

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

First meeting of the 2004/2005 Bureau  
Washington, D.C. (United States), 18-19 October 2004

Item 6: Issues and problems  
related to social statistics

**UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION'S  
PROGRAMME OF WORK IN SOCIAL STATISTICS**

**Note prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division**

1. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is committed to the strengthening of social statistics around the world and to the improvement of international and national cooperation and coordination in this area. An Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics<sup>1</sup>, convened in New York in May 2003, highlighted the importance of international standards, coordination and political commitment in the establishment of an integrated system of social statistics. Out of this meeting, a programme of work for social statistics was developed and presented to the 35th session of the Statistical Commission (March 2004)<sup>2</sup>, where it was considered by some to be too ambitious. The Commission recognized the need for a well-defined and realistic programme and decided that the programme of work for social statistics for the next ten years focus on the world programme of population and housing censuses. It recommended the establishment of an international expert group to address critical issues related to the planning of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses.

2. UNSD convened the first United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014)<sup>3</sup> in New York in September 2004. At this meeting, one of the topics considered by the experts is the need for a realistic minimum set of data that are essential to social and economic planning. The expert group proposed that an essential minimum core set of outputs be formulated, representing demographic and socioeconomic information that population and housing censuses and/or other statistical sources should deliver. This core set of outputs shall reflect, as much as possible, the essential data needs of countries and permit international comparability of data. Consideration would also be given to the role of the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook*<sup>4</sup> in defining this minimum set.

3. The last Statistical Commission also requested that the UNSD establish a well-structured web site to ensure the exchange of census and other data free of charge. A similar request was expressed in the Expert Group Meeting to Review the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* System<sup>5</sup> held in New York in November 2003, which called on the Statistics Division to disseminate essential population data free of charge through the Internet, and to present statistics through the use of an integrated statistical framework. In response to these and as part of the overall effort to organize social statistics, the

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<sup>1</sup> See Report of the Expert Group Meeting on Setting the Scope of Social Statistics, available at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/Socialstat\\_0503/docs/Report.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/Socialstat_0503/docs/Report.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> The Report of the 35th session of the Statistical Commission is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/sc2004.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> Information on the United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses (2005-2014) is available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/CensusEGM04/default.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/default.htm>

<sup>5</sup> The report of the Expert Group Meeting to Review the United Nations Demographic Yearbook System is available at [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/DYB\\_1103/docs/no\\_L4.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/DYB_1103/docs/no_L4.pdf).

Division has redesigned its Demographic and Social Statistics website<sup>6</sup>, and has made national population estimates and vital statistics downloadable via the Internet free of charge. The redesigned website has four major headings:

- Demographic and social concerns
- Sources of data
- Standards and methods
- Statistical products and databases

4. The purpose of this website is to provide a platform for disseminating the social and demographic data available in UNSD, as well as linking the work of various UN organizations and agencies within the given construct of social statistics. This construct, laid out under the heading “Demographic and social concerns”, specifies ten topics, as follows:

- Size and structure of the population, births, deaths and migration
- Social security and welfare
- Distribution of income and consumption; wealth and poverty
- Public order and safety, offenders and their victims
- Family formation, families and households
- Health, human functioning and disability
- Housing and its environment
- Learning and education
- Economic activity
- Allocation of time and time use

For each of these topics, a brief textual introduction is given, and links are provided to the relevant statistics, standards and methods. Some of the topics have multiple subtopics.

5. Topics or subtopics that were recently developed are “allocation of time and time use” and “human functioning and disability”. As resources permit, the subtopic “selected characteristics” under the topic “Size and structure of the population, births, deaths and migration” will be developed further to better reflect special population groups such as the elderly population, indigenous persons, etc.

6. In 2004, UNSD looked at the capacity of countries to report census results, vital statistics and other demographic statistics to the Division. This was done by reviewing country responses to the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires over several decades. The results are presented as technical reports and are available on the Internet<sup>7</sup>, for the following topics:

- Fertility
- Mortality
- International migration
- Marriage and divorce
- Economic characteristics (from censuses)
- Age and sex-specific data for population and selected population characteristics
- Household characteristics, living arrangements and homeless households

Additional topics will be analyzed in 2005 and developed as special topics of the *Demographic Yearbook*, including education characteristics (literacy, educational attainment and school attendance) and ethnicity and related characteristics (ethnicity, language and religion).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/default.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybtr.htm>

7. The UNSD is currently preparing the publication *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*. This report will analyze the past and current state of gender statistics at the national level, focusing on official statistics relevant to monitoring progress towards achieving gender equality. It will report on the type, availability, coverage and, where possible, quality of official national data relevant to gender, as reported by countries to the international statistical system from 1980 to the present. Areas where statistics are particularly scanty and deficient, and where improvement is critically needed, will be identified and suggestions for improvement offered. Attention will also be given to describing new and emerging topics considered important by stakeholders, for which statistics are not yet produced within the official national statistics system. The identification and description of these data gaps will serve as a basis for considering ways to address them in the future.

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