

## ***United Nations Expert Group Meeting*** **Setting the Scope of Social Statistics**

Date: **6-9 May 2003** Place: **New York**  
Host: **United Nations Statistics Division**  
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The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in collaboration with the Siena Group, is organizing an expert group meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics in New York on 6-9 May 2003. The purpose of the meeting and the key issues to be taken up are presented briefly below.

### **Purpose of the meeting**

The 2000 Millennium Summit<sup>1</sup> and International Conferences<sup>2</sup> held in the 1990's clearly and explicitly emphasized the importance of social development. Sound statistics and information play a key role in monitoring and evaluating the impact of social policies. The increasing demand for policy-relevant statistics on an ever-growing number of social issues calls for an integrated approach to social statistics that recognizes the links among the various areas of social concern. Despite the demand from national and international fora, however, progress in social statistics has been lagging. Social statistics are often produced in an ad hoc manner, without a clear strategy or programme of work. Coordination among producers of social statistics at both the national and international level is still insufficient, resulting in inconsistent statistics and under-utilisation of data. Furthermore the needs of stakeholders are not always adequately met in terms of timeliness and relevance.

In this context, the United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with the Siena Group, is convening an expert group to address these challenges and develop a concrete strategy on how to move forward. The meeting will review current practices in social statistics and examine possible solutions to improve their effectiveness. The importance of developing mechanisms to better coordinate programmes in social statistics at the national, regional and international level will also be addressed. The expert group will propose a programme of work for furthering the development of social statistics, with a view to presenting it to the Statistical Commission for action.

### **Key issues**

The expert group will focus on the following key issues:

#### **1. The current state of social statistics**

Existing programmes in social statistics reflect great differences in terms of objectives, organisation and coverage.

- What is the scope of social statistics? What areas of social concern are currently being covered in social statistics? What statistics are collected in relation to these areas? How do new or emerging issues fit into the current scope?

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.un.org/millennium/summit.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> For example The International Conference on Population and Development 1994, The World Summit for Social Development 1995, The Fourth World Conference on Women, etc. For a list of all conferences see <http://www.un.org/events/conferences.htm>.

- How are social statistics programmes organized at the national, regional and international level?
- What offices are responsible for collecting and disseminating various types of social statistics? How are these different statistical activities coordinated?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure the full participation of stakeholders?

## 2. Proposed strategies and approaches

The successful implementation of a social statistics programme requires certain operational considerations. For example:

- *Statistical capacity*: What is the minimum statistical capacity necessary for a successful programme in social statistics?
- *Statistical coordination*: What institutional arrangements and division of responsibilities are required? What should the coordination mechanisms be at the local, national, regional and international levels?
- *Producer/user collaboration*: What are the mechanisms for effectively engaging producers and users of social statistics in a dialogue to improve the quality of social statistics?
- *Harmonization of concepts, definitions, methods and standards*: What are the trade-offs between ensuring comparability and maintaining relevance? How can a balance be established?

What strategies and approaches should be adopted in relation to these challenges?

## 3. Defining a programme of work for social statistics

What actions are required to further the development of social statistics?

- How would the following contribute to the above goal:
  - a world programme for social statistics
  - an overall structure or framework for social statistics
  - a set of technical and/or operational guidelines (if so, on what specifically?)
- Who should be involved? How should responsibilities be divided?
- What commitments are agencies and countries prepared to make?
- What role should UNSD and other international agencies play in this process?
- What is the time frame (overall and intermediate)? What are the desired outputs?
- What resources are needed?