

## STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CO-ORDINATION OF STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
AND THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES: SECOND REPORT

(Memorandum prepared by the Secretariat for consideration  
under Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda)

1. This is the second report prepared by the Secretariat in accordance with a request of the Economic and Social Council on 29 March 1947 (E/409) that periodic reports be made to the Statistical Commission on progress achieved in developing administrative instruments, procedures, and agreements through which effective statistical co-ordination may be secured between the United Nations and the Agencies brought into relationship with it through formal agreements or otherwise.
2. The first periodic report (E/CN.3/28) to which this is a supplement, was made to the Second Session of the Statistical Commission 28 August to 5 September 1947.

## I. CLEARANCE OF QUESTIONNAIRES

3. In considering the first report the Commission urged (E/577) that the Secretariat arrange to receive from Specialized Agencies a draft of each statistical questionnaire prepared by any of them (including organs of the United Nations) and circulate the drafts for comments. The Commission also urged that such circularization should be done, as far as practicable, before the despatch of the questionnaire to Governments. This procedure was designed to supplement an arrangement adopted by the Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters for the exchange of questionnaires after issuance.
4. In accordance with the request of the Statistical Commission the Secretariat has arranged for the circularization of draft questionnaires in advance of issuance after referring the subject to the Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters. The Committee agreed at its meeting on 21 November 1947 to the following procedures and definitions:

Definitions

"Statistical questionnaires should for this purpose be defined to include both recurring and non-recurring requests for data, and questionnaires relating to statistical methods as well as

questionnaires calling for actual figures. It is understood that a request addressed to a number of countries, or a formally devised questionnaire in the ordinary meaning of the word, should be included. The originating agency may, however, exclude from this procedure for the advance circulation of draft questionnaires:

- (a) any single-time questionnaire limited to a field of statistics in which other agencies are believed to have no substantial interest;
- (b) any questionnaire of a general character which is primarily non-statistical but contains a limited number of statistical questions.

#### Procedures

- (a) Copies of draft questionnaires including such relevant materials as a statement of the essential purpose of the questionnaire, the frequency of its use, instructions for filling in the questions, and the list of governments to which it is to be sent should be addressed to the Statistical Office of the United Nations with a note indicating the time schedule proposed for the completion of the final text of the questionnaire and its date of issue.
- (b) The draft, instructions, etc., with a form letter stating the proposed circulation, periodicity and other pertinent information will be dispatched by the Statistical Office to the members of the Consultative Committee noting the deadline for comments.
- (c) Each agency which has comments to offer on the draft will transmit such comments as rapidly as possible to the originating agency and will send a copy at the same time to the Statistical Office of the United Nations.
- (d) The final text of the questionnaire will be sent to the Statistical Office for circulation under the procedure agreed upon at the second meeting of the Consultative Committee. (25 April 1947)".

5. Under these arrangements about forty questionnaires were circulated during the first four months after the adoption of the procedure. It may be reported that some benefits have accrued to various agencies but it is probable that the full benefits may not yet have been realized.

6. Note is made of the geographical dispersion of the international agencies and the resultant difficulties involved in the time required for the receipt of questionnaires and for the preparation and transmittal of comments. Several agencies have stated that insufficient time was being allowed.

7. The lack of sufficient time for comments, if not corrected, may vitiate many of the purposes of the clearance arrangement. While modest amounts of time may be saved by experience gained in mechanics of transmittal and routing, such improvements in themselves can not be expected to provide the additional time apparently needed. The Commission may therefore wish to emphasize the desirability of urging all international agencies to supply advance drafts of statistical questionnaires at the earliest possible date even though final drafts for the investigation may not have been made or approved by the originating agency,\* it being understood that the originating agency must reserve the right to make subsequent changes. Such changes, however, especially if of a substantive nature, should be called to the attention of the United Nations Statistical Office for handling through the usual channels.

8. In this connection the Commission may also wish to suggest that in a case where a statistical investigation (either a programme for statistics or the questionnaire) is actually drawn up by a formal or informal committee or conference that the time, place, and purpose of the meeting be made known to the Statistical Office as early as possible in order that any interested agency may be invited to participate.

## II. EXAMINATION OF STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

9. Attention is again drawn to the fact that the statistical needs and programmes of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies are not yet fully expressed; moreover it is not possible in many instances to anticipate at any given time all the requirements for statistics which may confront an agency. This is particularly true when statistics are of an "operating" character and when the governing bodies may have requested special statistics in connection with new resolutions and decisions.

10. In the long run, however, ad hoc and specialized collections of statistics are not satisfactory substitutes for systematically collected statistics based on a careful and realistic evaluation of the needs of international agencies which takes account of the capacities of internal statistical systems of Governments.

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\* The representative of ILO at the Second Meeting of the Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters suggested that agencies might submit a list of all questionnaires in the course of preparation in cases where there might be some delay in the circularization of the actual text. It was agreed that in the case of information outside their own fields agencies should either check with the Specialized Agency within whose field such data fell, or with the United Nations, before sending out requests for information.

11. The Statistical Commission therefore may wish to recommend that each Specialized Agency and each organ of the United Nations re-examine its present and prospective needs for statistics in all fields of direct or indirect interest to it, (and continue the joint examinations which have been undertaken so far) as a basis for the further development of regularly collected statistics. These needs might be made known to the Statistical Office which, through mechanisms for consultation already available to it, or in other appropriate ways, could arrange or assist in arranging for the collection of the necessary statistics.

12. The objective of this programme would be that the monthly, quarterly, and annual publications of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies include, as far as practicable, all the statistical series needed for the conduct of international affairs. A re-examination and a synthesis of needs for recurring statistics would have the further advantage of making it less likely that national central statistical offices would be subjected to as many ad hoc requests for statistics as they have been subjected to in the past. Moreover, this activity, in defining long-term statistical goals, would facilitate the concurrent development of national and international statistics and would complement the work being undertaken by various Committees and working groups of the several agencies.

### III. DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COLLECTION OF STATISTICS

13. It will not be necessary to repeat in this report the general arrangements for the collection of statistics recorded in the initial report (E/CN.3/28) on this matter. It will be necessary only to note new arrangements or adaptations of earlier arrangements. In general, the distribution of responsibilities is well understood and in most cases arrangements for collection have operated effectively. It should be noted, however, that in some instances mechanisms for the regular collection of statistics from Governments have not been developed or tested so that now it may be too early to evaluate the decentralized system of collection in all its ramifications. It is likewise difficult to know with certainty whether all national statistical offices will find the system suited to their practices and concepts in view of the fact that each international agency has tended to develop its own special correspondents in the various countries.

14. The Statistical Commission may wish to take the opportunity, as a precautionary measure in order that Governments be fully informed about the responsibilities of international agencies and about their own obligations in respect to these responsibilities, to urge each international collecting agency to take unusual care that no possible confusion is allowed

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to arise in its correspondence with Governments as to the responsibilities which the agency has. It might be explicitly stated in communications, for example, that Agency A is acting as a collecting agency on behalf of Agency B in a particular field of statistics, as well as on its own behalf, if such is the case. Ideally both agencies should send agreed-upon letters to Governments simultaneously. This would be an especially desirable procedure in the many instances where national statistical services are not completely centralized and where the absence of complete information about arrangements for the collection of statistics may cause unnecessary confusion, difficulties, and delays in the regular transmittal of necessary statistics.

15. The International Labour Office

In addition to arrangements already recorded in the earlier document (see paragraph 10 thereof) the Statistical Office and the International Labour Office have discussed the character of existing statistics and activity in relation to international migration statistics and future plans for work in this field. These discussions were precipitated as a result of the interest of the Social Commission of the Economic and Social Council in migration problems and policies (E/CN.5/40). Discussions have also occurred on the subject of certain types of social insurance statistics in connection with plans for the United Nations Statistical Yearbook. It is understood that the ILO is actively preparing to collect national data for important series of social insurance statistics.

16. The International Civil Aviation Organization

As from 1 January 1948 arrangements for the transfer from the Statistical Office to ICAO of the responsibility for the collection of statistics on the volume of civil air transport became effective. This removed a small element of duplication previously existing. In August 1947 the Statistical Office began the collection of monthly statistics on total civil air transport (with appropriate sub-divisions) because at that time ICAO was not prepared to undertake the work. Nevertheless, ICAO advised continuously upon the work to be undertaken by the United Nations and provided the definitions upon which the United Nations reporting system was based. In December 1947 and January 1948 both organizations advised Governments that responsibility for this work was being transferred and the Statistical Office turned over copies of all its records and correspondence on this subject to the Statistics Unit of the Economic Analysis and Statistics Section of ICAO.

17. The International Monetary Fund

Since the initial periodic report on co-ordination, working relationships on statistical matters between the United Nations and the Fund have been

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advanced to an operating stage with the advent of the Fund's monthly publication International Financial Statistics since January 1948. The Fund is now providing current figures for the United Nations Monthly Bulletin of Statistics on foreign exchange reserves, gold reserves, and exchange rates. Negotiations have been completed for the Fund to provide monthly figures on note circulation and deposits in commercial banks. On the other hand, the Statistical Office is supplying monthly figures to the Fund on industrial production, industrial share prices, wholesale prices, and external trade (value, volume and price). Correspondents have been notified of the new arrangement.

In addition, the two organizations have collaborated in achieving greater comparability and precision in the value figures of external trade and as a result of their collaboration the Statistical Office, as the collecting agency in this field of statistics, has requested Governments to provide fuller explanations of existing series and to supply certain additional monthly figures. Similar work is proceeding in connection with export and import price indexes with a view to clarifying matters of comparability in this field.

18. Prospective arrangements for the collection of balance of payments statistics have been previously reported. The annual questionnaire has now been sent to Governments by the Fund after extensive conferences were held with various representatives of Governments and international agencies. The United Nations participated fully in this work and it is expected that the results of the questionnaire, when they become available, will serve the purposes of the United Nations as well as of the Fund. The Statistical Commission will recall that it requested the Secretary-General, through the Economic and Social Council, to "consult with the International Monetary Fund and other interested inter-governmental agencies with a view to developing standards of reporting data in the field of balances of payments". (E/403). It is considered that this obligation has been discharged as far as matters have now developed. It is possible that the initial results of the Fund questionnaire may call for a review of the decisions previously reached and it is certain that periodic review, in the light of changing needs and concepts, will be required. The Statistical Commission will be informed, as occasion requires, of further developments in this field of statistics.

19. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

As previously reported, the Bank is not expecting to act as a primary collecting agent for statistics in the ordinary sense of the term. The Bank will make analytical use of a wide range of economic statistics collected

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by other international agencies and will, of course, receive detailed statistics and financial information directly from countries which are submitting loan applications. Such statistics would not be considered as generally available for publication or as suitable for the use of other agencies; consequently elements of duplication encountered here cannot easily be considered subject to the general arrangements for the collection of statistics which prevail among most other agencies. Moreover, it is not likely that the Bank will undertake any recurrent publication of statistics. Nevertheless, the Bank is a very important user of current economic statistics obtained in the first instance by the United Nations and by Specialized Agencies. These include certain financial series collected directly by the Fund and series on production, prices, external trade, national income, and population collected by the United Nations. The Statistical Office is giving every possible attention in planning its work programme to the particular needs of the Bank, especially in the field of national income statistics.

20. The Food and Agriculture Organization

The Food and Agriculture Organization has collaborated extensively with the United Nations in providing special tables from time to time for the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics and the Statistical Office is prepared to provide a number of economic series for the monthly statistical publication under consideration by FAO. FAO provided some statistics for use in the special newsprint survey conducted by the Statistical Office on behalf of the Department of Social Affairs, and in future will provide quarterly\* and annual series on forest products. Similarly, it will be responsible for the general field of fishery statistics. FAO and ILO are working out arrangements whereby FAO receives from ILO current index numbers for the food component of retail price indexes. Similar arrangements concerning data on agricultural employment and on agricultural wage rates are under discussion between these two agencies.

21. FAO and the Statistical Office are now reviewing the tables on agriculture and food published in the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics with a view to selecting the most generally useful tables for monthly publication and with the purpose of making different arrangements for the collection of statistics. It is expected that this examination will result in a considerable revision in the content of the tables now published and in shifting certain collection responsibilities from the United Nations to the FAO.

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\* The quarterly survey of timber statistics covering European countries, Canada, and the United States is conducted jointly by the FAO and the Economic Commission for Europe.

22. It is expected also that the FAO will make generous contributions to the Statistical Yearbook being prepared by the Statistical Office both in selecting the tables to be published and in providing the statistics.

23. The Statistical Office is supplying a considerable quantity of statistics to FAO, especially population and national income statistics and it is prepared to give special attention to FAO's needs for statistics on income to agriculture.

24. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Statistical relationships between UNESCO and the United Nations have not progressed as far or as rapidly as they have in other instances principally because the dimensions of the statistical programme of UNESCO have not been finally determined and the interests of the United Nations in the fields covered by UNESCO are still under consideration. Several discussions on the nature of co-operation between the two agencies have been held, however, and a UNESCO statistical officer spent several weeks in the Statistical Office of the United Nations studying the work in process and its relationship to the UNESCO programme. Responsibility for statistical work in UNESCO has recently been centralized. UNESCO representatives have participated actively in meetings of the Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters and have contributed a number of important suggestions respecting questionnaires involved in the clearance process.

25. World Health Organization - Interim Commission

Tentative arrangements have been made between the World Health Organization and the Statistical Office whereby the latter will supply certain data for the Annual Epidemiological Report to avoid the necessity of sending duplicating requests to Governments. These statistics include total population, deaths, births and infant mortality classified by age and sex for various designated geographic areas. These statistics will appear also in Demographic Yearbook and are now being collected. The WHO will supply various tables on health statistics for the Statistical Yearbook and for other purposes of the United Nations.

26. Other International Organizations

Definite arrangements have not yet been made with the Universal Postal Union, the International Telecommunications Union, and the International Refugee Organization although some papers have been exchanged and the Statistical Office will shortly request the assistance of these organizations in compiling materials for the Statistical Yearbook. It is not expected that any substantial difficulties will be involved in working out any necessary arrangements.



27. The Statistical Office has engaged in several discussions with representatives of the newly created Interim Commission of the International Trade Organization. Previously, the Office had prepared extensive tables on national income, population, and total external trade for a very large number of countries in connection with discussions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Employment at Havana. Careful attention was given to the statistical chapter in the ITO Charter with a view to adapting it more generally to the functions and responsibilities of various international agencies. While no important modifications of language were made in the final stages of the Conference, interpretations were agreed to which ultimately may provide for close collaboration on statistics and for mutual recognition of statistical responsibilities. Present arrangements provide that the Statistical Office of United Nations will be responsible for the statistics needed by the Interim Commission.

28. Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters

The Consultative Committee on Statistical Matters has had two meetings since the Second Session of the Statistical Commission. In addition to the development of procedures for the clearance of questionnaires and the integration of yearbooks the Committee has continued its examination of various matters dealing with technical statistical practices. These include definitions of continental areas, terminology for currency units (prepared by the International Monetary Fund), and editorial symbols. It has discussed various plans for the training of statistical personnel, in particular in relation to the use of technical missions in the field as centres for training.

29. Co-ordination within the Secretariat

It was previously reported that procedures existed for the co-ordination of statistical needs within the United Nations Secretariat. These procedures have continued to operate and the Statistical Office has conducted several statistical inquiries on behalf of other parts of the Secretariat and has continued to conduct, for special purposes statistical research resulting in analyses or tabulations of available material. In these senses, therefore, the Statistical Office is functioning as the central statistical unit of the organization. It is hoped that the steadily increasing volume of regularly collected and published statistics will serve many purposes hitherto requiring special research and investigation. Special undertakings have occupied no small amount of staff time, and, because no specific budgetary provision can be made for them, they must be fitted into the normal work load as best they can.

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This has resulted in delay in progressing upon some of the more general aspects of collection and publication although a number of the special investigations have contributed material for the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics and for the Statistical Yearbook. The provision of special statistical service, however, is regarded as an important responsibility of the Office and one which results in a substantial amount of co-ordination at the actual operating level.

30. Regional Economic Commissions

The creation of the regional economic commissions has introduced problems of co-ordination not originally contemplated by the nuclear Statistical Commission. The terms of reference of the Commissions are adapted to the regions and necessarily include some matters of interest to the functional commissions. The further fact that the sites of the regional commissions are located at some distance from Lake Success make problems of co-ordination also subject to factors of space and time. Because problems of statistical co-ordination involving regional commissions have special importance, and may require different techniques for their solution, a separate paper is being prepared for discussion under Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda.

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