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STATISTICAL COMMISSION

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Item 10 (a) of the provisional agenda

STATISTICS FOR SOCIAL PROGRAMMES

Progress report and work programme  
(Report by the Secretary-General)

I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission at its tenth session considered a memorandum containing an international programme of social statistics (E/CN.3/239), prepared by the Secretary-General in collaboration with the specialized agencies concerned, expressed views and adopted resolutions 10 (X), 11 (X), 12 (X), 13 (X), which outline a work programme to be carried on by the United Nations in collaboration with the specialized agencies concerned.<sup>1/</sup> Major subjects included in this programme are: (a) preparation of a Compendium of Social Statistics to be issued in 1963 (Resolution 10 (X)); (b) studies on the uses of statistics for the formulation of social programmes (Resolution 11 (X)); (c) definition and measurement of levels of living (Resolution 13 (X)); (d) household surveys (E/3126, paras. 137-140); (e) housing statistics (Resolutions 10 (X) and 12 (X)).

2. Taking into consideration the resolutions of the Statistical Commission and the interest expressed by the specialized agencies, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination established a temporary Working Party on Statistics for Social Programmes. Its terms of reference were stated as follows:

"32. The question of statistics for social programmes has been the subject of increasing interest to the Statistical and Social Commissions as well as the governing organs of some of the specialized agencies. Since a large part of the work on this subject is the responsibility of the specialized

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<sup>1/</sup> E/3126, paras. 106-144.

agencies, arrangements have been made by the United Nations, ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO, with a view to stimulating the development of statistics required for social programmes and of strengthening work in this field. In particular, a temporary inter-agency working group has been established, in order to (a) co-ordinate programmes for statistical projects which need to be developed jointly by several agencies, such as the Compendium of Social Statistics; (b) develop a common statistical framework for social programmes at the national level; and (c) agree upon the distribution of responsibilities and programmes for work in fields which are of interest to more than one agency, as, for instance, in work of household surveys. The working group is to include not only statisticians but also officers of the departments dealing with social programmes and a first meeting is planned for September 1959." 2/

3. The Working Party met for the first time in Geneva from 16-22 September 1959. The session was attended by representatives of the statistical services and the departments concerned with the conduct of social programmes in the United Nations, International Labour Office, Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization. The Working Party discussed and made proposals concerning the contents of the proposed Compendium of Social Statistics, reviewed a progress report on the definition and measurement of levels of living and examined the status of inter-agency work on multi-subject surveys. The conclusions of the Working Party are contained in the sections below. Without making detailed comments, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination noted the contents of the report with general satisfaction. The report will be further considered by the Ad Hoc Inter-agency Meeting on International Social Programmes at its July 1960 session.

## II. Compendium of Social Statistics

4. At its tenth session, the Statistical Commission recommended "that the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the specialized agencies, initiate the preparation of a Compendium of Social Statistics to be issued at the latest in 1963 in co-ordination with the full Report on the World Social Situation", and requested the Secretary-General "to report progress on the project at the eleventh session".<sup>3/</sup> In compliance with this recommendation of the Statistical Commission

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2/ E/3247, para. 32.

3/ E/3126, Resolution 10 (X).

an informal Inter-Agency Meeting on Social Statistics was held at Headquarters in May 1958, immediately after the Statistical Commission's tenth session, at which time the following aspects of the Compendium were discussed: (a) relationship of the Compendium to the Report on the World Social Situation; (b) views of the specialized agencies in connexion with the Compendium; (c) action to be taken by the Statistical Office in connexion with the Compendium; (d) nature of the contents of the Compendium and (e) responsibility for the collection of data to be included in the Compendium.

5. In line with decisions taken at the Inter-Agency Meeting on Social Statistics, the Statistical Office investigated the availability of data for the Compendium and drafted skeleton tables, on the basis of the outline given in Annex I of E/CN.3/239, which were circulated to the specialized agencies. After consultations by correspondence, a revised programme and outline of contents for the Compendium were presented to the Working Party on Statistics for Social Programmes.

6. The recommendations of the Working Party regarding the Compendium are contained in document E/CN.3/269. The Commission may wish to express its views on the proposed contents of the Compendium and on the means of promoting the collection of data needed for it from Governments.

### III. Definition and measurement of levels of living

7. In accordance with ECOSOC Resolution 585 B (XX)<sup>4/</sup> requesting the Secretary-General "to present at future sessions of the Social Commission, the Statistical Commission and the Council, a progress report on work done with a view to the development of measurement of levels of living", and following the adoption by the Statistical Commission at its tenth session of Resolution 13 (X)<sup>5/</sup> it was agreed at the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on International Social Programmes, which met in Geneva in August 1958, that a progress report should be prepared which would reflect the current thinking of the United Nations and specialized agencies on this subject.

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<sup>4/</sup> E/2795, p. 6.

<sup>5/</sup> E/3126, para. 136.

8. The progress report on international definition and measurement of levels of living which is submitted to the Commission (E/CN.3/270) has been prepared, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Working Party on Statistics for Social Programmes. The views of the Commission are invited, particularly on the statistical aspects discussed in Part I of the report; the comments of the Statistical Commission would then be submitted to the Social Commission at its fourteenth session in conjunction with the latter's consideration of the progress report. The Statistical Commission may wish to make recommendations regarding future work on the measurement of levels of living.

#### IV. Housing statistics

9. In compliance with Resolution 12 (X) of the Statistical Commission a revised version of General Principles for a Housing Census, incorporating the observations made by the Statistical Commission, was published<sup>6/</sup> and distributed to the statistical and census offices and housing agencies of the States Members of the United Nations.

10. The Principles were used as basic training material at the UN/FAO census training centres held in 1958 in Lima, Peru, for the Latin American countries,<sup>7/</sup> and in Tokyo, Japan, for countries in the ECAFE region.<sup>8/</sup> In both centres, experimental censuses of population, housing and agriculture were organized which permitted the evaluation of the Principles under experimental conditions. A separate report has been prepared on the experimental census of Adachi-Machi (Japan).<sup>9/</sup>

11. In accordance with Resolution 12 (X), para. 5, it is planned to undertake, after the 1960 series of censuses, an evaluation of international experience regarding the adaptation of the Principles for regional programmes and their application in national censuses.

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<sup>6/</sup> ST/STAT/SER.M/28.

<sup>7/</sup> ST/STAT/SER.M/33.

<sup>8/</sup> ST/STAT/SER.M/32 (in preparation).

<sup>9/</sup> ST/STAT.5 (in preparation).

12. In view of Resolution 11 (X) of the Statistical Commission requesting the preparation of "studies on the uses of social statistics for the formulation of social policies",<sup>10/</sup> and in consultation with the specialized agencies concerned, the Secretary-General initiated a series of studies for the purpose of determining the nature of the statistical data and the methods of analysis that are required in order to describe the housing conditions, estimate the housing needs, and relate the objectives of national housing programmes to the economic and human resources.

13. After the basic statistical units to be used in housing statistics, namely the "housing unit" and the "dwelling", were defined in General Principles for a Housing Census,<sup>6/</sup> and in regional housing census programmes,<sup>11/</sup> the following two studies were prepared: Statistical Indicators of Housing Levels of Living (E/CN.3/R.2) and Methods of Estimating Housing Needs (E/CN.3/274).

14. The first study mentioned above was considered by the Working Party on Statistics for Social Programmes, and its views in this respect are contained in Part I of document E/CN.3/270. The document was also distributed to a number of selected statistical offices, housing agencies, university departments and experts, and a report on the comments received is presented to the Commission in document E/CN.3/R.2/Add.1. The Commission is invited to express its views regarding the indicators of housing conditions contained in document E/CN.3/R.2, and to make recommendations regarding the measurement of housing conditions of living.

15. The Commission may also wish to express its views regarding the future international work programme on methods of estimating housing needs. In this connexion, the Commission's attention is invited to the work programme of the Economic Commission for Europe (Housing Committee) Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics which includes, inter alia, the preparation of reports on "The method for calculating housing shortage: how housing shortage could be defined and how far common standards could be developed"; "future objective needs: the factors which determine them and methods of translating these factors into actual figures"; and "future effective demand....",<sup>12/</sup> to be considered at its December 1960 session.

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<sup>10/</sup> E/3126, para. 121.

<sup>11/</sup> Conf.Eur.Stats./WG.6/82 and 3841 ab(COINS).

<sup>12/</sup> HOU/Working Paper No. 110/Add.1, paras. 4 and 5.

16. The Commission may wish to note that in view of the lack of an integrating mechanism for statistics for social programmes (such as exists for economic statistics in the form of the national accounts framework) the uses of statistics for these programmes must be considered separately for each major field, and that the responsibility for work in fields other than housing, such as education and health, lies primarily with the respective specialized agencies.

17. The Commission's views are invited regarding a programme on current housing statistics contained in document E/CN.3/275.

#### V. Household surveys

18. Since the last session of the Commission, considerable attention has been given by the United Nations and the specialized agencies to the promotion of household surveys. The promotion of surveys, especially multi-subject household inquiries, was considered at the following inter-agency meetings: the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on International Social Programmes, Geneva, 4-8 August 1958; the Inter-Agency Meeting on Household Inquiries and Related Studies, Geneva, 23-24 February 1959, and the Working Party on Statistics for Social Programmes, Geneva, 16-22 September 1959.

19. The Working Party discussed memoranda on the subject, prepared by the several agencies, and agreed that it was not practical to pursue the development of a uniform international schedule of inquiries for multi-purpose surveys. Nevertheless, it was recognized that most household surveys extended to more than one subject and it was agreed that the Secretariat should initiate the preparation of a Handbook on Sample Surveys of Family Living Conditions. In accordance with this agreement, a tentative outline of the purpose and contents of this Handbook has been prepared, in consultation with the members of the Working Party, and has been submitted for the comments of the Commission at its current session as document E/CN.3/271.

#### VI. Future work on statistics for social programmes

20. The Working Party considered the general aspects of statistics for social programmes that might be undertaken by the United Nations and the specialized agencies. As far as the short run work programme was concerned, the Working Party

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considered that it would be useful to make a systematic examination of the gaps or lacunae in the statistics applicable to the various social fields so as to see what possibilities existed to assemble new statistics for policy use. Many gaps were already known but it would be useful to review the whole statistical position in relation to policy requirements for each type of programme. Additional discussions would also be required concerning the proposed Handbook, as well as on final arrangements for the Compendium.

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