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

Setting the Scope of Social Statistics^{*} and the United Nations
***Demographic Yearbook*^{**}**

By the

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* Summary of the Report on the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics, held 6-9 May 2003, in New York.

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Executive Summary

A. Introduction

1. The United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics was convened in New York on 6-9 May 2003 by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in collaboration with the Siena Group on Social Statistics.
2. The objective of the meeting was to propose a programme of work for furthering the development of social statistics, with a view to presenting it to the thirty-fifth session of Statistical Commission for action.
3. The meeting brought together national, sub-regional, regional and international experts on social statistics. Participants included experts from 18 countries, six international organizations and seven regional or sub-regional organizations and institutions.

B. Summary of discussions

- (i) The need for a conceptual framework
4. Some experts expressed the need for a conceptual framework for social statistics. Other experts felt that there was no need at this point to develop a general framework, but agreed on the importance of conceptual frameworks within specific domains of social statistics (e.g., labour, education, health, etc.).
- (ii) The importance of standards and metadata
5. The meeting felt that international standards (i.e., concepts, definitions, classifications, methods, guidelines, principles and best practices) are not adequate for many areas of social statistics. There was therefore an urgent need to evaluate, revise and supplement existing standards, and to develop them in areas where they are non-existent or deficient.
- (iii) Low political commitment and visibility
6. Experts proposed several strategies to increase support and visibility for social statistics. For example, social statistics must be driven by key information needs of policy makers and other users in the broader community. In addition, results must be available to broad audiences.
- (iv) Data sources for social statistics

7. There was recognition in the meeting that three main sources of social statistics are population and housing censuses, sample surveys and administrative records. Experts stressed the need to identify existing sources of social statistics and integrate them so as to provide as complete information as possible to guide policy.

8. The discussion on integrating sources highlighted the need to clearly identify the units of enumeration and coverage in collecting and reporting statistics throughout the various sources. Participants also discussed the importance of common definitions, classifications and other standards across the different sources of data.

(v) Coordination

9. There was a general sense that there are many different international agencies involved in social statistics. Experts expressed interest in detailed knowledge on how these international agencies operated and coordinated their social statistical operations.

10. In parallel, at the national level there are many producers of social statistics besides the NSO such as the line ministries. A decentralized statistical system often means that there is no strong, independent national statistical entity to coordinate these various statistical activities. International data requests and other statistical activities often do not involve NSOs since some international organizations deal directly with the line ministries.

(vi) Statistical capacity building

11. Participants voiced the need to increase support for statistics and statistical capacity building. In relation to this, experts stressed the need to ensure the sustainability and coordination of international aid for NSOs in developing countries.

12. A point was made that international organizations do not pay enough attention to the sustainability of survey programmes in developing countries and the development of local staff skills for conducting sample surveys. Related to this, experts stressed the need for building sustainable institutional capacity in countries with developing statistical systems, including investing on continuous training of personnel, as there is high turnover of staff in most statistical offices in developing countries.

13. The following recommendations were made by the Expert Group Meeting.

C. Recommendations

The expert group:

- (a) Following its consideration of frameworks and noting the importance of maintaining a flexible system that can meet the needs of various social statistics frameworks, requested the UNSD and other partners including national statistical offices (NSOs) to develop a work programme of activities through 2015 to set the

scope of social statistics that would complement future programme activities across censuses, surveys and administrative records. The scope would include aspects of the human life cycle, well-being, and the linkages among social, economic and environment statistics. UNSD will carry this work plan to the thirty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission.

With respect to this and all recommendations that follow, work programmes to be developed should consider whether implementation should occur in stages; and if so, identify these stages and define the content of each. For all recommendations, UNSD and its partners should specify outputs, timelines for implementation, major actors and their specific responsibilities and methods of coordination.

- (b) Requested UNSD, in collaboration with international and regional agencies and NSOs, to conduct a disciplined review and assessment of social statistics and identify necessary substantive developmental work on international standards. This review and assessment should cover the current state of social statistics, international standards for social statistics, standards for assessing data quality and mechanisms for monitoring conformity to standards.
- (c) Recommended examining the totality of data sources for social statistics, e.g., censuses, surveys and administrative registers, and reviewing common standards, units and classifications necessary across these sources. The expert group also recommended that:
 - The world programme for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses be implemented and that every country conduct a census by 2014;
 - UNSD provide support and guidance to countries preparing/planning to set up, strengthen or use administrative registers and/or administrative files for statistical purposes. Vital statistics should be part of all countries' data systems. With respect to administrative registers, due attention should be given to data quality and the issue of confidentiality;
 - UNSD, the Siena Group and international agencies collaborate with countries to strengthen national capacity to conduct relevant surveys on a sustained and integrated basis, drawing on the experience of those NSOs that have a successful system of multiple surveys including multipurpose as well as specialized surveys;
 - The Siena Group take the lead in developing, documenting and promoting emerging methodologies for integrating the various data sources.
- (d) Requested that UNSD and the Siena Group raise awareness of the relevance of social statistics to policy and the important role that censuses play. The expert group emphasized the need to make social statistics more visible and to promote the use of statistics for policy formulation, planning and monitoring. Strategies to attain this include training policy makers, researchers, students, media, civil society and NGOs on the use of social statistics; and presenting information that would demonstrate the power of statistics for policy formulation. Noting that

UNSD is planning to produce a handbook on dissemination for population and housing censuses, the expert group recommended that in preparing the handbook UNSD incorporate in all relevant chapters the possibilities offered by information and communication technology, for example, on ways of enhancing information products and services on social statistics to fit more appropriately the needs of different users mentioned above.

- (e) Recommended that UNSD and the Siena Group promote international partnership in training in official statistics, in particular social statistics, guided by the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics; and that this be done at both the regional and global levels, stimulating the cooperation among NSOs, national and regional professional training institutions, universities and international and regional statistical agencies.
- (f) Called for the systematic adoption by countries of statistical standards and principles, including the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, and for the development of social statistics to take place within the Fundamental Principles. Adopting standard systems for documenting and improving social statistics such as the IMF's General Data Dissemination System (GDDS) would also help to increase the utility of and public trust in statistics.
- (g) Recommended that UNSD, in collaboration with international and relevant regional agencies, prepare a report documenting the roles and statistical activities of international organizations, as well as existing mechanisms and bodies for inter-agency coordination, in particular with respect to social statistics, with a view to (a) increasing the understanding of social statisticians at national, regional and international levels of the roles and activities of the international organizations, and (b) finding ways to make the existing mechanisms for coordination more effective. The expert group further recommended that results of all inter-agency meetings be forwarded to the new group recommended in para. (i) below, in order that this new group may consider the inter-agency meetings' recommended directions in its work plan.
- (h) Requested that UNSD and other agencies, in collaboration with NSOs, compile a report describing and analysing coordination mechanisms and activities among producers of social statistics at the national level, recognizing different practices and constraints, with a view to documenting good practices for such coordination.
- (i) Based on the experience of the Siena Group and this expert group, and to follow up on the recommendations contained in this report, recommended the establishment of a forum for social statistics where experts from national statistics offices, international and regional agencies and professional training institutions can exchange information on a regular basis. Such a forum would promote better coordination and understanding between NSOs and international organizations. In addition, an electronic format was proposed to facilitate communication among social statisticians.

- (j) In light of the current high priority being given to the MDGs, recommended that UNSD, in consultation with participating agencies, produce a technical report reviewing the standards and quality of underlying national statistics needed for producing the MDG indicators that relate to social conditions, and assessing national capacity to collect and disseminate these statistics, as currently reported to the international statistical community, and that this report be presented to the MDG working group. This work will take into account existing initiatives to assess the quality of underlying national data for MDG indicators.
- (k) Recommended that the expert group meeting to review the Demographic Yearbook in November 2003 consider the recommendations of this meeting with a view to improving the collection, dissemination and integration of demographic and social statistics.
- (l) Invited the Siena Group and other city groups related to social statistics (Washington Group, Rio Group, Delhi Group, etc.) to review at their next meeting their mandate and work plan, taking into account the outcome of this meeting and the recommendation to establish a United Nations forum for social statistics (see para. i).

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on
Setting the Scope of Social Statistics
New York, 6-9 May 2003**

II.

**Proposed Future Actions
(Proposed work programme for social statistics, 2004-2014)**

Proposed work programme for social statistics, 2004-2014
(First draft by the United Nations Statistics Division)

Part One: Coordination

A. Social Statistics Forum (2004)

1. As a follow up to the United Nations *Expert Group meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics*, convened in May 2003 by UNSD in collaboration with the Siena Group, it is proposed that a *Social Statistics Forum* (hereafter referred to as *Forum*) be established. The *Forum* will comprise social statistics experts from national statistics offices, international and regional organizations and professional training institutions. The primary function of the *Forum* is to monitor the international work programme for social statistics. UNSD would provide secretariat service.
2. The *Forum* will meet every two years to review progress and address specific issues in the further development of social statistics. The sharing and exchange of information and ideas among Forum members, facilitated by UNSD, will be maintained throughout the intervening period.
3. It is proposed that the first meeting of the *Forum* take place before the end of 2004.

B. Review of existing coordination mechanisms (2004-2005)

4. A review of existing coordination mechanisms for social statistics at the international level will be carried out by the UNSD, in collaboration with international and regional organizations through the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities (CCSA). In this context, a report will be prepared documenting the roles and statistical activities of international and regional organizations, as well as existing mechanisms and bodies for inter-agency coordination, in particular with respect to social statistics (2004).
5. In addition, a report will be prepared describing and analysing coordination mechanisms and activities among producers of social statistics at the national level, recognizing different practices and constraints, with a view to documenting good practices for such coordination. Countries contributing to this report include Australia, Philippines, South Africa and the United States of America (2004-2005).

C. Social Statistics Website (2004)

6. The Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of UNSD is restructuring its website to better reflect the diverse and interlinked areas covered by social and

demographic statistics. In addition to highlighting the work of the Branch, this website will serve as “home” for social statistics, with active links to the UN specialized agencies responsible for education, labour and employment, health, crime, human settlements, and other areas of social concern. It will also be “home” to the *Forum* and international standards in social statistics (see para. 7).

Part Two: International Standards

A. Compilation of international standards (2004-2005)

7. The UNSD will compile and make available, through the Social and Demographic Statistics website, existing international standards (frameworks, classifications, concepts and definitions) relevant to all areas of social statistics. The *Forum* will determine a set of criteria to be applied in reviewing international standards, including the delineation of relevant areas of social concern and what constitute international standards for this activity. Custodians of international standards will be responsible for reviewing their holdings according to the specified criteria and preparing appropriate web pages to be linked to the international standards page on UNSD’s Social and Demographic Statistics website. The compilation will be reviewed by the *Forum* for relevance to the work of its members. The website will be updated at least twice a year.

8. Printed versions of key standards will be provided upon request to Member States with limited access to the World Wide Web.

B. Outline of further developmental work in social statistics standards (2005-2014)

9. The UNSD, through the *Forum*, will outline further developmental work needed on international standards for social statistics, specifying areas of work, agencies/ organizations that will carry out the work, and an estimate of the timeline for implementation to be provided by the actors concerned. These proposals will be carried to the United Nations Statistics Commission for review every two years as part of the report on Social Statistics.

Part Three: Data Sources

A. Review of the totality of data sources for social statistics (2004-2014)

10. The UNSD and each participating agency/ organization (ILO, UNESCO, WHO) will conduct a review and assessment of the quality and availability of national social statistics in their area of responsibility and competency and convey their findings in a technical report. The review will consider the totality of data sources such as population and housing censuses, population and household surveys and administrative records. It will include an assessment of the ability of countries to regularly produce statistics of reasonable quality, with explanations of standards for assessing data quality. The review

will also cover timeliness of data reporting, conformity to international standards and recommendations, as well as the extent to which units and classifications are harmonized across sources (2004).

11. The Forum will review the technical reports prepared by the organizations and recommend strategies for strengthening social statistics. These recommendations will be submitted to the Statistical Commission (2005).

12. As a subset of the above output, one specific technical report will be prepared that will focus on the basic matrix of national statistics necessary for supporting the production of social indicators to assess Millennium Development Goals (2005).

B. Establish a World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)

13. The *Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics* requested that a *World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)* be established. It is proposed that the *Forum* support the implementation of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses and facilitate the use of censuses for social statistics.

14. The *World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)* would include the following activities in addition to what were already approved by the Statistical Commission at its 33rd and 34th sessions:

- (a) An expert group meeting to review the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1* for relevance to current needs of social statistics and subsequent preparation of a supplementary annex to the *Principles*. (2006-2007) (already approved by SC, E/CN.3/2003/34, para 2a).
- (b) A follow-up to the 2004 *United Nations Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses* organized by UNSD (2008).

C. Strengthen the development and utilization of national administrative records for statistical purposes (2005-2014)

15. Strengthening the development and utilization of national administrative systems for social statistics, with specific attention to civil registration systems for vital statistics, population registers and other administrative records. Activities in this area will be implemented as part of an integrated set of activities with the *World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)*. Strengthening administrative systems will also be addressed as part of the *Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses* review that will consider alternative designs for the collection and compilation of social and demographic statistics (2004-2014).

16. UNSD will continue to provide, on an ad hoc basis, technical assistance to countries to support and strengthen national civil registration and other administrative

recording systems for use in the production of population, vital and other social statistics (2004-2014).

17. United Nations expert group meetings and international workshops proposed:
 - (a) Three international workshops and expert groups on strengthening vital statistics and civil registration systems (2005-2014);
 - (b) Three international workshops on an integrated approach to the production of fertility and mortality statistics through use of civil registers, population censuses and surveys (2005-2014);
 - (c) Three international workshops on the development of international migration statistics through use of administrative records, population censuses and surveys (2005-2014);
 - (d) Expert Group meeting to review the handbook on methodology and evaluation of population registers and similar systems (2006).

18. Guidelines on the use of administrative records for statistical purposes will be developed. Proposed new handbooks:
 - (a) Handbook on methodology and evaluation of population registers and similar systems (2007)
 - (b) Handbook on creating record linkages and multi-domain micro-databases (ask Siena Group and Statistics Denmark, 2007)

D. Strengthen national capacity to conduct surveys in a sustained and integrated manner (2005-2014)

19. Strengthening national capacity to conduct surveys on a sustained basis will be implemented as part of an integrated set of activities of the proposed *World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)*. The *Forum* will support countries in planning and conducting surveys as part of a sustainable and integrated statistical programme that encompasses censuses, administrative records and surveys. Training seminars and workshops on surveys will include promoting the harmonization, integration and complementary use of surveys with other sources of data.

Proposed expert group meetings and workshops:

- (a) Workshop on planning multipurpose surveys (UNSD/ Canada (2007)
- (b) Workshop on methodologies for integrating various data sources for social statistics (Sienna Group/ 2006)
- (c) Workshop on controlling errors in sample surveys (2006)
- (d) Workshop on disability measurement and planning of data collection (UNSD/ Washington Group, 2004)
- (e) UN Expert Group meeting to review population and housing censuses and their use for the production of housing and human settlements statistics (2007)

20. Proposed technical reports and handbooks:
- (a) Handbook on Designing Household Sample Surveys (UNSD, 2004, already approved by SC)
 - (b) Technical report on emerging methodologies for integrating various data sources for social statistics (Siena Group, 2006)
 - (c) Handbook on multipurpose surveys (Statistics Canada, 2006)

Part Four: Promoting the use of social statistics

A. Maximize the utilization of social statistics for policy formulation, planning and monitoring (2004-2014)

21. Based on the recommendations of the *Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics*, and on the conclusions and recommendations of the *Expert Group Meeting to Review the Demographic Yearbook*, the UNSD is strengthening its Demographic Yearbook Database System to better respond to the increasing demand for social statistics, at the same time expanding its user base by making its outputs more relevant and accessible to a wide range of users. (The Reports of the two Expert Groups are available as Background Documents to the upcoming 35th session of the Statistical Commission, and the recommendations are provided as Annexes to this report).

- (a) UNSD will prepare the next report on the *World's Women 2005* in a format and language accessible to policy makers, planners, researchers and advocates. The 2005 edition will be based on the reporting of national statistical authorities to the *United Nations Demographic Yearbook (DYB)*; national population policies compiled by the United Nations Population Division; the reports of *States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women* and other authoritative national reports provided to the Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and national data collected by United Nations agencies such as UNESCO, ILO, WHO, UNAIDS and UNICEF as well as other members of the Secretariat (2005).
- (b) Some topics in social statistics that are not hitherto included in the *Demographic Yearbook* will be incorporated in the future, starting with disability statistics (already approved by the SC) in 2004 and housing statistics in 2005.
- (c) UNSD will prepare technical reports on national capacity to report through the DYB database system:
 - on the metadata of social statistics (2005)
 - on data pertaining to housing, households and living arrangements (2007)
 - on data pertaining to urbanization, cities and urban areas (2008)

22. UNSD and international organizations will promote the provision and dissemination of metadata on the three major data sources of social statistics cited in this

report and the adoption of dissemination standards such as the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) *General Data Dissemination System (GDDS)*. Through a regular review process, including the conducting of one Expert Group meeting and two international workshops, UNSD will review and revise as necessary the *Demographic Yearbook* metadata system so that it complements and supports the work of IMF and the World Bank on *GDDS* while improving the general understanding of data quality. In this context, UNSD will enjoin countries to provide the requisite metadata with their statistical data in a harmonized way (2004-2014).

Proposed meetings and workshops:

- (a) UN Expert Group to review the *Demographic Yearbook* collection of metadata on population and housing censuses, administrative registers and population and household surveys, for monitoring and assessing the quality and timeliness of social statistics (2005)
- (b) Two international workshops to review national metadata systems used to describe the quality and timeliness of social statistics produced through population and housing censuses, surveys and administrative registers. (UNSD, World Bank, IMF; 2006, 2007)

B. Raise awareness and promote international partnership in training in official statistics (2005-2006)

23. The training partnership proposed will raise awareness of the use of social statistics and information for policy, and encourage the adoption by countries of internationally agreed statistical standards and principles including the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* and the *GDDS*. Two expert group meetings will be conducted by UNSD to support the initiative to strengthen user-producer relationships in social statistics:

- (a) International workshop to consider the role of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* in the planning of social statistics for governmental initiatives and services (2006);
- (b) Expert Group Meeting to review the use of the *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics* as a foundation for the implementation of censuses, surveys and administrative registers and the use of internationally agreed principles and guidelines in preparing statistics for social policy (2005).