INTERIM REPORT ON MIGRATION STATISTICS

Memorandum prepared for consideration under Item 9 (f) of the provisional agenda

1. At its third session (26 April - 6 May 1948) the Statistical Commission considered the subject of migration statistics and referred the subject to the Secretariat for further study in consultation with interested specialized agencies and for report to the Commission at its fourth session.¹/

2. The Economic and Social Council at its seventh session considered the report of the Technical Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and made certain specific resolutions on the subject of duties in the field, recalling that "in addition to the Population and Social Commission, all other functional commissions of the Council may have to deal with aspects of migration which fall within their respective assignments, the co-ordination of the activities of the Commission being the task of the Council". Resolution 156B (VII) requested that "international arrangements in matters of migration include as soon as possible means for the improvement of statistics on international migration so as to increase their adequacy and comparability".

3. The Statistical Office, in accordance with its terms of reference to promote the development of national statistics and the improvement of their comparability, as well as the improvement of statistics and statistical method generally, has worked in consultation with the other offices within the United Nations and with the specialized agencies in investigating the various aspects of the problems of migration statistics.

4. Migration statistics have existed in one form or another for many years. Attempts to present them on an international basis are also of long duration. The responsibility of the ILO in the field has been stated in document E/CN.3/76, in which a review of the work of the Office is given,

¹/ E/795
beginning in 1924 when migration statistics were published in special reports in the Migration Series and in the International Labour Review, and ending with 1948 when the Office published a special study of displacement of population in Europe.

5. Since lack of comparability between the international migration statistics which exist is the fundamental problem, emphasis has been placed by the Secretariat on a "survey of the methods of collection, types of classification and forms of tabulation of migration statistics published by seventy-one countries. Analyses were made of the problems of migration statistics and of the international recommendations concerning them". All of these data are available in a background paper entitled Studies on Migration.

6. From the detailed studies on migration, certain recommendations for the improvement of migration statistics emerged. These are set forth in some detail in document (E/CN.9/C.3/2 - E/CN.3/68) and the Population Commission is expected to give consideration to them.

7. The draft recommendations presented are designed to implement and not to supersede the principles laid down by the Conference of Migration Statisticians in 1932. They were prepared to fill the need felt for (1) measures designed to promote and facilitate the implementation of the 1932 resolutions by Governments; (2) additional precision in the definition of migrants; and (3) recommendations concerning the collection, classification, tabulation, and publication of co-ordinated statistics of the various categories of international travellers. Their aim is to describe in some detail first steps that should be taken to improve migration statistics.

8. A first attempt at an analytical study of the sex and age of migrants since the end of the First World War has been begun by the Secretariat for presentation to the Population Commission at its fourth session just concluded. The details of this study, together with indications of the incompleteness and lack of internal consistency in the series is given in document E/CN.9/C.3/1.

9. The Secretariat is continuing its investigation of ways in which migration statistics may be improved, both through the inventory method of assembling and studying available published data, and through initiating action for standardization of definitions, classifications, and tabulations.

10. The Statistical Commission may wish to be kept informed of specific proposals made for the improvement of migration statistics and to assure itself that a desirable degree of co-ordination is effected both in regard to migration statistics considered as a separate subject and in regard to the substantive relationship of migration statistics and other kinds of statistics.