the current *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires, the Expert Group Meeting noted the following issues that the United Nations Statistics Division needs to address:

34. Continue the work on revising the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires, harmonizing them with international standards and national practices.

- a. Include in each of the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires a request for the name and contact information of the person responsible for its completion. The questionnaires should also provide an official contact at the United Nations Statistics Division to provide the necessary assistance in the completion of the questionnaires.
- b. *De facto and de jure population*. In different *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires the data requested refer to the *de facto* population. The concept of the *de facto* population is not applicable in all the countries. Moreover, more and more countries, especially in the European region, that are using population registers as data sources, do not use the concept of the *de facto* population. The fact that tables of the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaire request explicitly data for the *de facto* population requires, for a number of countries, meticulous footnoting indicating that data refer to *de jure* population. It would be more appropriate to provide a different approach, for example, there would be check boxes that the data provider would use to indicate whether the data refer to the *de jure* or *de facto* population.

- c. Population by marital status. This topic is represented in several *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires. With regard to the frequency of collecting these data, a possibility of collecting them at two- to three-year interval should be considered. More substantially, there is a need to provide in-depth assessment of different national practices with regard to the marital and living arrangements and to review the categories that are now used in the *Demographic Yearbook* in light of current country practices.
- d. It is of utmost importance to outline the reasons for collecting *Demographic Yearbook* statistics from national statistical offices. The *Demographic Yearbook* should provide justification for collecting the information from national statistical offices; not just the legislative background, but also scientific rationale and its relevancy to policy development and planning. This should be complemented with the description of the different purposes for which data are used.

Coordination

35. The experts called for more efficient coordination among international organizations and agencies and urged the United Nations Statistics Division to reduce the burden on national statistical systems resulting from multiple data requests. Specifically it was requested that the United Nations Statistics Division:

- a. Identify for each country and area the functionary responsible for filling in the questionnaires or directing them to the appropriate persons/offices.
- b. Promote partnerships with international, regional and sub-regional agencies and organizations to coordinate statistical activities, avoid duplication of collection efforts and reduce response burden to countries.
- c. Develop a website providing the relevant definitions and classifications used by the United Nations agencies active in the field of demographic and social statistics.
- d. Provide more detailed information regarding coordination mechanisms established for the collection and dissemination of various indicators (in particular the indicators used to monitor the Millennium Development Goals).
- e. Consider additional agreements similar to the coordination that has been set up between Eurostat, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Statistics Division, as a way of reducing the burden of data collection on national statistical offices, and to facilitate the rapid and efficient collection and distribution of a standard set of official statistics at the international level.
- f. Strengthen partnerships with other United Nations agencies, regional organizations and subregional intergovernmental organizations, to maximize the use of technical assistance resources for the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection, dissemination and analysis.
- g. Sensitise counterpart institutions at the national level, that is, the national statistical institutions, to collaborate with the ministries of health, while the World Health Organization also works with its national counterparts, the ministries of health, to improve consultations with the national statistical offices. Similar

initiatives should be taken by the United Nations Statistics Division and other international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, and UNESCO, to strengthen/support dialogues and cooperation among their counterpart national statistical institutions.

Dissemination

36. The Meeting requested that the United Nations Statistics Division consider making the data and meta-data collected through the *Demographic Yearbook* system available to multiple users, including national statistical offices, libraries and universities, research institutes, etc. Specifically the experts requested that the United Nations Statistics Division:

- a. Adopt a more proactive approach towards countries by informing them about their data currently available in the *Demographic Yearbook* database. Disseminating information on country response might encourage countries and areas to improve their reporting to the *Demographic Yearbook* system.
- b. Disseminate essential population data through the Internet, free of charge to all users and provide a PDF version of the *Demographic Yearbook* on the Internet as an interim means of expanding electronic dissemination of these data.
- c. Take steps to ensure that the *Demographic Yearbook* database is made available to all national statistical offices and sub-regional statistical offices.
- d. Encourage national statistical organizations to advertise in their publications the availability of international products such as the *Demographic Yearbook*, and to create links to the *Demographic Yearbook* website.
- e. Initiate a review of *ad hoc* requests for data for a better understanding of who are the users of the data in the *Demographic Yearbook* system.
- f. Develop a strategy of regularly publishing the special topic issues in the next ten years, with a view to minimizing the time lag between the collection and dissemination of data for the special topics. Once adopted, the plan is to be posted on the *Demographic Yearbook* website and remain subject to review in the light of emerging social and policy needs, and for purposes of managing expectations.
- g. Develop partnerships in the dissemination of the available statistics in order to ensure that statistics that are collected are disseminated, so as to encourage responses from countries and meet the wide and growing demand for statistics.
- h. Continue reviewing the *Demographic Yearbook* dissemination practices beyond this Expert Group Meeting, involving a broad spectrum of users and producers of data. With so many organizations involved in the dissemination of demographic and social statistics, the United Nations Statistics Division as a part of the United Nations Secretariat should play a central role in coordinating this work on dissemination with other United Nations and regional organizations.
- i. Develop different products to meet the needs of the many users of the *Demographic Yearbook*, taking into account the different levels of sophistication

and uses, starting from basic maps and information for children, to complex downloading facility for researchers, scholars and decision-makers.

- j. Consider ways in which the *Demographic Yearbook* presentation may be used to strengthen social statistics, in light of the fact that social statistics has been a fragmented statistical system. The *Demographic Yearbook* provides an opportunity for further statistical elaboration and analysis of social concerns through the use of an integrated and well-established statistical framework.
- k. Continue work on the *Demographic Yearbook* website on cities and maintains regular updated access to cities data through this medium, as well as distribution through the *Demographic Yearbook* database so that further analysis on cities' statistics may be conducted.
- l. Review the completeness and comparability of the information collected on rural/urban cross-classifications and consider more suitable means of disseminating the information other than in the printed publications.
- m. Consider reducing their work in some areas, e.g., size of annual *Demographic Yearbook* in printed format, in order to tackle new user needs as recommended by the experts.

Capacity building

37. The experts stressed the need to improve national statistical capacity, as an important means for ensuring that countries are able to supply data to the *Demographic Yearbook* system. In this respect, it was recommended that the United Nations Statistics Division:

- a. Be actively involved in statistical capacity development in the area of data collection and dissemination, in collaboration with other regional and international agencies. Particular attention was given to the need to promote statistical capacity building in the development of civil registration systems and the compilation of vital statistics.
- b. Adopt the latest international standards in its questionnaires and encourage countries to implement these standards, underlining the advantages of comparability. It was suggested that a profile of countries according to their types of compliance with international standards be produced.
- c. Work towards improving comparability of national data with respect to concepts, classifications and adjusting the structure and formats of the *Demographic Yearbook* tables in order to reduce the footnotes.
- d. Consider developing and making available to national offices a database structure that would enable direct transfer of national population related statistics into the *Demographic Yearbook* system.
- e. Include national level coordination as one of the main components in training workshops and explore the possibility of replicating the United Nations Statistics Division/CARICOM approach to developing national capacity (i.e., through high level regional advisory committee to plan statistical development and national coordination committees for social statistics).

Improving response rates

38. The Experts advocated improving country response to the *Demographic Yearbook* system by identifying incentives for countries able and willing to provide data. It was suggested that a better understanding of the value added to countries for collaborating in this exercise might be necessary. Specifically it was suggested that the United Nations Statistics Division:

- a. Encourage countries to report data despite possible gaps or inconsistencies with international guidelines and recommendation, and to provide detailed meta-data periodically.
- b. Provide national statistical offices, in accordance with country needs and priorities, feedback on data supplied and country response rates.
- c. Undertake regional workshops to train national statisticians responsible for the compilation of statistics for the *Demographic Yearbook*, in close coordination with international, regional and sub-regional organizations.
- d. Provide to producers of data, on a regular basis, information on the availability of the latest *Demographic Yearbook* publications, etc., and send them information about missing data.
- e. Send the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires at a given date each year. This practice would make it easier for countries to programme their work and contact the United Nations Statistics Division to solicit the questionnaires in case they had not received them.

New topics to be considered for inclusion in the *Demographic Yearbook* system

39. The Experts discussed the issue of incorporating disability and housing statistics in the *Demographic Yearbook* system. They noted that in exploring the feasibility of introducing disability and housing statistics in the *Demographic Yearbook* system, there was need to pre-test and monitor the process and to report on a regular basis on the results, so that any possible advantages and disadvantages would be identified early. The Meeting recommended that:

With respect to disability

- a. The *Demographic Yearbook* system consider incorporating the collection and dissemination of disability statistics as a regular activity, but initially using a separate questionnaire, rather than incorporating the questions within existing questionnaires.
- b. Given the disparities in national practices, there is need to exercise caution when evaluating the appropriateness of collecting these data, with respect to relevance, quality of available data and international comparability.
- c. The United Nations Statistics Division, under the auspices and jointly with the *Washington City Group on Disability Statistics*, further investigate the most appropriate methodological approaches to measuring disability and activity

limitations using the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*.

With respect to housing

- a. The United Nations Statistics Division explore ways to incorporate the collection of housing statistics in the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection system, in order to take advantage of the regularity of the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection, existing meta-data support, and data processing facilities.
- b. As for the proposed topics, there is need for further efforts and consultations on national and international practices. While some topics may not be very relevant for some countries (such as electricity or water supply), in others they are of major concern. Similarly, as the population in many countries is aging, the issue of ownership of housing unit becomes more and more significant. Therefore, a balance between different topics would need to be established.

Specific recommendations on questionnaires of the *Demographic Yearbook*

40. Questionnaire on Population Estimates:

- a. The request for data in table 1 for the period starting 1960, though considered a prolonged period, was necessary given that the revisions of national estimates often include extrapolations to the past as well as projecting into the future.
- b. Given the nature of data being requested, it was emphasized that the division of labour between different offices at the national level should be taken into consideration when evaluating the timeliness of the responses to the questionnaire. In some countries, data on estimates are produced outside of the statistical agencies and the time needed to coordinate the filling of this questionnaire usually goes beyond the suggested deadlines.
- c. On the collection and dissemination of meta-data, there is a need to explore the relationship of the *Demographic Yearbook* meta-data with the IMF's *General Data Dissemination System (GDDS)* and to investigate the possibility of their complementing each other. The meta-data part of the questionnaire requires further scrutiny leading to updating methods and improving the descriptions of the techniques. There is need to tabulate meta-data collected by this questionnaire on a three- to four-year basis, so as to provide more complete information to the users, as well as to the reporting national statistical agencies.

41. Questionnaire on Vital Statistics:

- a. The issue of collecting vital statistics disaggregated by urban/rural areas is still relevant for some countries, but in highly urbanized countries and areas this distinction might not be of primary importance.
- b. This questionnaire requires primarily statistics derived from civil registration systems. Countries with inadequately developed or incomplete civil registration are often discouraged from replying to this questionnaire because vital statistics generated by civil registration are not available. Most of these countries have, on the other hand, data available from censuses and/or sample surveys. Hence, it is

necessary to expand the coverage of the questionnaire by collecting vital statistics obtained from sources other than registration systems.

- c. Highlight in the questionnaire that statistics are required by usual place of residence of the mother, for births, and of the deceased, for deaths.
 - d. Insert a question on the time lag between occurrence and registration of the event in the meta-data sheet of the vital statistics questionnaire.
 - e. Replace the terms '*Legitimate/Illegitimate*' with '*In wedlock/Out of wedlock*', following the most recent *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*.
 - f. Add the category "for social reasons" to the table on legally induced abortions to take account of countries where legal abortions are induced not only for health reasons.
 - g. In consultation with the Social Statistics Forum, review current user needs and relative significance of data on duration of "marriage" and "birth intervals" as determinants of fertility, and:
 - Consider replacing the table on "in wedlock live births by duration of marriage" with "live births by birth interval" in view of its relevance and prevailing national practices;
 - Review the appropriateness of collecting statistics on in wedlock live births by sex of the child;
 - Investigate the necessity for collecting data on live births by age of father as this information is often unavailable in most countries.
 - h. Explore the possibility of the United Nations Statistics Division calculating the abridged life tables from basic population and death data supplied by countries.
42. Questionnaire on international migration and travel statistics:
- a. Due to the complexity of the tabulations, (tables 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B), and the diversity of the data sources that are needed for the compilation of these tables, countries will only be able to fill in parts of the tabulations as the available data sources do not allow completion on all the elements required for the tables.
 - b. Tabulations of the inflows and outflows include both tourism and migration data. Tourism data follow a different structure from migration data, in particular, when considering the cross-classification by duration of stay. In order to create a clearer distinction it was recommended to tabulate the data on tourism separately.
 - c. Dual citizenships might create a problem when tabulating separately the information for citizens and foreigners. It is therefore recommended to insert in the meta-data section a reference to issues related to the collection of information by citizenship, in particular efforts related to the registration of people with dual citizenship.
 - d. The compilation of the tables by country of citizenship or by country of origin or destinations (Tables 3A, 3B, 4) can be cumbersome for countries that follow listing or coding of the countries different from the one proposed in the United

Nations questionnaires. It is recommended that countries be allowed to send their tabulations of the information with the list of countries that will then be matched by the United Nations Statistics Division to the required system of coding following the United Nations standards.

- e. An increasing number of countries place stress on the variable “place of birth” rather than on “country of citizenship”. Furthermore, it is extremely useful to collect information on both the place of birth and of citizenship in order to capture the nature of the movements. It is recommended, for pilot purposes, to include in the next round of testing of the questionnaire a table on long-term migrants that would cross-classify the information of the place of birth with the country of citizenship.
 - f. Internal mobility is an increasingly important issue. Although it is recognised that international migration needs more immediate attention, it is recommended that United Nations Statistics build it into its ten-year plan.
43. Questionnaire on Population Census – General Characteristics:
- a. The variables on literacy, school attendance and educational attainment require detailed review in consultation with national offices and UNESCO, as the ones applied in the current version of the questionnaire are not easily applicable.
 - b. The construction of the age groups in this questionnaire needs some additional review, as they are sometimes confusing.
 - c. The United Nations Statistics Division is encouraged to continue its work on the definitions of cities, urban agglomerations, urban areas and related concepts in order to enhance international comparisons.
 - d. Statistics on most topics in this questionnaire are also requested for urban and rural areas. In this context, and given the different national approaches to the urban/rural delineation there needs to be a thorough review of the relevance of urban/rural presentation of data collected by this questionnaire.
 - e. Overall, this questionnaire needs a thorough review in order to bring it in line with the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses.

Specific recommendations on current layout of the *Demographic Yearbook*

44. A series of recommendations regarding the current layout of the *Demographic Yearbook* refer to:
- a. The need to ensure that the introduction clearly states that the *Demographic Yearbook* presents exclusively the official national statistics.
 - b. Exploring the possibility of including copies of the questionnaires in the *Demographic Yearbook* and of providing links to the questionnaires for Internet dissemination.
 - c. Introducing a synoptic table that would list all the countries that provided information for that specific issue of the *Demographic Yearbook*, including the

topics for which data were provided and the respective reference year, with information about accessing *Demographic Yearbook* data in other media.

- d. Including more highlights using summary tables and derived statistics targeting broader audiences.

Proposed activities

45. It is of crucial importance to strengthen partnerships with relevant regional and sub-regional intergovernmental organizations, including United Nations agencies and national statistical agencies, in the collection and dissemination of demographic and social statistics, in order to reduce the burden on national statistical agencies from responding to multiple questionnaires, and in national capacity building. To this end, the United Nations Statistics Division, in particular, the *Demographic Yearbook* system, should:

- a. Define and implement procedures for maintaining direct contact and effective interaction with countries, including:
 - (i) Assigning staff to cover specific countries and requesting names of contact persons for the questionnaires that are completed, in order to establish communication on a regular basis with country offices;
 - (ii) Providing feedback on the data, and information on what has been received, the gaps, further clarification required, etc;
 - (iii) As a first step, summarizing and circulating the presentation on content and coverage of the *Demographic Yearbook* system.
- b. Convene technical groups to:
 - (i) Review the content and format of the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires;
 - (ii) Explore different ways of customizing the questionnaires to suit specific country preferences.
- c. Organize regional and sub-regional workshops to:
 - (i) Review national practices in the dissemination of demographic and social statistics and their relevance to the compilation of data for international dissemination;
 - (ii) Provide training in the compilation of vital statistics and international migration statistics from a variety of sources;
 - (iii) Strengthen coordination with agencies that produce demographic and social statistics at the national level.
- d. Establish coordination mechanisms with international, regional and sub-regional organizations in the collection of demographic and social statistics and in the planning and implementation of national capacity building programmes.
- e. Develop different modes for disseminating *Demographic Yearbook* statistics and products targeting specific types of audiences:

- (i) Set up expert technical teams to assist in developing a framework for building national databases capable of generating outputs that can feed data directly into the *Demographic Yearbook* system;
 - (ii) Develop and circulate a ten-year dissemination plan for producing special topic issues.
- f. Provide support through the United Nations Statistics Division fellowship programme for country visits to strengthen partnerships and cooperation among national statistical offices, regional and sub-regional organizations in demographic data collection, compilation, dissemination and exchange of information.
- g. Convene expert group Meetings to promote the application of contemporary information technology in the collection and dissemination of data.
- h. Develop a comprehensive website that will enable exchange of data, information and update on developments between the Statistics Division, national statistical offices and other partners, as well as users at large.
- i. As a matter of priority, develop a Portable Document Format (PDF) version of the *Demographic Yearbook*, starting with the 2001 issue, and make it available through the Division's Website, for speedy, free and wide access.
- j. From the methodological point of view, explore the feasibility of:
 - (i) Developing on the *Demographic Yearbook* website a database of national census documents, such as questionnaires, manuals, and handbooks by initially scanning the relevant census schedules and making them available to users at the national and international level;
 - (ii) Designing and conducting research on national practices in archiving census questionnaires, in the process of organizing the Symposium on Preparation for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses.
- k. Undertake, in light of the work already completed by the United Nations Statistics Division and on the basis of recommendations of this Meeting, a review of the *Demographic Yearbook* Work Programme for 2004-2005 to set priorities which will entail reducing work in some areas, and taking on new activities as recommended by the Expert Group.

Annex 1. Information Note on the United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review the Demographic Yearbook System



Date: 3-7 November 2003

Venue: New York

Host: United Nations Statistics Division

The United Nations Statistics Division has, since 1948, collected, processed and disseminated national statistics on a variety of demographic topics, including population size and characteristics, vital events such as births, deaths, marriages, and international migration. These data are maintained in a database and used to generate a series of outputs: the regular and special issues of the *Demographic Yearbook* (DYB), CD-ROMs focussing on special topics, as well as Internet presentation of population and vital statistics. The statistical information, including meta-data, for this data collection and dissemination programme are obtained almost exclusively from questionnaires administered annually to national statistical authorities in over 230 countries or areas.

Purpose of the Meeting

Significant changes have taken place over the period since the Demographic Yearbook programme has been in operation. There have been changes in the concepts, methods, and classifications in several of the demographic and social variables, leading to periodic revisions and updates in international standards and recommendations to guide national data collection; information technology is increasingly playing a vital role in data production and dissemination; and the demand for statistics has expanded to cover a wide range of policy issues, resulting in greater demands being placed on national statistical systems to provide timely and relevant statistics. For the DYB programme to remain relevant in these rapidly changing environments, it is necessary that the information be as comprehensive and complete as possible, reliable as well as easily accessible to the wide range of users.

The Expert Group Meeting is to provide an assessment of how well the Demographic Yearbook programme is doing with respect to its collection of statistics and meta-data; the level and quality of responses achieved with countries, and their trends over time; and how effective is its dissemination plan. On the basis of these assessments, the expert group will make recommendations for improving the content and coverage of the data collection, and enhancing the demographic yearbook and related outputs in content and form, and for a wider audience.

Key issues

The Expert Group will address these major issues.

1. Collection of statistics and metadata

As the demand for more timely and policy relevant statistics grows, it is important that a data collection of the magnitude of the DYB programme balance the needs of users with practical considerations such as the need for parsimony.

- Who are the main groups of users of the data and what are their data need?

- Are the topics on which data are being collected really relevant? Do they adequately reflect issues pertinent to monitoring demographic and social changes?
- Do the questionnaires comply with international recommendations for population and vital statistics?
- How do they compare to national and international (ILO, WHO, UNESCO, etc.) data collection practices?
- Are the questionnaires consistent internally and one with the other?
- How can a more complete metadata be obtained?

2. *Level and quality of replies*

Broadly defined, the level and quality of country responses are the result of an interplay between the modalities of data collection, such as the design of the questionnaires, medium, timing, etc., and the disposition of countries to provide the requisite data.

- What are the trends in the response rates and how can the rates be increased?
- Is the content of the questionnaires, including concepts, definitions and classifications clear enough for countries to follow? How do the language, format and structures of the questionnaires influence the response rate? What physical format is most suitable for questionnaires (electronic spreadsheets, hardcopy, using FTP)?
- What are the barriers to the transfer of data from countries to the United Nations?
- How can a more responsive network of national statistical authorities be fostered?
- How can countries be assisted to respond to DYB data requests?
- How can the level, completeness and quality of responses be tracked?

3. *Data dissemination*

Users vary with respect to their topics of interest and level of technical knowledge and expertise in the use of data. A variety of products are required to meet these different needs. A fundamental question to be addressed is how the overall dissemination scheme might be enhanced to promote optimum use of the data that the DYB programme generates:

- How effective are the basic products in Meeting the needs the target audiences?
- What features of the products, such as, content, format, layout, need to be adjusted?
- Is the DYB presenting items that are not needed and not presenting those that it should?
- What would be an ideal periodicity and timing of the topics and these outputs?
- What are some examples of effective products?
- What can the United Nations DYB learn from the national demographic yearbooks?
- What are the priorities that need to be addressed in the overall dissemination scheme?
- What are the best vehicles for dissemination of population and vital statistics?

4. *Expected outputs*

The Expert Group Meeting is expected to provide guidance on how future work on the collection and dissemination of demographic data, might be organized, including:

- (a) Recommendations on how to increase the efficacy of the DYB, prioritizing the topics covered by the data collection and dissemination; the cycle and frequency of the topics, and other aspects of the data collection and dissemination.
- (b) Advice on how current approaches to data dissemination might be adjusted to better respond to users' needs and the value added of the different media of data dissemination, i.e., in print, CDs, internet, etc., could be maximized.
- (c) Suggestions on practical ways of facilitating the completion of the questionnaires and improving national capacity to report data.

Annex 2. List of Participants

	Name	Title and Affiliation
1	Mr. Koffi Amelewonou	Statistician Economic and Social Policy Division Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)
2	Ms. Rosemary Bender	Assistant Director Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division Statistics Canada
3	Mr. Edwin St. Catherine	Director of Statistics St. Lucia
4	Mr. Neramit Dhanasakdi	Chief Labour Statistics Group Economic and Social Statistics Bureau National Statistical Office Thailand
5	Ms. Suzann Evinger	Senior Policy Analyst Statistical and Science Policy Branch Office of Management and Budget United States
6	Ms. Doris Ma Fat	Statistician World Health Organization
7	Ms. Gugulethu Gule	Deputy Director General Population Statistics Statistics South Africa
8	Mr. Gerald Haberkorn	Demographer Population/ Demography Programme Secretariat of the Pacific Community
9	Ms. Philomen Harrison	Programme Manager - Statistics Caribbean Community (CARICOM)
10	Mr. Larry Heligman	Chief Population Studies Branch United Nations Population Division
11	Mr. Mansoor Khawaja	Chief Demographer, Demographic Research Programme Statistics New Zealand
12	Ms. Annika M. E. Klintefelt	Statistics Sweden
13	Mr. Árpád Mészáros	Deputy Director of Department Population, Health and Welfare Statistics Department Vital Statistics Section Hungarian Central Statistical Office
14	Mr. Swaraj Kumar Nath	Deputy Director General Social and Environment Statistics Division Central Statistical Organisation Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation Government of India

15	Ms. Wimala J. Nigamuni	Senior Statistician Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka
16	Ms. Philomena E. Nyarko	Lecturer Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS)
17	Ms. Pamela C. Paz-Vergara	Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática Peru
18	Ms.. Mary Powers	Fordham University
19	Mr. Sylvan Roberts	Senior Research Project Officer Caribbean Community (CARICOM)
20	Ms. Ana Lucia Sabóia	Manager Population and Social Indicators Coordination Fundacao Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) Brazil
21	Mr. Victor Garcia Vilchis	Technical and Conceptual Statistics Coordinator Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática (INEGI) Mexico
22	Ms. Cecilia M. C. Wass	Statistics Sweden

**United Nations Statistics Division
Demographic, Social and Housing Statistics Branch**

Ms. Mary Chamie Chief Demographic and Social Statistics Branch	
Demographic Statistics Section	Social and Housing Statistics Section
Ms. Grace Bediako, Chief Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, Editor, <i>Demographic Yearbook</i> Mr. Ozer Babakol Ms. Julie Chan Ms. Haoyi Chen Ms. Francesca Coullare Ms. Magaly Fernandez Mr. Mohan John Ms. Tiziana Leone Ms. Margaret Mbogoni Mr. Seiffe Tadesse Mr. John Thomas	Mr. Jeremiah Banda, Chief Ms. Erlinda Go Mr. Romulo Julian Ms. Clare Menozzi Ms. Malin Synneborn Mr. Yacob Zewoldi

Annex 3. Organization of Work

Monday, 10 November 2003

Registration of participants (9:30 – 10:00 a.m.)

Morning session (10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

Opening

Introductory remarks

Purpose of the Meeting

I. Overview of the *Demographic Yearbook* system

This session is comprised of two presentations. The first one provides a historical overview of the *Demographic Yearbook* system for collecting, processing and presenting data, and presents general information on the content of the six *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires, dissemination activities, and main reasons for the current review. The presentation is on future work in social statistics and its possible implications for the *Demographic Yearbook* system. The session gives a perspective on the expected contribution of the Meeting to the future of the *Demographic Yearbook* system.

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation: The United Nations *Demographic Yearbook*: In need of improvement (ESA/STAT/AC.91/1)

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation on: Setting the scope of social statistics and the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* (ESA/STAT/AC.91/5)

Discussion and recommendations:

The degree of involvement of the national offices in the Demographic Yearbook system both as provider of official statistics and as user of the Demographic Yearbook data

- How national offices, international agencies, academic/research institutions currently use the Demographic Yearbook and how it might better serve their needs
- The role of the Demographic Yearbook in the national statistical system

- *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process

Following an introductory statement, the Meeting will break into the following three groups – Group 1: Population estimates and international migration, Group 2: Fertility, mortality and nuptiality, and Group 3: Population census topics. In each group, experts will review the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process with respect to the content of the questionnaires, concepts, definitions and classifications used, and relevance of statistical tables requested. The groups will consider whether there is a need for modification of tables/statistical series covered in the questionnaires.

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation: An overview of the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process (ESA/STAT/AC.91/2)

Lunch break (12:30–2:00 p.m.)

Afternoon session (2:00–5:30 p.m.)

Working Groups on the review of the questionnaires. In each group, the following format will apply:

- 1) Introduction by UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION on the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and proposed revisions
- 2) Discussion on specific tables with regard to relevance and adjustments

Tuesday, 11 November 2003

Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

II. *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process (continued)

Plenary, reports from the working group sessions

| Expanding the scope of the *Demographic Yearbook* system

This part of the Meeting will consider different ways to expand the scope of the *Demographic Yearbook* by incorporating the collection of data on topics that are not currently covered. The experts will review the scope of the *Demographic Yearbook* as proposed by UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION with regard to the topics being suggested, the content of the draft questionnaires and the periodicity for the collection of data on the new topics.

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation on: Need for international collection and dissemination of data on disability (ESA/STAT/AC.91/6)

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation on: Reconsideration of housing statistics in the *Demographic Yearbook* data collection and dissemination system (ESA/STAT/AC.91/7)

Lunch break (12:30–2:00 p.m.)

Afternoon session (2:00–5:30 p.m.)

II. *Demographic Yearbook* data collection process (continued)

Discussant's comments

Discussion and recommendations:

- Key considerations incorporating disability and housing to the *Demographic Yearbook* system
- How the collection and dissemination on data on new and existing topics might be rationalized within the *Demographic Yearbook* system
- Adequacy and relevance of the data being proposed to users' needs and requirements

Wednesday, 12 November 2003

Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

III. Improving coverage and completeness of country responses to the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests

The session focuses on ways to improve responses from national statistical authorities to the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests for official statistics and identify data requirements and gaps. The discussion will include a review of how factors such as the modalities of data collection, including the design of the questionnaires; medium of data collection; timing; and the disposition of countries to provide the requisite data, affect the rate and completeness of country responses. The session will also present examples of coordination mechanisms at national and international levels and consider activities needed to improve reporting of national data to international data collection programmes.

Level of responses and data gaps

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation on: Coverage and completeness of the *Demographic Yearbook* data (ESA/STAT/AC.91/3)

Presentations on: Meeting users' needs: Data requirements and gaps (ESA/STAT/AC.91/14)

Discussants' comments

Discussion and recommendations:

- Balancing the need to meet users' needs with practical considerations and national realities

Factors affecting the transfer of data from countries

Presentations on: Factors affecting countries' ability to respond to the *Demographic Yearbook* data requests (ESA/STAT/AC.91/10)

Discussants' comments

Discussion and recommendations:

- Steps to improve the cooperation and communication between countries and the *Demographic Yearbook* system

Lunch break (12:30–2:00 p.m.)

Afternoon session (2:00–5:30 p.m.)

III. Improving coverage and completeness of country responses (continued)

The role of coordination

Presentations on: Country response to international data requests: The role of statistical coordination at the national level (ESA/STAT/AC.91/9)

Discussant's comments

Presentations on: Efforts towards improved coordination of data collection at the international level (ESA/STAT/AC.91/16)

Discussants' comments

Discussion and recommendations:

- Essential characteristics of an effective coordination mechanism at the national and international levels
- Making arrangements at the international level more efficient and effective

Thursday, 13 November 2003

Morning session (9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

II. Data dissemination

The session will present the current *Demographic Yearbook* data dissemination plan and explore ways of enhancing the dissemination programme for wider outreach and optimum use of the data that the *Demographic Yearbook* system generates. It will also discuss the most effective ways to meet the needs of data users. The discussions will take into account the fact that users vary with respect to their topics of interest, level of technical knowledge and expertise in the use of data, and that a variety of products are required to meet these different needs. Presentations of country experiences will include examples of effective products.

Improving the dissemination programme

UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION presentation on: The *Demographic Yearbook*: Disseminating data (ESA/STAT/AC.91/4)

Presentations on: Meeting users' needs: Data requirements and gaps (ESA/STAT/AC.91/14)

Presentations on: National approaches to the dissemination of demographic statistics and their implications for the *Demographic Yearbook* (ESA/STAT/AC.91/12)

Discussants' comments

Lunch break (12:30–2:00 p.m.)

Afternoon session (2:00–5:30 p.m.)

IV. Data dissemination (continued)

Discussion and recommendations:

- Elements of a successful data dissemination processes and products
- Enhancing the efficacy of Demographic Yearbook data dissemination process and relevance of products to the wide range of data users

Statistical products

Presentation of statistical products for data dissemination at national, regional and international levels

Friday, 14 November 2003

Morning session (10.00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.)

V. Adopting recommendations for improving the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* system

Presentation and review of draft recommendations

Lunch break (1:00–2:30 p.m.)

Afternoon session (2:30–3:30 p.m.)

Conclusion

Adoption of final recommendations