

Expert Group Meeting to Review the United Nations Demographic Yearbook System



Date:	10-14 November 2003
Venue:	New York
Host:	United Nations Statistics Division
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The *United Nations Demographic Yearbook (DYB)* is the authoritative source of official national statistics on population size, distribution and composition, vital events and international migration. Since 1948, through questionnaires administered to national statistical authorities, these official demographic statistics are collected, compiled, processed and stored in a database by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The main outputs are the regular and special issues of the DYB¹.

Significant changes have occurred in national and international approaches to the collection and dissemination of statistical information. For example, there is a rapidly increasing demand for timely, valid, and reliable statistics by a wide range of interested users in order to address newly emerging population policy concerns and for purposes of decision-making at all levels of government, and for purposes of research and public education. Second, concepts, methods, and classifications of demographic and social variables have been revised by the international community and are now being implemented by statistical systems, worldwide. These amendments to the system must be fully incorporated into the international data collection and dissemination instruments. Third, new approaches to information technology have radically affected the ways in which national and international statistical offices collect and exchange data. The speed at which data are expected to be available has been radically altered. In order to address these demands for timely and flexible sets of demographic statistics, the UNSD is initiating a set of activities designed to update the practices of the DYB system. The goal is to ensure that the official national population statistics reported to the United Nations through the Demographic Yearbook system remain comprehensive, relevant, timely, and readily accessible to interested Member States, researchers, libraries and the public at large.

Purpose of the meeting

The UNSD is conducting an Expert Group Meeting to review the DYB system and to propose necessary changes to: the current collection and dissemination of statistics based on a review of the level and breadth of responses obtained from member states, their trends over time; and the effectiveness of the current collection and dissemination strategy. On the basis of this review, the Experts will recommend actions to be taken to improve the content and coverage of data collection, and for enhancing the *DYB* and related outputs in content and form.

Key issues to be addressed

1. Data collection

As the demand for more timely and policy relevant statistics rapidly grows, a data collection system of the magnitude of the DYB's has to balance the needs of users with practical considerations such as the need for parsimony. Some of the issues include:

¹ For a description of DYB products, please see box on reverse page.

- *Relevancy of the variables*: Are the variables on which data are being collected relevant? Do they adequately reflect issues pertinent to monitoring demographic and social change? Is there a need to include additional variables?
- *Content of questionnaires*: Is the content of the questionnaires, including concepts, definitions and classifications clear enough for countries to follow?
- *Coordination of questionnaires*: How well are DYB questionnaires coordinated with national, regional (e.g., regional commissions, Eurostat) and other international (ILO, WHO, UNESCO, etc.) data collection practices?
- *Metadata*: How should the collection and presentation of metadata be enhanced?

2. Coverage and completeness

The level and quality of country responses are the result of interplay between the modalities of data collection, such as the design of the questionnaires, medium, and timing, and the capacity of countries to provide the requisite data.

- *Response rates*: What are the trends in response rates by Member States and how could they be increased?
- *Questionnaire format*: How do the language, format and structures of the questionnaires influence response rates? What physical format is most suitable for questionnaires (electronic spreadsheets, hardcopy, using file transfer protocol (FTP))?
- *Engaging respondents*: What are the barriers to more efficient transfer of data from countries to the United Nations? How can a more responsive network of national statistical authorities be fostered?

3. Data dissemination – meeting users’ needs

Users vary with respect to their topics of interest and levels of technical knowledge and expertise. 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 access and use of the data that the DYB system generates:

- *Current status*: How effective are the current products in meeting the emerging needs in demographic and social statistics and of addressing the needs of target audiences? What features of the products, such as, content, format, layout, need to be altered?
- *Contents*: Is the DYB presenting any statistical series or meta-data that are not needed and is it not presenting those that it should?
- *Periodicity*: What would be an ideal periodicity and timing of the dissemination of topics/statistical series, in both the regular and special issues, and the outputs?
- *Dissemination vehicles*: What are some examples of effective products? What are DYB’s priorities in developing efficient dissemination instruments?

4. Future work programme

The Expert Group Meeting will consider future work on the collection and dissemination of demographic data and social data make recommendations on:

- (a) Ways to increase the efficacy of the DYB system.
- (b) Proposals put forward for the *DYB Review and Development Plan 2003-2015* - a set of actions and activities being prepared by UNSD for maintaining and improving the *Demographic Yearbook*.

Summary of the DYB products:

- 1) Regular, annual issue of the *Demographic Yearbook*, in hardcopy.
- 2) Regular issues of the *Special Topic Demographic Yearbook on CD*.
- 3) Regular quarterly *Population and Vital Statistics Report*, in both hardcopy and on the Internet.
- 4) Internet presentation on population of major cities, at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/citydata/>.
- 5) Special technical reports on ad-hoc basis.