

**Expert Group Meeting on
Setting the Scope of Social Statistics**

United Nations Statistics Division

in collaboration with the Siena Group on Social Statistics

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Social Statistics produced by the U.S. Federal Statistical System *

by

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* This document is being issued without formal editing.

** Office of Management and Budget, Bureau of the Census, National Center for Health Statistics respectively. The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat, the Office of Management and Budget, the Bureau of the Census, or the National Center for Health Statistics.

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The stated purpose of the Expert Group Meeting: Setting the Scope of Social Statistics meeting is to develop a strategy for the systematic development of social statistics. Conference organizers asked participants to develop a brief note touching on one of five issues. We have selected >statistical coordination among various producers of social statistics= as our topic.

How is the U.S. Federal statistical system organized?

The United States is one of a small number of countries that have highly decentralized national statistical systems with statistics being produced by various subject matter agencies. Ten principal Federal statistical agencies, plus sixty other agencies or organizational units within agencies, collect statistical information, often in concert with program administration or regulatory functions. Because the statutory authority for producing statistics resides in the various agencies, statistical coordination among the various producers of social statistics is critically important for the efficient production of social data.

In this context, the role of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget=s (OMB) Statistical and Science Policy Office is to carry out the statistical policy coordination functions set forth in the Paperwork Reduction Act. The staff provides critical methodological expertise, support, and advice to other governmental units; oversees and reviews information collection requests, budget proposals, and agency operations; and coordinates participation of the agencies in international statistical standards development.

The Statistical and Science Policy Office staff identifies priorities for improving Federal statistical programs, establishes Government-wide statistical policies and standards, and evaluates statistical programs for compliance with OMB guidance. The Office also works to ensure that high priority statistical programs are adequately funded. In performing these functions, the staff attempts to conform the inherent tensions among the objectives of increasing the efficient use of scarce fiscal resources; improving the relevance and quality of Federal statistics; protecting the integrity of statistical information products; respecting pledges of confidentiality; and minimizing the reporting burden on the public. When making these trade-offs, the Statistical and Science Policy Office strives to ensure that statistical surveys and studies sponsored by Federal agencies are as reliable and useful as possible and that statistical activities are carried out in a manner that earns the confidence of those who use Federal statistics, those who participate in federally-sponsored surveys, and those who are affected by actions of the Federal Government that are based on statistics.

Major statistical programs differ in organizational structure and in the means by which they are funded. Some statistical programs, such as health statistics, are carried out by agencies (such as the National Center for Health Statistics) whose sole missions are statistical; these organizations are referred to as principal statistical agencies. In other cases, agencies have statistical programs that support their program planning and evaluation functions or that are an outgrowth of their administrative responsibilities. In addition, a statistical program is not always executed by the agency that sponsors it. In these instances, the work is done on a reimbursable basis by another Federal agency or by a state or local government or a private organization under contract.

How are the various activities of statistical agencies coordinated?

OMB's Statistical and Science Policy Office plays a central role in facilitating the coordination of the United States' diverse statistical programs and agencies. The Office accomplishes this coordination function largely through the following six activities:

- § ensuring the integrity and quality of Federal Government statistical activities through the development and issuance of Government-wide policies, standards, and classifications for statistical data collection, analysis, and dissemination. Perhaps most significant are the North American Industry Classification System (developed in collaboration with Canada and Mexico), the Standard Occupational Classification System, the Standards for Defining Metropolitan and Micropolitan Areas, and the Standards for Classification of Data on Race and Ethnicity;
- § coordinating and overseeing statistical agency surveys and publications to ensure that the performance measures that the Nation depends on for demographic, economic, and social decision-making provide relevant, accurate, and timely information;
- § reviewing budget submissions of statistical agencies to ensure that the budget proposals reflect Administration statistical priorities and planned long-term improvements;
- § supporting review of statistical surveys and studies submitted to OMB for approval under the Paperwork Reduction Act;
- § providing leadership to improve statistical methodology, and working directly with agencies to bring about long-term improvements in statistical programs; and,
- § coordinating the Federal Government's participation in international statistical activities.

What strategies are used to enhance communication and sharing of information among the various agencies that produce statistics?

To enhance communication within this decentralized system and to highlight critical program

improvements, the Statistical and Science Policy Office prepares each year a chapter on Strengthening Federal Statistics that is included in the President's Budget submission to the Congress. In addition, the Office annually prepares for the Congress Statistical Programs of the United States Government, a report on the statistical work of more than seventy Federal agencies that have budgets of \$500,000 or more for statistical activities. Also, the Office has been instrumental in facilitating one-stop shopping for Federal statistics through an Internet site called *FedStats* (www.fedstats.gov) that permits easy access via an initial point of entry to the wide array of statistical information available to the public from more than one hundred Federal agencies.

The Chief Statistician of the United States directs the work of the Statistical and Science Policy Office and chairs the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy. This council is a vehicle for the heads of the principal statistical agencies to discuss topics of mutual interest, improve system-wide coordination, provide counsel to the OMB, and leverage the experience and resources of the member agencies. Additionally, a staff member of the Statistical and Science Policy Office chairs the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, a group of more than twenty senior statisticians from agencies across the Federal Government who prepare in-depth working papers on methodological topics that bear on the quality and efficiency of the Federal Government's statistical work. Finally, there are many interagency committees, task forces, and working groups that offer opportunities for agencies to collaborate and consult on a variety of common issues.

What are the core social statistics produced by the U.S. Federal statistical system?

U. S. Federal statistical programs are designed to inform the electorate and to provide relevant, accurate, and timely information for private and public decision-makers. While the U.S. Federal statistical system does not produce a single report or publication focused exclusively on an agreed-upon set of social statistics, a quick look at various websites and publications reveals a common set of measures. The following are several examples that suggest agreement on core social statistics:

§ The White House website has a section entitled Latest Federal Government Statistics (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/fsbr.html>). Within that website are two briefing rooms—the Economic Statistics Briefing Room and the Social Statistics Briefing Room. All of the information included in the Social Statistics Briefing Room is maintained and updated by the statistical units of those agencies whose data are featured. Crime, demography, education, and health are the four key areas included in this briefing room.

§ Statistical Programs of the United States, Fiscal Year 2003 contains a chapter on Programs and Program Changes. Within that chapter, there are four sections: (1) Health and Safety Statistics; (2) Social and Demographic Statistics; (3) Natural Resources, Energy, and Environment Statistics; and (4) Economic Statistics. The Social and Demographic Statistics section provides information on over thirty different agencies that produce demographic statistics, crime and justice statistics, education statistics, and

transportation statistics. While Health and Safety Statistics are described separately in this report, they are widely regarded as a central part of the core set of social statistics.

§ Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2002 does not have one section entitled Social Statistics. It does, however, have five sections covering social statistics. They are population; vital statistics; health and nutrition; education; and law enforcement, courts, and prisons.

How does the U.S. Federal statistical system address emerging issues or new areas of interest within social statistics?

Individual agencies identify new areas of interest and demand, and take the initiative to implement new surveys that will produce needed social statistics. However, the development of a major statistical program that will affect the Federal statistical system or its infrastructure is usually accomplished through the active involvement of the data collection agency in collaboration with the Statistical and Science Policy Office and the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy. The following two examples illustrate recent efforts to identify and collaborate on new initiatives to improve the performance of the Federal statistical system in the area of social and demographic statistics.

1. In 2003, the Bureau of Labor Statistics is continuing its work to inaugurate the new American Time Use Survey to measure how Americans spend their time at work, fulfilling family responsibilities, and at leisure. Currently, there is no ongoing nationally representative survey of time use in the United States. Occasional surveys in the past have not provided the breadth of information on demographic, labor force, and social characteristics of individuals that the American Time Use Survey will provide beginning in 2004. This survey will permit a broader assessment of national production and national well-being than is presently possible, as well as comparisons across demographic groups. The American Time Use Survey will contribute to knowledge in many areas, such as time spent caring for the young and the old, house cleaning, home repair, shopping, and skills acquisition, as well as multitasking and variations in time use between single-parent and two-parent families. The availability of national time use data also will facilitate comparisons of time use patterns in the United States with patterns in other countries, as well as comparisons of augmented measures of national output that account for home production.

2. The American Community Survey has been developed to provide timely annual information about the economic, demographic, and housing characteristics of the U.S. population to Federal, state, and local decision makers. The American Community Survey began in 1996 in four sites and was expanded in 1999 to thirty-one sites. With continued Congressional support, the American Community Survey is scheduled to be implemented nationwide in 2004. When fully implemented, profiles of key social, housing, and economic data will be provided every year for communities with populations greater than 65,000. Ultimately, all communities for which the decennial census long form traditionally has produced data—even those with populations less than 20,000—will have profiles based on multi-year estimates that will be updated every year.

The American Community Survey is expected to eliminate the need for the long form in the 2010 Census (the current source for this detailed information), thereby focusing that effort solely on counting the population. This will move the traditional "once every ten years" collection of key social, housing, and economic statistics to a continuous activity providing current data every year.

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