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THE INTERNATIONAL STANDARD CLASSIFICATION OF OCCUPATIONS

(Memorandum prepared by the International  
Labour Office)

1. The interest of the ILO in an international standard classification of occupations dates back to the First International Conference of Labour Statisticians, held in 1923. Actual research in this field, however, began in 1947, following a resolution adopted by the Sixth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, and has continued to date. The Office has devoted an appreciable part of its statistical resources to this work, of which a major phase has now been completed through the publication of an International Standard Classification of Occupations composed of major, minor and unit groups, endorsed by the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians.
2. Since the inception of this work in 1947, the classification has been studied and reviewed by an impressive number of bodies, and circulated repeatedly to governments for comment. A first draft was submitted to a meeting of experts convened by the International Labour Office in April 1948; the tentative list of major groups agreed upon at this meeting was forwarded to the statistical offices of the different countries for their comments, and a second draft taking these comments into account was presented to a meeting of experts in May 1949. A classification of occupations in ten major groups and twenty-four sub-groups was submitted to the Seventh International Conference of Labour Statisticians in September 1949; the Conference adopted a classification into nine major groups and urged further work toward the development of sub-groups and unit groups. At its Fifth Session in May 1950 the Statistical Commission, which has been regularly kept informed of the progress

of the classification, recommended that a tenth major group be added to the classification in order to cover the armed forces.

3. Continuing its work on the classification, the Office developed a new tentative list of minor groups, which was submitted to a meeting of experts in May 1953 and then circulated to specialists in the different countries. Taking into account the comments received from twenty-five countries, the Office prepared a revised classification composed of ten major groups and seventy-nine minor groups, for submission to the Eighth International Conference of Labour Statisticians. The classification provisionally approved by this Conference was sent to governments for comment early in 1955, and the replies were used by the statistical classification specialist, recruited by the Office, in the preparation of the documentation for a new working group of experts, which met for three weeks in October and November 1955. Following the recommendations of this working group, the International Labour Office continued working on the classification throughout 1956.

4. Final proposals for a three-digit international standard classification of occupations, together with draft definitions of each group, were thus prepared and were submitted in April 1957 to the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians. The proposed classification was endorsed by the Conference in a resolution which noted that it should be amended promptly by the Office to take account of certain points brought out in the discussion. The resolution provided that other proposals for amendments which might appear necessary on the basis of experience in practical application of the classification should be considered by a subsequent conference after the results of the coming population censuses become available.

5. The final text of the International Standard Classification of Occupations, as modified to take into account the few amendments suggested by the Ninth Conference, was published in 1957 in the report on the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians and in the September issue of the International Labour Review. The classification includes ten major groups, seventy-one minor groups and 201 unit groups.

6. Draft definitions of the various groups had been submitted to the Ninth International Conference of Labour Statisticians for information; they

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were circulated to governments for comments in the second part of 1957, and revised definitions were prepared on the basis of these comments.

7. A complete volume on the International Standard Classification of Occupations will be published by the International Labour Office in the course of 1958. It will contain a substantial introductory section on the origin, organization and use of the classification, the list of major, minor and unit groups, together with their revised definitions, and lists of specific occupations belonging to each unit group, with the definition of these specific occupations. The classification will therefore be available for consideration by countries undertaking population censuses in or around 1960; it should be of particular practical help to countries who have not yet developed a fully detailed occupational classification, and should contribute greatly to the improvement of comparability of occupational data throughout the world. The International Labour Office will give continuing attention to problems raised by the application of the International Standard Classification of Occupations, and will endeavour to help countries planning to take account of the international classification in their national occupational statistics and making provision for convertibility between their national classifications and the International Standard Classification of Occupations.

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