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REVIEW OF THE RECURRENT PUBLICATIONS OF THE STATISTICAL OFFICE  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Secretary-General

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## INTRODUCTION

1. At its seventeenth session, the Statistical Commission approved the programme of work of the Statistical Office which included: "Review, with the assistance of an expert group of national statisticians and a consultant, of the statistical publications of the Statistical Office with a view to improving their content, timeliness and rapidity of issue and the efficiency of their compilation". 1/
2. Although no expert group has been appointed, the Statistical Office has initiated a review of its publications and an oral progress report was made at the fifth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination. The Working Group took note of the report on the subject and expressed its support of the programme outlined (E/CN.3/442, para. 66). No over-all conclusions were reached, but it was hoped that it would be possible to report progress to the Commission at its eighteenth session (ibid., para. 65).
3. At the same session, the Working Group discussed an oral progress report on the study of the reliability of international statistics. It approved the steps taken by the Statistical Office to examine the statistics it publishes (ibid., para. 56). A progress report on this item is included in the present document.

### I. ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

4. The Commission may wish to take note of this report and to provide whatever comments and advice it deems appropriate. The Commission's attention is drawn to annex III and, in particular, to the financial implications in regard to the Compendium of Housing Statistics.

### II. GENERAL REMARKS

5. This report summarizes the results of a review of the United Nations Statistical Office publications made at the end of 1973 and in the first months of 1974. Its scope is limited to the recurrent publications of statistical data, although other forms of dissemination are being used by the Statistical Office. Section A describes the publications issued by the Statistical Office. Section B suggests improvements that could be made in the contents of the publications and deals with some general problems, such as relations with users of international statistical publications. The ways and means of improving the timeliness of the publications are discussed in section C. Section D summarizes some problems related to electronic data processing. Section E deals with the distribution of publications.

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1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 2, para. 193 (f).

6. It may be worth noting that the problems encountered by those responsible for international statistical publications are somewhat different from those of national statistical offices. In general, an international statistical office does not collect data from primary sources, but reports aggregated statistics supplied by countries. In national statistical publications, reporting units (individuals, households, enterprises) do not in general appear separately but are aggregated. In international publications, the reporting units, viz., the countries, are shown as such - together with regional indexes and aggregates. Thus, the timeliness and quality of the output of international statistical offices are much more dependent on each reporting unit, i.e. each country, than are national offices which can rely on the law of large numbers to compensate, in part at least, for deficiency of contributions of individual reporting units.

7. Another difference arises from the market of statistical publications: while national agencies may be able to identify the consumers of their products and their requirements, an international organization works for users spread all over the world, who are much more difficult to identify and whose needs are more difficult to establish.

8. It should also be noted that the Statistical Office is a unit of a large organization and is dependent on other units for vital elements of the production process. These other units, which have to consider other priorities, are responsible for electronic data processing, translation, printing and dissemination.

#### A. Description of the Statistical Office publications

9. About 50 per cent of the human resources of the United Nations Statistical Office is devoted to publications, which include (i) recurrent compendia of statistical data and (ii) methodological studies and handbooks. There are two kinds of recurrent compendia, (a) those which cover the whole scope of economic and social statistics, reflecting the co-ordinating function of the United Nations Statistical Office and (b) those which deal with fields, such as industry or trade, for which the Statistical Office has a specific responsibility.

##### 1. General compendia

10. The general compendia are the Statistical Yearbook and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.

#### STATISTICAL YEARBOOK

11. The Statistical Yearbook has been published since 1948. The 1973 edition, to be issued in 1974, is the twenty-fifth. It has more than 800 pages and shows more or less the same tables, although a few are added and a few are dropped each year. For instance, from the 1971 to the 1972 edition, five tables which became irrelevant for various reasons were eliminated while five new tables were introduced. Each table deals with a subject-matter and shows standardized data for as many countries as possible. In addition, a score of tables give a "world summary", viz., aggregates by region, continent or other groupings of countries.

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Statistical Yearbook, 1973  
(Distribution of the tables by topic)

Topic	No. of tables
World summary . . . . .	17
Population and manpower . . . . .	6
Agriculture, forestry, fishing . . . . .	23
Industry, construction, energy . . . . .	94
Trade . . . . .	5
Transport and communications . . . . .	12
Consumption . . . . .	12
Balance of payments . . . . .	1
Wages and prices . . . . .	3
National accounts . . . . .	10
Finance . . . . .	8
Development assistance . . . . .	5
Health . . . . .	1
Housing . . . . .	2
Education, science, culture . . . . .	11
Total . . . . .	210

12. In general, data shown in the Statistical Yearbook are official data reported by countries. However, in some cases estimates are published, which are made by the Population Division of the United Nations, FAO, IMF or other specialized agencies. The yearbook also shows indexes and regional aggregates which include estimates made by the Office. Out of the 210 tables of the 1973 edition, 116 were prepared by the Statistical Office, 6 by other services of the United Nations, 69 by specialized agencies and 19 by other international organizations.

13. The Statistical Yearbook is the recurrent publication of the United Nations which has by far the largest circulation.

MONTHLY BULLETIN OF STATISTICS

14. The Monthly Bulletin of Statistics shows monthly, quarterly, or, in some cases, annual data on almost all economic subjects (except for agriculture) and some demographic topics. The same tables are shown each month except for a set of "special tables" which are published quarterly, half-yearly or yearly. The Bulletin, like the Statistical Yearbook, is arranged by subject-matter. On each topic, as many countries as possible are shown, but, of course, the coverage is much smaller than in the Statistical Yearbook, due to the lack of reliable short-term data in many developing countries on many subjects. As shown later in this report, the timeliness of data varies from one topic to another and from one country to another.

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Monthly Bulletin of Statistics  
(Distribution of the monthly tables by topic)

Topic	No. of tables
Population and manpower . . . . .	8
Industry, construction, energy . . . . .	41
Trade . . . . .	4
Transport . . . . .	1
Wages and prices . . . . .	4
National accounts . . . . .	5
Finance . . . . .	7
Total . .	70

15. All the tables are prepared by the Statistical Office either from the monthly bulletin questionnaire filled by the countries, from national publications or from statistics provided by the ILO, ICAO and IMF. All data are official data supplied by national governmental agencies except for some of the population estimates, made by the Population Division of the United Nations, and for some indexes shown in special tables.

16. A Supplement to the Statistical Yearbook and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics is published from time to time, giving detailed information on methodology and definitions of the data published in these two publications. The latest issue (1967) was published in 1969, 2/ and a new issue (1972) is to be published in 1974.

## 2. Specialized yearbooks

17. Among the specialized compendia, there are six yearbooks: (i) the Demographic Yearbook, (ii) the Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics, (iii) the Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, (iv) World Trade Annual and its Supplement, (v) World Energy Supplies and (vi) The Growth of World Industry. In addition, a recurrent Compendium of Housing Statistics and a Yearbook of Construction Statistics are planned to be published in the near future.

### DEMOGRAPHIC YEARBOOK

18. The Demographic Yearbook has been published since 1948. The latest edition, 1972, issued early in 1974, was the twenty-fifth. It shows demographic data including population, vital statistics, international migration and economic activity. Except for some of the total population estimates by country aggregates

2/ United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.68.XVII.9.

and for regional and world, all data are official figures provided by countries, through the questionnaires of the Statistical Office and sometimes through national publications. Some data are supplied every year but many are drawn from the results of population censuses. Besides the standard annual tables, the Demographic Yearbook deals each year with a special topic.

Demographic Yearbook

(Special topics of the last 10 years)

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1963: Population census	1968: Marriage and divorce
1964: Population census	1969: Natality
1965: Natality	1970: Population trends
1966: Mortality	1971: Population census
1967: Mortality	1972: Population census

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19. A long chapter of technical notes, numerous foot-notes accompanying the tables and special codes provide indications of the way the data have been collected and compiled. Each issue includes a text on specific aspects of demographic statistics such as "Statistical definitions of urban population and their uses in applied demography" in the 1972 edition.

#### YEARBOOK OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS STATISTICS

20. The Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics has been published since 1957. The 1972 edition, published early in 1974 was the sixteenth. It includes three volumes, two of which show individual country data and the third, international tables. The first two volumes include detailed national accounts data for 120 countries and territories for the period 1960-1971. Most countries report in terms of the System of National Accounts (SNA); the countries with centrally planned economies report according to the System of Material Product Balances (MPS). The complete set of tables include 17 tables for the SNA countries and 9 tables for the MPS countries, but for many countries or territories the set is not complete. Most of the countries which report in terms of the SNA are still applying the former SNA. Only 26 countries presently apply the revised SNA. All data are official data provided by the countries through questionnaires sent by the Statistical Office and, in some cases, supplemented by national publications.

21. The third volume (international tables) is not arranged by country but by topic. Its purpose is to show comparable country data - e.g. in a common currency (US dollars), in percentages of distribution or in real growth rates - and aggregates for the whole world and by region. It includes estimates made by the Statistical Office where official data are not available.

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## YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS

22. The twenty-first edition of the Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, 1970-1971, was published in 1973. It contains (i) data for individual countries and (ii) basic summary tables. Annual statistics are shown for 136 countries for the years 1966 to 1971, but 1970 is the latest available year for some countries. For each country, the following tables usually appear: (i) value in US dollars of imports and exports analysed by countries of provenance and destination, (ii) volume and value in US dollars of the imports and exports analysed by commodity according to the Standard International Trade Classification and (iii) historical tables showing a few series for the years 1946-1971. Until the 1969 edition, the values were shown in national currencies; the 1970-1971 edition was the first where they were expressed in US dollars, in order to facilitate international comparisons and analysis of trade flows. Only the historical series are shown in national currencies. The basic summary tables include, inter alia, data by region, matrixes of global trade by region of provenance and destination and price, unit value and quantum indexes. The trade statistics data are usually provided by the countries and, in some cases, extracted from national publications.

## WORLD TRADE ANNUAL AND SUPPLEMENT

23. Besides the Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, the World Trade Annual and its Supplement, which are printed by a private publisher, show detailed data on imports by commodity and by country partner for the most developed market economies. The 1971 World Trade Annual, the ninth issue of this series which started with the 1963 edition presents, in five volumes, the trade in 1971 in each of the 1,312 most detailed commodity items of the United Nations Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) as reported by each of the following 24 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium-Luxembourg, Canada, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, Yugoslavia.

24. The data are in commodity-by-reporting-country-by-partner-country order for the convenience of users interested in individual commodities. The figures cover over 80 per cent of world trade. Value data are in thousands of United States dollars and quantity figures in metric units are also shown, where available and meaningful. Total imports and total exports by each reporting country in each commodity are shown, as well as the analysis of imports by countries of provenance and of exports by countries of destination. An introduction and technical notes describe the tables and the nature of the data reported by each country.

25. The Supplement to the World Trade Annual has been published since the 1964 edition. The 1971 edition presents in five volumes the data of the World Trade Annual in geographical order of about 154 partner countries which traded with the 24 reporting countries; the trade among the 24 countries is omitted. The trade in each of 1,312 commodity items of the United Nations Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) is arranged in the 1971 Supplement to serve users interested in individual countries whose own internationally comparable trade

data are either not easily available or become available late. In addition to the data for each of the 154 countries, the imports and exports of the 24 countries from and to the 9 following regions are shown: Eastern Europe and USSR, South and Central America (including Caribbean and Bermuda), Latin American Free Trade Association, Central American Common Market, Africa, Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa, Near East, Asian Centrally Planned Economies.

#### WORLD ENERGY SUPPLIES

26. World Energy Supplies (Statistical Papers, Series J) may be considered a yearbook of energy statistics. The sixteenth edition was published in 1973 showing data on production, trade, supply and consumption of energy for the period 1968-1971; 185 countries are shown in this issue. Data are shown for each kind of fuel, by country as well as by region. The data are, in general, taken from official sources; however, where official data are missing or inconsistent, estimates are made by the Statistical Office. In order to meet the requirements arising from the energy crisis and as expressed by the General Assembly at its sixth special session (April 1974), World Energy Supplies will be extended to include new sets of data, and issued more promptly.

#### THE GROWTH OF WORLD INDUSTRY

27. The Growth of World Industry, which may be considered a yearbook of industrial statistics, consists of two volumes. Volume I shows data on the industrial sector; volume II shows industrial commodity production statistics. Industry consists of groups 2, 3 and 4 of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), i.e. mining and quarrying, manufacturing and electricity, gas and water. Construction is excluded.

28. The 1971 edition of Volume I, which was the fifth, was issued in September 1973. It includes two parts: (i) national tables (560 pages) and (ii) international tables (30 pages). The first part is arranged by country; 94 countries are shown. The maximum number of tables is 21 in the case of the developed and 12 in the case of the developing countries. Most countries, however, do not provide the whole set of tables and the actual average number for each country is 9. Each table shows the distribution of an item by industrial sector according to the International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) at the 3-digit level. The topics 3/ are the following:

- I. Number of establishments
- II. Number of persons engaged
- III. Number of employees
- IV. Wages and salaries of employees

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3/ Underlining indicates tables filled out for all countries; tables not underlined concern the developed countries.



- V. Supplements to wages and salaries
- VI. Number of operatives
- VII. Wages and salaries of operatives
- VIII. Man-hours worked by operatives
- IX. Quantity of electricity consumed
- X. Gross output at current prices
- XI. Cost of goods and industrial services consumed
- XII. Cost of materials and supplies consumed
- XIII. Cost of purchased fuels and electricity consumed
- XIV. Value added at current prices
- XV. Gross fixed capital formation at current prices - Total
- XVI. Gross fixed capital formation at current prices - Machinery and equipment
- XVII. Value of stocks - Total
- XVIII. Value of stocks - Materials, fuels and supplies
- XIX. Value of stocks - Work-in-progress
- XX. Value of stocks - finished goods*
- XXI. Index of industrial production

29. Many foot-notes and two pages of methodological comments for each country describe sources, methods and peculiarities of national statistics. The second part consists of two tables showing (i) index numbers of industrial production and (ii) index numbers of industrial employment. The national data of part I are collected through an annual questionnaire and supplemented by national publications. The indexes of part II are computed by the Statistical Office, on the basis of all available data.

30. The Growth of World Industry, Volume II deals with industrial commodity production statistics. The fifth edition, 1971, was issued in June 1973. It shows the production of 397 industrial commodities, expressed in physical units, by country and by group of countries. Ten years are shown: 1962 to 1971. The coverage is extended each year: the 1970 edition showed 315 commodities; the 1976 edition will probably show 550 commodities. The country coverage is not very good for all commodities and efforts are being made to collect new data and fill the gaps. Whenever possible, estimates are made by the Statistical Office and included in totals and subtotals, but the estimates themselves are not shown.

#### NEW RECURRENT PUBLICATIONS

31. In addition to the existing yearbooks the Statistical Office, in compliance with recommendations of the Statistical Commission, is preparing for publication in 1974 the first issue of a Compendium of Housing Statistics <sup>4/</sup> and of a Yearbook of Construction Statistics.

<sup>4/</sup> See also annex III.

3. Other compendia

32. Besides the yearbooks, the Statistical Office currently publishes two other recurrent publications, Population and Vital Statistics Report, issued on a quarterly basis, and Commodity Trade Statistics, which has approximately 50 fascicles a year.

POPULATION AND VITAL STATISTICS REPORT

33. Population and Vital Statistics Report (Statistical Papers, Series A) shows the latest available demographic data every three months. All figures are annual. The following table gives the list of data shown:

Population and Vital Statistics Report

(List of data)

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1. Population

- (a) Latest census
- (b) Latest official estimate
- (c) Mid-year estimate for a fixed (recent) year

2. Vital statistics: Registered number and rate, and estimated rate of:

- (a) Births
  - (b) Deaths
  - (c) Infant deaths
- 

In addition, the first two issues of 1974 include special tables, in compliance with the recommendations of the Population Commission, supported by the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination.

COMMODITY TRADE STATISTICS

34. Commodity Trade Statistics (Statistical Papers, Series D) consists of tables showing annual and quarterly external trade data of all countries which provide data according to the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC). Data are published as soon as they are made available by the countries and processed by the International Computing Centre, Geneva. An average of 50 fascicles are normally published each year. <sup>5/</sup> A third of the fascicles are devoted to annual

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<sup>5/</sup> Due to the transfer of the processing of the trade statistics to Geneva, in 1971, a backlog appeared which led the Statistical Office to drop the publication of 1971 and 1972 quarterly data.

figures, which are available for 100 or so countries and territories, and two thirds deal with quarterly data, which are available for 37 countries and territories. Imports and exports are shown by commodity, according to the SITC at the 4-digit level and by partner country. The data are published only above a threshold of trade of \$US 100,000. They are expressed in US dollars and, whenever relevant and available, in physical units, according to the metric system.

#### OTHER PUBLICATIONS

35. Besides the publications listed above, the Statistical Office issues many publications dealing with methodology, systems and classifications. This report focuses on data publications; however, to get a complete picture of the publications issued by the Office, it may be worth listing the other publications issued in 1973, as an example:

Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System (Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 19, Rev.1)

Input-Output Tables and Analysis (Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 14, Rev.1)

A Short Manual on Sampling, vol. II, Computer Programmes for Sample Designs (Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 9, vol. II, Add.1)

Sample Surveys of Current Interest (Twelfth report) (Statistical Papers, Series C, No. 13)

#### B. Improving the contents of the Statistical Office publications

36. This section discusses the problems related to improvement of Statistical Office publications. After some general comments on the relations between the Office and users of its publications, the various recurrent publications are considered one by one; then some general issues are discussed, regarding (i) the reliability of published data, (ii) the publication of estimates, (iii) the usefulness of analytical tables showing indexes, ratios, and so on, and (iv) the possibility of publishing comments on the statistical data shown.

##### 1. Relations with users

37. The publications of the Statistical Office result from requests made by the Statistical Commission, which speaks on behalf of the international community of statisticians and conveys the wishes of the users. When new problems appeared and new statistical data were required by countries or international bodies, the Statistical Commission asked for new publications. In the meantime, national statistics were improving or extending in scope and the coverage of the international publications grew correspondingly. Although radical changes in statistical publications, whether national or international, should not be made often, a permanent effort of adjustment to users' needs has to be made.

38. Unlike most commodities, the requirements for statistical publications cannot be analysed satisfactorily through market studies. User surveys are difficult to

implement; their results are generally difficult to interpret. Direct discussions with the main users, and consultations through conferences, working groups or seminars have often proved to be more useful. At the international level, special problems are encountered due to the fact that (i) the users are spread all over the world and (ii) most subscribers and buyers of international publications are libraries, so that the end users are in general unknown.

39. Therefore, the Statistical Office cannot suggest a complete and efficient programme of effective market studies. But it intends to do its best to get a better knowledge of the users' needs. Before making important changes in the publications, it plans to consult: (i) the substantive divisions of the United Nations at Headquarters, such as the Population Division, the Centre for Development Planning, Projections and Policies, and the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning, as well as UNCTAD, UNIDO and the regional commissions, (ii) specialized agencies, and other international organizations, (iii) selected users, by questionnaires, as it has recently done for the Demographic Yearbook, and of course, (iv) the Statistical Commission.

40. Except for the Demographic Yearbook, the present survey of Statistical Office publications was made without any systematic and detailed consultation with the users. However, some improvements can be considered: they are suggested below, publication by publication.

#### STATISTICAL YEARBOOK

41. The Statistical Yearbook is an irreplaceable reference tool and obviously the main demand of the users is for continuity and up-to-dateness. As noted in paragraph 11, there is little change from one year to another in the tables. The questions one can ask about such a publication are (i) is it easy to handle? (ii) does it include any table of little or no usefulness? and (iii) is there any important topic missing? Besides, of course, the reliability of the data should be considered but this is dealt with in another part of this report.

42. The present format and presentation of the Statistical Yearbook seem satisfactory. The main problem is to remove the inconsistency of the classifications used in various tables for order and grouping countries. Since the tables are prepared by several agencies, the country classifications and the order in which countries are shown are not the same from one table to another. This makes it difficult to use the data for a given country from various tables. These classifications will soon be harmonized. It may also be possible to arrange the topics in a more logical sequence.

43. Is there any table of little or no usefulness in the Statistical Yearbook? A careful review of all tables led to the conclusion that all tables are most likely to be useful. Some of the tables, however, do not have a sufficient country coverage to be useful; but the gradual improvement of the coverage, owing to efforts made by reporting countries, encourages the Statistical Office to maintain such tables.

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44. Is there any topic that the Statistical Yearbook should include but has omitted so far? As shown in paragraph 11, most economic and social areas are covered in the present Yearbook. However, such subjects as environment and social indicators do not appear, because statistics are not yet available: gradually as national statistics develop in these and related areas, the Statistical Office will have to include them in its compendia. On topics already covered by the Yearbook, more data could be published. For instance more demographic tables could be shown: but the purpose of the Statistical Yearbook is not to duplicate the specialized yearbooks. In addition, it should be noted that some of the suggestions for the Demographic Yearbook, in paragraph 50, may be valid for the Statistical Yearbook.

#### MONTHLY BULLETIN OF STATISTICS

45. The Monthly Bulletin of Statistics could be improved in the following ways: (i) an effort should be made by the Statistical Office and the reporting national agencies to improve timeliness, (ii) annual figures of national accounts and population estimates should be published on a quarterly basis, and (iii) tables in which only a few countries are shown or in which most data are outdated should also be published on a quarterly basis. The Statistical Office is presently reviewing the Monthly Bulletin tables in these respects. A panel of users will eventually be consulted.

#### DEMOGRAPHIC YEARBOOK

46. The Demographic Yearbook, like the other specialized yearbooks, is mainly used by specialists: therefore it is easier to identify the needs it tries to meet. In July 1973, a survey of selected users of the Demographic Yearbook was conducted by a joint working group of the Statistical Office and the Population Division, organized to study possible improvements in the publication. Questionnaires were sent to 92 demographers and statisticians known to be regular users of the Demographic Yearbook in an effort to determine how well the publication met their needs. Replies were received from 54 persons.

47. On the basis of its examination of these replies and of the opinions of its members on additional possibilities not touched on in the replies, the working group made a series of suggestions for improvement. Some of the suggestions may be implemented as soon as 1975; others will result in increasing the cost of the Yearbook and their implementation depends on the availability of funds; a third category of suggestions will need further analysis and gradual implementation.

48. The steps which can be taken in 1975, i.e. in the 1974<sup>1975</sup> edition, are: (a) rearranging the Demographic Yearbook so that annual tables appear in a first part and special topics in a second part, (b) setting a fixed rotation schedule of the topics shown in the second part, (c) improving the index which could facilitate the use of the Yearbook, (d) reducing the technical notes published at the beginning of the Yearbook, which are repeated each year, (e) presenting the breakdowns by urban/rural areas as supplements to the relevant tables instead of

incorporating them in the tables, in order to lighten the latter, (f) enlarging the World Summary by including population by sex and age, and (g) publishing 10-year series of data on international migration from time to time.

49. The proposals which will result in increasing the size, hence the cost, of the Yearbook consist of (a) including more detailed vital statistics tables in each edition - birth-rates and death-rates specific for sex and age, gross and net reproduction rates, marriage rates specific for age of bridegroom and bride and divorce rates specific for age of husband and wife - and (b) showing deaths by cause, sex and age.

50. The suggestions which need further analysis and gradual implementation concern (a) printing techniques, 6/ (b) consideration of a "loose-leaf" service in the future, (c) publication of a special historical edition including long series, (d) improvement of the population estimates made by the Population Division, (e) estimation and publication of number of households and statistics on head of households, (f) publication of more analytical tables, viz., ratios and percentages and (g) collection and publication of data on immigrants by period of residence and occupation at the end of the period, with breakdown by sex and age if feasible.

51. In addition, the joint working group considered the possibility of dropping the special text, presented as chapter I, which deals with methodological problems not necessarily directly related to the contents of the Yearbook, but it was unable to arrive at a conclusion.

52. The kind of survey made for the Demographic Yearbook can be extended to other publications, even though it may be more difficult to select users in other fields. Moreover, some of the suggestions referred to above, such as, for instance, the publication of a historical edition or the consideration of loose-leaf service could be extended to other areas.

#### YEARBOOK OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE STATISTICS

53. A major improvement in the Yearbook of International Trade Statistics was made in 1973: the publication of data in US dollars, which makes comparisons between countries and analysis of trade flows feasible. Two other changes may be made soon: (i) including tables by commodity in addition to tables by country now shown and (ii) improving the quality of indexes and regional aggregates.

54. Although all data are comparable, it is quite difficult to gather all export and import data on a given commodity from country tables. Therefore the Statistical Office plans to add tables by commodity to the existing features. These tables would summarize international flows of each commodity, according to the SITC at the 3-digit level, by showing the main importing and exporting countries and world and regional aggregates. This would be a step towards the publication of trade matrixes by commodity. The Statistical Office has already initiated the building

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6/ See para. 92.

of matrixes by commodity. Aside from substantive analysis, the matrixes will facilitate the analysis of inconsistencies between data reported by partner countries. This could provide a basis for discussion with the reporting countries in order to improve the concepts, definitions and methods applied in national statistics on external trade (see E/CN.3/454).

55. Indexes and regional and world aggregates should also be improved. While rebasing the indexes to 1970, the Statistical Office is improving them, by updating the weighting coefficients and by developing more reliable estimates for the countries which do not provide up-to-date data.

#### YEARBOOK OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS STATISTICS

56. The Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics does not need to be substantially changed but more information is needed to facilitate the assessment of the character and reliability of the data published. The frame of the tables, as well as the definitions, classifications and concepts, follows either the System of National Accounts (SNA) or the System of Material Product Balances (MPS). For each country, available data are shown and the completeness is increased each year, reflecting improvement in country national accounts statistics. The main improvement for users would consist of lengthening the series, i.e. showing data for every year available, which may be made feasible by using photocomposition techniques instead of offsetting, as at present. Volume III shows comparable data, rates of increase, percentages of distribution and so forth. Such tables could be enlarged to a certain extent.

57. The reliability of the data is of concern in every statistical field. But it deserves special consideration in the field of national accounts, because (i) national accounts statistics, especially the main aggregates, are widely used for appraising the development of countries; and (ii) the reliability of the national accounts depends on the whole system of national economic statistics. Studies of the former therefore throw light on the latter.

58. At its seventeenth session, the Commission approved the programme of work of the Office, which includes: "Design and application of methods and techniques of improving the checking and evaluation of the reliability of data gathered and compiled by the Statistical Office and of publishing information in that respect, with the aid of a consultant". 7/

59. The Statistical Office has of course always paid attention to the reliability of the data it collects and disseminates, but further efforts are being made to strengthen this activity. In connexion with the national accounts, a project is being started, in collaboration with the regional commissions and country experts, which aims to provide systematic information on the sources and

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7/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 2, para. 193 (g).

methods used in constructing national accounts in developing countries. Although results from this project cannot be expected in the short term, the project will gradually lead to more extensive knowledge of methods and sources of national accounts and, more generally, of the character and reliability of available economic statistics and to guidelines for major improvements.

60. Another problem encountered by the Statistical Office is in connexion with the revised SNA. So far, only 26 countries have reported according to the new SNA. Clearly, the international comparability of national accounts statistics implies the extended use of the new system. The forthcoming review of the SNA at the Conference of European Statisticians and at a planned interregional seminar on national accounts should provide information on facilitating this extension.

#### WORLD ENERGY SUPPLIES

61. The current heightened importance of and interest in energy matters implies a need for detailed, comprehensive and up-to-date information on all aspects of energy. Although World Energy Supplies already displays a fairly comprehensive set of data on resources, production, trade, supply and consumption of most kinds of energy sources, it can be much improved and supplemented.

62. The improvements that could usefully be undertaken in the next few years include: (i) extending the coverage of World Energy Supplies, (ii) developing detailed statistics on end use of energy, (iii) developing energy-related statistics, notably with respect to resources and reserves, cost/price statistics and plant, equipment, storage and transport facilities, (iv) integrating all statistics in a computer-based data bank from which ad hoc tabulations could be retrieved as well as the publication itself and (v) establishing consistent systems of energy accounts. Further development of energy statistics would be carried out in close co-operation with the relevant substantive units of the United Nations and other agencies.

#### THE GROWTH OF WORLD INDUSTRY

63. The Growth of World Industry, Volume I, which features statistical data on the industrial sector, has been gradually improved since its first issue six years ago. The main problem posed by this publication is the lack of comparability between countries. Although definitions and classifications are the same in all tables, differences between national statistics are often large, because of differences in collection methods, in national classifications unequally adapted to the ISIC, in coverage, etc. Therefore, probably more than in other areas, important differences are hidden behind common designations and classifications. The technical notes to the set of tables of each country and many methodological foot-notes warn the reader and indicate those differences between national statistics and international standards. So the user, if he takes these notes into account, may be aware of the character and limitations of the statistics shown for a given country, but he can hardly compare data between countries in many cases. This problem can be solved gradually, but its solution depends much more on actions by national statisticians than on the United Nations Statistical Office.



64. However, the Statistical Office intends to take steps to become more aware of the actual use of this publication: who the users are and what they are expecting from it. It is possible that most users look for data on a given country, rather than try to make international comparisons. If so, The Growth of World Industry, Volume I, is an excellent tool of dissemination of national statistics. If not, i.e. if it is used for international comparisons, then steps need to be taken to improve the use of standardized definitions and classifications. The Growth of World Industry, Volume II, shows industrial commodity production statistics. Its scope has been extended since the first issue and will be further extended.

The Growth of World Industry, Volume II

Edition issued in	Latest year shown	Number of commodities	Number of Countries
1970	1967	315	67
1971	1969	327	163
1972	1970	347	173
1973	1971	397	191
1974	1972	437 *	195 *
1975	1973	475 **	195 **
1976	1974	550 **	200 **

\* Provisional.

\*\* Forecast.

POPULATION AND VITAL STATISTICS REPORT

65. The Population and Vital Statistics Report meets very specific requirements of demographers wishing to get demographic data as up to date as possible. Possible incorporation in the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics is under consideration.

COMMODITY TRADE STATISTICS

66. Commodity Trade Statistics meets the needs of users who require up-to-date, detailed trade data. A thorough study will be carried out of the most effective and efficient form of dissemination of the data. Issues such as further development of ad hoc calculations and tapes, co-ordination with other agencies, improvement of timeliness and reduction of costs will be included in the study.

2. General problems

(a) Indications of reliability

67. The statistical publications pose common problems to which we now turn. The first problem concerns indications of reliability of data. The quality of the data

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currently shown in the Statistical Office publications varies widely. Yet there is no general procedure for conveying this to the users. Obviously, the problem is more difficult at the international than at the national level, since the statistics are provided by national statistical offices whose methods of collection and estimation are generally not well known.

68. However, some steps have been taken: the Demographic Yearbook uses special codes in some tables, which indicate the completeness of coverage of vital statistics and the methodology for the preparation of population estimates. In all publications, many technical notes and foot-notes indicate sources and methods. The programme of analysis of the sources and methods in national accounts, referred to in paragraph 59 above, may lead to some rating of the reliability of national accounts statistics. The study on reconciliation of international trade statistics proposed to the Commission (E/CN.3/454) may also be helpful in this respect. Such studies could usefully be undertaken in other areas; simultaneously, the Statistical Office will pay more attention to checking and appraising the data collected; but it is obvious that such analytical tasks are limited by availability of resources. Moreover, full co-operation of national statistical offices is, of course, required for the analysis of the reliability of the data they provide.

(b) Publication of estimates

69. It should be noted that in general the policy of the Statistical Office in the past has been to disseminate official data reported by countries. There are, however, some important exceptions: estimates made by the Population Division; energy data estimated by the Statistical Office in order to make the statistics it collects consistent with each other; and estimates of national accounts statistics and trade statistics which are not published as such but which are used for computing regional and world aggregates and indexes. In order to fill the gaps in country data and to provide more reliable data where the reported data are clearly inaccurate, the Statistical Office should probably make and publish estimates to a greater extent than it has done in the past. But special marks or codes would, of course, show which of the figures are estimates and which are official national data, as is already done in the Demographic Yearbook.

(c) Indexes, ratios and analytical tables

70. Some analytical work is done in the Statistical Office in order to provide indexes, percentage distributions, rates of increase, vital statistics rates and other ratios. Most publications include a few analytical tables but they have not been developed to a great extent. The computerization of the data files and their integration into a data bank will make such compilations and computations much easier and cheaper. Although the emphasis should be put much more on improving the quality of the statistical data than on preparing analytical tables, a gradual development of such tables could usefully be planned in the next few years, since the latter may have a beneficial effect on the former. Four areas deserve special attention in this respect: trade statistics, energy statistics, demographic and social statistics and national accounts statistics.

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(d) Comments

71. So far, the Statistical Office has restricted its comments on statistical tables to methodological points. Without changing the major purpose of its publications, which is to disseminate statistical data, experiments could be made to include some descriptive comments in order to assist the user in analysing statistical tables. But for technical, budgetary and other reasons this would have to be done with great care and gradually.

C. Improving timeliness

72. Improvement of timeliness is one of the permanent concerns of any statistical office. The Statistical Commission has frequently emphasized the need for more timely publications. But the Statistical Office encounters many obstacles in this respect. The dissemination of international statistical data involves five stages: (i) collection and compilation of statistics by national statistical agencies, (ii) supply of national data to the Statistical Office either directly, through other agencies, or through national publications, (iii) compilation of data in the Statistical Office manually and/or by electronic data processing, (iv) printing and (v) distribution. Stages (i) and (ii) are in the hands of national statistical agencies, stages (iv) and (v) are in the hands of units of the United Nations other than the Statistical Office. Stage (iii) alone is in the hands of the Statistical Office.

1. Stage (i). Processing of national statistics

73. In all tables of all publications, except for those which show estimates made by the United Nations or other international agencies, timeliness of the data is quite different from one country to another. By and large, there is a correlation between the state of development of countries and the timeliness of their statistical data.

74. The following table shows the latest year included in 17 important tables of the Statistical Yearbook, 1972 - for six countries arbitrarily chosen. Out of these 17 tables, the developed countries (Canada and France) provided data for 1972 in 1 table and for 1971 in 12 tables. The developing countries (Algeria, Brazil, Chad and India) did not provide any data for 1972 but provided them for 10, 8, 5 and 4 tables respectively for 1971. While Canada and France supplied out-dated figures (i.e. before 1970) for only 2 tables, the developing countries did so for respectively 5, 4, 3 and 3 tables.

Statistical Yearbook, 1972  
17 selected tables

(Number of tables according to the latest year shown)

	No data	Latest year				Total
		Before 1970	1970	1971	1972	
Algeria	3	5	4	5	0	17
Brazil	1	4	4	8	0	17
Canada	0	1	3	12	1	17
Chad	8	3	2	4	0	17
France	0	1	3	12	1	17
India	0	3	4	10	0	17

75. The same phenomenon may be observed in the Monthly Bulletin. The index of industrial production is shown every month. In the December 1973 issue, the indexes of 55 countries were shown. For 16 countries, the latest figure available was related to 1972. Of the remaining 39 countries, 25 provided an index for July 1973 or later, of which 17 are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and 4 of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.

Monthly Bulletin of Statistics - December 1973  
Index of Industrial Production

(Latest month shown)

	1st Quarter	2nd Quarter	July	August	Sept.	Oct.	Total
OECD countries	2	2	5	7	4	1	21
CMEA countries	0	2	0	1	3	0	6
Others	0	8	2	2	0	0	12
TOTAL	2	12	7	10	7	1	39
25							

76. This suggests that the main problem of timeliness of the United Nations statistical publications lies with the reporting national agencies. Most countries receive the same questionnaires at the same time, <sup>8/</sup> but because principally of the state of their own statistics, the timeliness of the data they provide is very different from one country to another.

<sup>8/</sup> In some cases, the date of mailing has been adjusted to the requirements of reporting national agencies.

2. Stage (ii). Supply of statistical data to the Statistical Office

77. The time elapsed between the mailing of the questionnaires and their return varies from one country to another, from one publication to another and from one year to another. Moreover, questionnaires are often returned partly filled in; further correspondence is then necessary to get all data required. So it is quite difficult to set up complete statistics of returns. The following table concerns the Demographic Yearbook questionnaire mailed in June 1971 and used for the 1971 Yearbook.

Cumulative percentages of return

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July 1971	2.6
August	16.2
September	38.5
October	53.4
November	62.4
December	70.1
January 1972	75.2
February	76.9
March	78.2
April	80.3
May	80.3
June	81.2 - (date of mailing of the 1972 questionnaire)
July	85.0

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78. The mailing dates of the questionnaires may not be optimum, but they were fixed by successive approximations and seem to meet the wishes of most reporting agencies. However, the Statistical Office may make the task of reporting countries easier and facilitate a reduction of the time spent in filling out the questionnaires by using pre-filled computer printouts as questionnaires: the Industrial Commodity Production Questionnaire is already a pre-filled computer printout and this method is expected to be soon extended to the national accounts questionnaires.

3. Stage (iii). Processing in the Statistical Office

79. When data are received by the Statistical Office, either from the national agencies or from international organizations, they are checked and entered into data files; the relevant data are retrieved and reported on the tables to be published, according to a time schedule established for each publication.

80. The data are received during the entire year and published once a year in the yearbooks. The Statistical Office makes every effort to take into account the latest available figures; it establishes the time schedules of the various

publications so that trade-offs are thus involved between country coverage and timeliness. The procedures utilized are under scrutiny at the present time with a view to keeping the Office processing time to a minimum, but it is felt that significant gains in processing time will have to await fuller conversion to electronic data processing.

#### 4. Stage (iv). Printing

81. The Statistical Office is currently studying ways and means of reducing the printing time for its various publications, in co-operation with the relevant services of the United Nations.

82. The Statistical Yearbook is released in July every year. The manuscripts are submitted according to a time schedule convenient for the printer, from November to April.

#### Statistical Yearbook

	1970	1971	1972
(a) First manuscript submitted	November	November	November
(b) Last manuscript submitted	12 April	19 April	30 April
(c) Yearbook released	11 July	11 July	1 July
Time elapsed between (b) and (c)	90 days	83 days	62 days

83. The same kind of schedule is applied to the printing of the Demographic Yearbook. The 1971 and 1972 editions schedules were upset by unforeseen technical problems; the 1969 and 1970 editions were printed according to the following time schedule:

#### Demographic Yearbook

	1970 (1969 edition)	1971 (1970 edition)
(a) First manuscript submitted	December 1969	December 1970
(b) Last manuscript submitted	28 May	29 June
(c) Yearbook released	16 October	22 November
Time elapsed between (b) and (c)	141 days	146 days

Average time elapsed between (b) and (c) for the last eight years: 120 days. <sup>9/</sup> These two yearbooks are printed by typesetting outside the United Nations.

84. The Monthly Bulletin of Statistics is also printed externally by typesetting. Manuscripts are submitted each month on the 22nd (or the nearest working day) and the Bulletin is usually released exactly one month later.

85. The other publications are printed by offsetting either of typewritten sheets or computer printouts.

86. The latest edition of The Growth of World Industry, 1971, Volume I, followed the following time schedule:

Typing: April-June 1973  
Printing: 28 June-22 October 1973.

The next editions will be prepared by offsetting of computer printouts, which will reduce the delay.

87. The date of release of World Energy Supplies has varied from one year to another. But the printing time is approximately three months every year, though the project consists exclusively of offsetting typewritten material and computer printouts. Special efforts are being made in 1974 to accelerate the printing of this publication.

World Energy Supplies (Statistical Papers, Series J)

	J 12 (1969)	J 13 (1970)	J 14 (1971)	J 15 (1972)	J 16 (1973)
Manuscript submitted	27 June	21 July	26 July	16 October	10 July
Yearbook released	19 August	20 October	9 November	15 January	25 October
Time elapsed (days)	54	91	106	91	107

88. The printing time seems quite long. Moreover, additional difficulties arise from time to time; for instance the third quarter issue of Population and Vital Statistics Report in 1973 was so late, owing to the time taken for printing, that it had to be cancelled, because it would finally have been released at the same time as the fourth quarter issue.

89. In addition, it should be noted that the Reproduction Section at United Nations Headquarters, which prints some of the statistical publications (namely,

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<sup>9/</sup> The Demographic Yearbook was printed by the same printer as the Statistical Yearbook until 1973. The higher priority given to the latter explains the difference in delay between the two publications.

The Growth of World Industry, the Yearbook of International Trade Statistics, World Energy Supplies, Population and Vital Statistics Report and Commodity Trade Statistics), cannot devote much time to statistical publications from September to December each year. During this period, it is fully devoted to documentation for the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies.

90. In order to improve this situation, the following steps can be taken: (i) set up more accurate planning with the services in charge of printing at the United Nations and (ii) extend the photocomposition techniques to all publications. On the first point, the Statistical Office has strengthened its relations with the Department of Conference Services, which is in charge of printing (as well as translation and editorial control). In the meantime, it is trying to improve its own planning procedures in order to be able to determine its time schedules more accurately and reduce the elapsed time in the Statistical Office for preparing manuscripts for printing.

91. But it should be noted that, from the point of view of the Department of Conference Services, statistical publications are only part of a much broader set of United Nations publications and are not always accorded a high priority because of the generally urgent requirements of the legislative bodies of the United Nations. Moreover, the Statistical Office cannot by itself make decisions on time schedules, printing techniques and choice of printers. Hopefully, the close co-operation which now exists with the relevant services should result in improving the situation.

92. But the main improvement will stem from using photocomposition techniques. Photocomposition from magnetic tapes is obviously a faster and more economical printing technique. All the Statistical Office specialized publications are already partly or fully produced from computer-based data files, and this should be extended to the Statistical Yearbook and the Monthly Bulletin. Except for the Demographic Yearbook and Population and Vital Statistics Report, all specialized publications are now printed by photo-offset. The replacement of photo-offset by photocomposition is currently being considered in co-operation with the Department of Conference Services. Although the technical studies were not completed at the time of writing, it is anticipated that this technique will be implemented in the next few years, starting with Commodity Trade Statistics and the Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics. Aside from improving timeliness, this will result in substantial savings, notably in the case of Commodity Trade Statistics.

##### 5. Stage (v). Dissemination

93. Once publications are released in New York, it takes at least a month, often two or three, to make them available to the subscribers outside North America. The following table shows the time elapsed between the release of the Demographic Yearbook and its receipt by Sweden's National Central Bureau of Statistics, which receives the Yearbook free as a correspondent of the Statistical Office. Aside from speeding up the mailing from New York, the only way of improving timeliness is to send books to subscribers by air mail or air freight, which would of course increase the subscription rate.

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Demographic Yearbook

	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971
Yearbook released	25 Oct.	8 Oct.	9 Mar.	16 Oct.	22 Nov.	16 Feb.
Yearbook received in Sweden	20 Dec.	9 Dec.	16 Apr.	16 Dec.	10 Jan.	16 Mar.

D. Computerization

94. Until recent years, compilation and dissemination of data by the Statistical Office were done manually. Gradually, the process has been more or less put on a computerized basis and the Office is now making plans for the design and implementation of a computer-based, integrated statistical information system. This part of the report (i) describes the present situation, (ii) summarizes the advantages of an integrated information system and (iii) suggests the steps planned within the next few years (see also E/CN.3/445).

95. The main characteristics of the present systems of electronic data processing at the Statistical Office is that they are strongly publication-oriented, which means that the data files and programmes have been designed to make the preparation of publications more efficient and quicker, but are designed neither to produce ad hoc outputs for dissemination or analysis nor to integrate all statistical data into a unified data bank.

Present status of the Statistical Office publications  
with respect to electronic data processing

	Collection	Processing	Printing
<u>Statistical Yearbook</u>	-	-	- a/
<u>Monthly Bulletin of Statistics</u>	-	-	- a/
<u>Demographic Yearbook</u>	-	Partly computerized	- a/
<u>Trade Yearbook</u>	Partly in machine- readable form	Completely computerized	Offset of printouts
<u>National Accounts Yearbook</u>	-	Completely computerized	Offset of printouts
<u>World Energy Supplies</u>	-	Almost completely computerized	Offset of printouts for most tables
<u>The Growth, volume I</u>	-	Computerization started in 1974	Offset of printouts in 1974
<u>The Growth, volume II</u>	Pre-filled question- naires in the form of computer printouts	Completely computerized	Offset of printouts
<u>Population and Vital Statistics Report</u>	-	-	- b/
<u>Commodity Trade Statistics</u>	Mostly in machine- readable form	Completely computerized	Offset of printouts

a/ Typesetting.

b/ Offset of typewritten material.

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This table shows that all specialized publications depend either fully or partly on computer systems (with the exception of Population and Vital Statistics Report) in the sense that data are entered into machine-readable data files and tables are retrieved directly from the computer in the form of printouts. 10/

96. As far as collection is concerned, three publications benefit from computerization. The Yearbook of International Trade Statistics and Commodity Trade Statistics are produced from national statistics which in many cases are transmitted to the Statistical Office in the form of tapes or, sometimes, punch cards. Besides, one of the advantages of a computer-based system of storage and retrieval is that questionnaires may be pre-filled with data of previous years, which lightens the workload of reporting agencies and avoids reporting errors to a certain extent.

97. The Industrial Commodity Production (The Growth of World Industry, volume II) is presently handled that way, and it is planned to do the same with the General Industrial Questionnaire (The Growth of World Industry, volume I) in 1974. In addition, the Statistical Office, together with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, is studying the possibility of using the same method for the national accounts questionnaires.

98. The last column of the table deals with printing techniques. All publications using electronic data processing are printed by photo-offset or computer printouts except for the Demographic Yearbook whose computerization is partial. In addition, World Trade Annual, which is published by a private publisher using the trade statistics tapes of the Statistical Office, is printed by photocomposition. The generalization of this technique would result in saving money, reducing delays and improving the presentation of publications. As indicated above, the Statistical Office is at present testing extension of photocomposition to Commodity Trade Statistics, as a first step, and then to the Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics. This is being done in collaboration with the Printing Section of the United Nations Secretariat.

99. Aside from this improvement of printing techniques, the main objective of the Statistical Office, as far as electronic data processing is concerned, is to move from specialized data files aimed at specific publications to a computer-based integrated information system. Such an integrated system would provide a user, upon demand, with country profiles across subject-matter areas, ad hoc tabulations and time series, the results of applying common statistical tools to the data in the system and, of course, outputs for publication. In addition, such a system has the potential of unifying current processing techniques within the Office, and reducing the time required to produce all kinds of outputs.

100. If the Statistical Office is able to design, implement and maintain such a system, dissemination of data through publications will be supplemented by ad hoc outputs upon request from Governments, scholars or other users - notably in

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10/ It should be noted that the Yearbook of Construction Statistics and the Compendium of Housing Statistics are manually processed.

machine-readable form. As far as publications are concerned, the Statistical Yearbook and the Monthly Bulletin, in particular, whose tables are assembled from all subject-matter areas, will be prepared much more efficiently and rapidly.

101. But the implementation of a computer-based integrated statistical information system is a long-term goal. The following steps would have to be taken in the short-term and medium-term periods: (i) strengthening the programming staff of the Statistical Office and, probably, improving the current computing capability, and (ii) continuing and completing current systems development activities.

102. As far as the last point is concerned, the Statistical Office expects in the short term to (a) extend the concept of computer-prepared, pre-filled questionnaires to national accounts data and then to other areas, (b) continue to improve the processing of international trade statistics, (c) implement the use of photocomposition for all computerized publications, (d) introduce more general text-processing procedures, and (e) document the system of computer programmes used in producing the Demographic Yearbook.

103. Besides these short-term goals, the Statistical Office hopes to be able to take the required steps towards integration of the various data files. This includes experimentation with new software systems, research on data structuring and storage and retrieval techniques, analysis of the potential market of ad hoc tables, etc.

104. In the meantime, the Statistical Office will study the possibility of "computerizing" the Statistical Yearbook and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics.

105. To conclude this part of the report, it should be noted that such developments require time, collaboration with and correlative action by other units of the United Nations, a substantial investment in training of the Statistical Office technical staff as well as improvement in the computer capability of the United Nations.

#### E. Distribution

106. The distribution of the Statistical Office publication is obviously too narrow and should be extended by sales promotion and advertising through various channels. The following table shows the circulation of the Statistical Office yearbooks published in 1972, according to statistics provided by the United Nations Sales Section as of 1 January 1974.

	Free distribution	Sales	Stocks, Jan. 1974	Total
<u>Statistical Yearbook, 1971 a/</u>	2,400	8,600	-	11,000
<u>Demographic Yearbook, 1970</u>	2,100	5,650	550	8,300
<u>Trade Yearbook, 1969</u>	1,800	2,800	-	4,600
<u>National Accounts Yearbook, 1970</u>	2,000	2,300	-	4,300
<u>World Energy Supplies (J/15)</u>	2,000	925	75	3,000
<u>Growth of World Industry,</u> vol. I, 1970	2,050	920	80	3,050
<u>Growth of World Industry,</u> vol. II, 1970	2,050	910	90	3,050

a/ The 1972 edition of the Statistical Yearbook had to be reprinted, the first 12,000 copies having been exhausted.

107. The following table shows the subscribers to the other recurrent publications. It does not include the free distribution which amounts to approximately 2,000 copies.

Number of subscribers 1973

<u>Monthly Bulletin of Statistics</u>	3,014
<u>Population and Vital Statistics Report</u>	717
<u>Commodity Trade Statistics</u>	454

108. The distribution of buyers and subscribers by country shows that the developing countries account for less than 10 per cent and that the United States accounts for approximately one third.

Subscribers 1973

	<u>Monthly Bulletin of Statistics</u>	<u>Population and Vital Statistics Report</u>	<u>Commodity Trade Statistics</u>
USA	950	476	192
Canada	128	58	37
Asia	404 <u>a/</u>	38	115
Latin America	212	7	21
Europe	1,310	121	76
Africa	70	15	10
Middle East	40	2	3
Total	3,014	717	454

a/ Of which Japan: 280.

109. The statistics regarding the sale of yearbooks are not easy to interpret; since they are sold by several distributors spread all over the world.

Statistical Office annual publications

	New York		Geneva sales <u>a/</u>	<u>Major distributor in</u>			Total sales
	sales			Europe	Asia	Others	
<u>Statistical Yearbook</u>	2,500	1,431	2,300	1,720	295	340	8,586
<u>Demographic Yearbook</u>	2,019	1,150	1,300	750	135	296	5,650
<u>Trade Yearbook</u>	733	677	700	495	135	60	2,800
<u>National Accounts Yearbook</u>	1,559	551	600	415	111	64	2,300
<u>World Energy Supplies</u>	20	299	500	85	6	15	925
<u>Growth of World Industry,</u> vol. I	187	223	350	120	20	20	920
<u>Growth of World Industry,</u> vol. II	177	223	350	120	20	20	910

a/ In reality the figures of this column represent the copies shipped to Geneva.

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110. The subscribers and buyers of the Statistical Office recurrent publications are: (i) university libraries; (ii) public and government libraries; (iii) private companies and banks. It is quite impossible to compile statistics of subscribers and buyers because distributors are spread all over the world and, even in New York, the names and addresses are not sufficient indications for relevant classifications. Besides, it should be noted that the end user is rarely the buyer and that we do not know how many people use the yearbooks and bulletins stored in libraries. Therefore, a comprehensive market study is not feasible.

111. Whoever the actual users are and however they use the Statistical Office publications, it is believed that the dissemination of the publications could be made much wider. The national statistical agencies could be an appropriate channel for publicizing international statistical publications: they could include information on these publications in their bulletins and newsletters. The Statistical Office, as well as the statistical divisions of specialized agencies, could provide all materials required in this respect.

112. The Statistical Office is preparing a "pocket book of international statistics" which will be broadly disseminated and, aside from its own usefulness, will be a medium for publicizing international statistical publications.

113. The co-operation developed between the Statistical Office and the Sales Section of the United Nations should lead to a thorough analysis of the ways by which the sales of the publications could be expanded, including consideration of prices, appearance of publications, publicity and other factors.

ANNEXES

Annex I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 2732 (XXV), paragraph 4, invited the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) to examine and report to it at its twenty-sixth session on the programme of recurrent publications of the United Nations. The JIU submitted its report on this question to the Assembly at its twenty-sixth session (A/8362, which includes JIU/REP/71/8, a report prepared by Robert M. Macy).
2. In accordance with Assembly resolution 2886 (XXVI), the Economic and Social Council decided a/ to transmit the relevant recommendations of the report to those of its subsidiary bodies meeting in the first half of 1972.
3. Hence the recommendations of the Inspector's report pertaining to statistics together with the comments of the Secretary-General (see A/8540) were brought to the attention of the Statistical Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination. At its seventeenth session, the Commission discussed the proposals of JIU, based on a report of the Secretary-General entitled "Publications of statistics" (E/CN.3/439 and Add.1) and the comments of the Working Group (E/CN.3/420, paras. 4-22).
4. The Commission endorsed the views of the Working Group, which had already been considered by the Economic and Social Council. At the same session, it approved the programme of work of the Statistical Office, which included a "review ... of the statistical publications of the Statistical Office with a view to improving their content, timeliness and rapidity of issue and the efficiency of their compilation". b/
5. At its fifth session, in 1973, the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination was given an oral progress report by the Director of the Statistical Office and "expressed its support of the programme outlined" (E/CN.3/442, para. 66).

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a/ At its 1810th meeting, held on 6 January 1972.

b/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 2, para. 193 (f).

Annex II

EXCERPTS FROM THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION'S  
WORKING GROUP

1. The Working Group of the Statistical Commission discussed the report of the Joint Inspection Unit at its 1972 session. Its views were later endorsed by the Economic and Social Council and by the Statistical Commission.
2. In its report, the Working Group emphasized several considerations which have been taken into account in the present review (E/CN.3/420):

"The Working Group had grave reservations about the recommendations made in the JIU report. The criteria used in the report were too restricted and were applied too rigidly. Disproportionate emphasis was given to reducing expenditures on the publication of statistics. Little or no attention was devoted to the obligation of the United Nations to satisfy the wide range of requirements for internationally comparable statistics; and the recommended criteria for the timeliness of the international publication of statistics were too strict and were used without taking other important considerations into account. Contrary to the recommendations of the JIU report, the Working Group emphasized that duplication in the publication of series of data was required in order to disseminate the data widely for the convenient use of the statistical publications of the United Nations system. Otherwise, the users of these publications would often find it necessary to consult a number of different statistical publications in order to assemble the statistics they require. Furthermore, the costs of publishing statistics are small relative to the costs of gathering and processing the data. The Group agreed with the JIU report that any duplication that existed in the collection of statistics from Governments should be eliminated but considered that the means recommended in the report for ensuring this would create serious obstacles to the efficient collection of timely data" (ibid., para. 7).

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"The Group recommended that the timeliness of the various series in the United Nations statistical publications should be reviewed and that, where appropriate, ways should be investigated and efforts should be made to improve the situation. This should not be done at the expense of unwarranted reductions in the completeness or reliability of the series, and attention should be devoted to devising ways and means for transmitting data from national statistical authorities to the international statistical offices.

"The Group emphasized that the frequency with which a statistical publication was issued should not be reduced solely because the desired criteria of timeliness were not met. Nor should the publication be abandoned. These were counter-productive measures. Users of the international publications wished to have data as up to date as could be issued. Less

/...



frequent issue of the publication would lengthen the lag between the time at which series were available and the time at which they were issued.

"The Working Group stressed that it was essential to continue to issue a Monthly Bulletin of Statistics and an annual Statistical Yearbook. The Group considered that the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics and the Statistical Yearbook should be reviewed with a view to enhancing the content, timeliness and rapidity of distribution of the publications. It was recommended that a group of national experts should be convened in 1973 for this purpose.

"The Monthly Bulletin of Statistics was widely used in the United Nations family, in other international organizations, in the statistical and other agencies of Member States, in private business organizations, and in private research and other institutions, as a convenient source of the most up-to-date, internationally comparable monthly and annual data available on economic and social conditions.

"The Statistical Yearbook was used by a similarly wide audience as a source of more comprehensive, most up-to-date annual data available. The results of a user survey carried out for the JIU report, as well as the sales of the two publications, attested to their value to a wide audience. According to the user survey, the Statistical Yearbook was used more widely than any other United Nations statistical publication, and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics was very widely used. The number of copies sold of each publication was large; the Statistical Yearbook was the only publication of the United Nations for which the income from sales significantly exceeded the costs of printing and binding," (*ibid*, paras. 12-16).

Annex III

COMPENDIUM OF HOUSING STATISTICS

1. Preparation of a Yearbook of Housing Statistics was included in the work programme of the sixteenth session of the Statistical Commission a/ as a project on which the Commission wished to see substantial progress made before its seventeenth session, in 1972. It was again included in the work programme of the seventeenth session of the Commission. b/ Accordingly, work was initiated on the Yearbook and it was submitted for printing in 1972.
2. After the Yearbook had been submitted for printing, the Publications Board requested that the title be changed to Compendium of Housing Statistics rather than Yearbook of Housing Statistics. The Board noted that a statement of financial implications had not been presented to the Commission as required for new periodicals or recurrent publications and the Board did not feel that the publication should be issued with a title which implied that it would appear on a continuing basis.
3. The main purpose of the Compendium is to make available the information on housing stock and characteristics derived from national housing censuses. In order to provide for the correct interpretation of census results, other data which have a bearing on the housing situation are also included; for example, data are included on number of dwellings constructed, rate of construction etc. to give some indication of trends with respect to additions to the housing stock.
4. It is hoped that in addition to its use as a source of data for individual countries, the Compendium may furnish a preliminary view of world housing conditions. In this connexion it may be worth noting that, as many countries carried out their first housing census in 1960, it is only with the 1970 round of censuses that it has become possible to make comparisons over time for any significant number of countries.
5. Subsequent issues of the Compendium would be devoted to the publication of additional data from the 1970 censuses as these become available. With improvement in the national gathering of data, both the territorial coverage and the scope of subject-matter could be expanded. From time to time, an effort would be made to include information concerning aspects of housing which are of topical interest; the extent and rate of growth of squatter housing, for example.
6. After considering the financial implications set forth below, the Statistical Commission may wish to express its views concerning the desirability of preparing a second issue of the Compendium of Housing Statistics in 1975 followed by a third issue in 1978. In the meantime, demand for the publication could be assessed and further recommendations made to the Commission at its nineteenth session concerning the most appropriate periodicity for subsequent issues.

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a/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 2, para. 115 (32).

b/ Ibid., Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 2, para. 196 (b).

Financial implications

7. The cost of publishing the Compendium of Housing Statistics, 1972-1974, is estimated at \$10,000 for a typeset version.

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