STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Seventh session
Item 12 of the provisional agenda

SOCIAL STATISTICS: PROPOSALS FOR A PROGRAMME OF WORK

(Memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General)

1. In agreement with the suggestions made by the Statistical Commission at its fifth session, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General "to take the initiative in arranging for adequate programmes of development in the various branches of social statistics by:

(a) Surveying the needs of the United Nations and other international agencies in the field of social statistics;
(b) Exploring the extent to which these needs are being met by the United Nations and the specialized agencies and drawing attention to the areas where more complete and comparable data in their respective fields are required, and
(c) Investigating the availability and comparability of data now being compiled by the United Nations or the specialized agencies and compiling those most urgently needed together with appraisals of their adequacy."

2. The survey requested by the Commission has been completed in preliminary form; it is now being discussed in detail with the several specialized agencies responsible and with various parts of the Secretariat which have need for the statistics for analytical purposes. When the preliminary report has been reviewed by those concerned, it is intended to prepare it for wider circulation. It is intended that the report should give a suitably detailed account of the needs and problems in the different branches of social statistics, together with comments upon the adequacy of existing data about these problems.

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1/ Council resolution 299 F (XI)
3. The investigation, so far, has indicated a rather extensive need for much more comprehensive and comparable data on the following subjects:

(a) Statistics showing social stratification, that is tabulations of populations according to industry, occupation and status (as employer, employee, etc.), urban and rural areas, education, ethnic characteristics, and the like.

(b) Statistics on family and household structure, that is tabulations to bring out aspects of child care, care of the aged and infirm and the unemployed, and to form a basis for studies of standards of living in relation to family charges, and the like. The conventional definition of "household" is not particularly applicable to the conditions in countries where the "joint family" is traditional and were, during the process of industrialization, it is becoming modified.

(c) Fertility rates, according to various socio-economic groups, educational and ethnic groups, and other characteristics, for purposes of studies of demographic and economic problems.

(d) External and internal migration tabulations could be improved if the basic information were cross-tabulated with statistics on occupation, marital status, language, education, and the like. Tabulations of this sort would be useful in studying social problems related to migration, particularly the questions of economic, social, and cultural assimilation.

4. The most effective source for the statistics mentioned in the foregoing paragraph are the population censuses. To a large extent, information on these population characteristics has been collected on the census questionnaires, so that a considerable amount of basic statistics could be derived from them. All of these statistics, however, require substantial cross-classification, in order to be useful for the purposes stated. It is considered important that countries ultimately be advised concerning the types of tabulations which would contribute to an understanding of these problems. As a first step, therefore, it is suggested that the Statistical Commission may wish to request the Secretary-General to examine the tabulations which have been made of the recent censuses and tabulations which may yet be made of the census material to see to what extent cross-tabulations of the kind suggested are now available. These cross-tabulations and proposals based on them could then be reviewed by the Statistical Commission at a later session.
5. The Economic and Social Council in resolution 434 B of the fourteenth session requested "the Secretary-General, in co-operation with the International Labour Organisation and other appropriate specialized agencies, to convene a small group of experts to prepare a report on the most satisfactory methods of defining and measuring standards of living and changes therein in the various countries, having regard to the possibility of international comparisons, to obtain the comments and recommendations of the Statistical Commission and the Social Commission thereon, and to report to the Economic and Social Council at an early date." In carrying out this request, the Secretary-General has sought financial authorization to convene a small group of experts to meet early in 1953. The report of this group will be made available to the Statistical Commission and the Social Commission at an appropriate time, so that the Commissions may consider the initiation of work programmes looking towards the objective sought in the Council resolution.

6. The general field of housing statistics has been under study for some time. Some new material may be expected from the recent censuses, and it is suggested that the Secretariat give study to the kinds of tabulations made, particularly those which would cross-classify housing characteristics with family and household composition characteristics. It is proposed to submit a report on these tabulations and other possibly recent tabulations to the Statistical Commission at a later session. The report might also include the results of any sample surveys which have been conducted in this field.

7. Adequate statistics do not exist on child welfare and on assistance to the needy where these activities are not covered by social security schemes. It is proposed, therefore, that the Secretariat conduct preliminary studies concerning statistics on child welfare and public assistance, with a view to exploring what sources of information are available and what methods may be considered appropriate in order to assess the existing need for assistance, and to determine the extent and nature of the help actually given dependent children, elderly people and other categories of needy. It is suggested that a study of welfare institutions and their inmates on the basis of available census material would prove valuable as a first approach to the subject of institutional care provided in various countries.

8. As previously requested by the Statistical Commission, the Secretariat is proceeding with a study of criminal statistics, the study being limited at present to obtaining and classifying information on the scope, definitions, and methods used in selected countries in the preparation of criminal statistics. The
conclusions of this study might ultimately result in the formulation of minimum standards for the assembly of criminal statistics.

9. The foregoing problems in the general field of social statistics have been selected for first and more intensive work. The topics suggested do not include those which are considered to fall primarily within the responsibility of one or another of the specialized agencies. When the present investigation and report are completed, the Commission may wish to request the specialized agencies to prepare statements or proposals for the Statistical Commission, setting forth the most important tasks which face each of them. In addition, the Commission may wish at this session to suggest priorities within the subjects selected for United Nations attention and to add other subjects which have not been listed in the present paper.