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SPECIAL ISSUES: RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF FOR
WORK IN NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES AND STATISTICAL SERVICES OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The present report has been prepared at the request of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination. The Working Group was guided in its decision by the discussions held at the twenty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission.

The report contains a review of general issues in the recruitment and selection of professional staff in statistics (paras. 3-12). This is followed by a summary of the recruitment and selection process in national statistical offices, based on information obtained by means of a questionnaire circulated to selected Member States (paras. 13-80), and an overview of procedures for recruitment and selection of United Nations staff and their application to statistical posts (paras. 81-118). The last section contains points for discussion by the Commission (para. 119).

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its twenty-fourth session, the Statistical Commission reviewed a list of special topics presented to it in order to identify the issues that should be considered at its next session. The discussion on the subject reflected a consensus among members of the Commission that the special topics to be taken up should be issue-oriented and deal with problems of particular concern to the United Nations and relate to the efficacy, quality and content of the statistical work of the Organization. The final decision on the selection of topics, however, was left to the Commission's Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination. 1/ The Working Group, at its twelfth session, in October 1987, decided that "Selection and recruitment of professional staff for work in national statistical offices and the statistical services" should be one of the two special issues to be taken up by the Commission at its twenty-fifth session. 2/

2. In connection with the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General on that subject, the Working Group agreed that the Statistical Office should send a questionnaire to selected national statistical offices with a view to obtaining information on national practices. The Working Group recommended that the questionnaire also be sent to all the countries that are members of the Statistical Commission. The Working Group expressed the view that the report and the Statistical Commission's consideration of it could be expected to provide particular guidance for the United Nations in its process of selection and recruitment of professional staff for the statistical services of the Organization. 3/

I. GENERAL ISSUES IN THE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF STAFF
IN STATISTICS

3. The recruitment and selection of technically qualified staff is key to the successful implementation of the work programmes of national and international statistical offices. Technical concerns, that is, needed skills based on present and planned work programmes and the judgement of statisticians, are integral to the recruitment and selection process. In addition, given the nature of governmental organizations, this process must be undertaken within the established principles of civil service recruitment. In other words, an effective recruitment policy for national and international statistical services must recognize the substantive, that is, technical, needs of statistical offices as well as procedures for fairness and equity involved in creating and maintaining a civil service.

4. On the substantive or technical side, there are unique features in the skill needs of statistical offices. First, staff must have an aptitude for and an interest in quantitative work. Second, a range of subject-matter specializations must be represented within the occupational group referred to as "statistician". This point is made effectively in a report on the management of national statistical agencies reviewed by the Statistical Commission at its nineteenth session, in 1976:

"Although in many countries all professional employees in a statistical office are automatically referred to as 'statisticians', it bears emphasizing that the production of official statistics is an interdisciplinary endeavour involving inputs from a variety of fields of knowledge ... typically, in a well established statistical office, the greater part of the professional employees do not have degrees in statistics as such, but rather in economics, econometrics, demography, sociology, accountancy, cartography, business administration, computer science etc." 4/

5. To grasp the variety of skills and subject-matter specializations needed, one may consider the following basic activities of national statistical offices, which are also reflected in the work programme of statistical offices at the international level: extracting statistics from administrative records, planning and executing national censuses, and designing and conducting sample surveys. Each of these sources of data covers diverse aspects of economic and social fields. For example, international trade statistics, vital statistics and statistics on educational enrolment and health care are compiled from administrative records; statistics on population, households, housing, agriculture and economic activity are obtained through censuses; and statistics on employment, income/expenditure, fertility, mortality and industrial production are obtained through sample surveys. Other areas of statistics, such as national accounts and balances, draw on several sources. The raw information obtained from these sources must be reviewed to eliminate obvious errors, transferred first to a machine-readable format and then processed so as to create data bases and statistical tables. These tasks may also involve the preparation of estimates. The resulting statistics need to be evaluated and then disseminated to users to respond to their needs for timely and reliable statistics at the national, regional and local levels, and for special target subgroups or domains of study. These activities require (a) specially trained clerks, interviewers, editors, coders, cartographers, administrative officers and so forth; (b) subject-matter specialists in the various social sciences, demography, economics, data processing, sampling, statistics and the like; and (c) management capability to facilitate a good interactive multidisciplinary work environment. Except for interviewers and field supervisors, all the occupational categories needed for work in national statistical offices are also needed for statistical work in the United Nations.

6. Clearly, the special mix of skills needed in any statistical office, whether national or international, depends on the scope of responsibility of the office in terms of both subject-matter and statistical operations. In an office where, for example, agricultural statistics are part of the work of the central statistical agency, specialists in this subject-matter field are required; even when another agency has the responsibility for agricultural statistics, some staff who are at least familiar with this field of statistics are required in the central statistical agency for compilation and methodological work that interface with agricultural statistics. It may be stressed that some fields of statistics, such as work on national accounts and balances and work on statistical classifications, require a particularly high degree of specialization. Variations in the skill mix required also depend on the size of the statistical office concerned. In general, small or very small offices must rely on generalists, or at least specialists capable of working on a wide range of tasks, while larger offices will require more and deeper specialization.

7. Another consideration is that "the knowledge acquired in universities, both in subject-matter fields and in statistics, is often too general and abstract to be immediately well adapted to the needs of statistical agencies". 5/ In other words, a university degree in the relevant subject-matter theory is not a sufficient basis for working effectively in a statistical office at either the national or the international level. One also needs experience with the work involved in official statistics. These unique features in the skills required in statistics call for the close involvement of statistical office staff in the process of recruitment.

8. At the same time, administrative concerns are important in the recruitment and selection process. The process must be carried out under general rules and established principles that ensure a unified civil service. In addition, there must be an effective vehicle for the performance of the many functions included in this process. These concerns point to the administrative arrangements for carrying out recruitment and selection, which may be the responsibility of a personnel unit in the statistical office or in the central personnel service of the Government. Other administrative aspects are the procedures and guidelines set by national and international civil service commissions, as well as their role in identifying the entities that will have responsibility for each function in the process.

9. The process of recruitment and selection of statistical staff thus involves both statistical authorities and the national civil service commission or personnel unit. The degree of responsibility placed in each of the two units varies widely around the world. In this respect, the interface between the central Government and the statistical office in recruitment and selection may follow one of the following three general lines: (a) the statistical service has the responsibility for executing the process within the guidelines set by the civil service commission; (b) both the civil service administration and the statistical service have a substantial role in the process; or (c) the civil service administration controls and executes most of the functions in this process.

10. Differences in the organization of responsibilities are reflected in the various activities in the recruitment and selection process. The main sets of activities include (a) identification of personnel needs based on vacant posts and work programmes; (b) provision of financial support through the budgetary process; (c) identification of potential candidates, which involves, for example, advertising posts open for recruitment and contacts with universities; and (d) pre-selection and selection of candidates, which involves methods such as competitive examinations and interviews.

11. Differences in the locus of responsibility for recruitment and selection also occur by level of staff recruitment. Civil service systems or staff rules influence the selection process at all levels and probably have a higher impact on professional posts at the lower or junior levels in terms of establishing minimum requirements for appointment. Another potential source of difference is the subject-matter field. Statistical authorities are more likely to have a key role in the recruitment and selection of statistical staff in fields where the supply of available candidates is most limited, such as economic statistics and data processing. The recruitment of statistical staff in these areas may be organized differently from that of statistical staff in other areas.

12. Issues in the recruitment process considered so far involve the organization of the process and how it is affected by general guidelines and programmes internal to the organization. In addition, in carrying out recruitment, national and international organizations are affected by very general conditions and trends that go beyond the government service itself. For example, as advances are made in the various fields involving statistics, the skill level for staff to be recruited also increases. For instance, the increased need for data processing skills creates the need for statistical office personnel in terms of both data-processing specialists and subject-matter staff with strong data processing skills. An additional set of conditions that has placed greater demands on the work programme and skill needs of statistical offices is connected with the growing demand for and importance placed on information. In particular, priority has been placed on extensive, timely and accurate statistics at the international level, the national level and disaggregated for small areas in countries. On the other hand, pressures for affirmative action in the hiring of special population groups may be seen as eroding the influence of the statistical services on personnel matters. Similarly, as a result of general policies or practices, the salaries and conditions of service for civil servants relative to the private sector may be such that it becomes difficult to recruit and retain high calibre staff.

II. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES

13. Pursuant to the recommendations of the the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination, the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat prepared a brief questionnaire dealing with the various aspects of the recruitment and selection process. The questionnaire was sent to 36 Member States, including the 24 members of the Statistical Commission and 12 other States. In selecting the 12 additional countries, the Statistical Office tried to ensure an adequate balance in terms of geographical and other relevant considerations.

14. The questionnaire included queries on recruitment procedures, methods of selection and, in particular, the use of competitive examinations as a means of identifying potential candidates, application of special measures with regard to regional diversity, women and representation of minority groups, major problems encountered in the recruitment of professional staff and so forth.

15. By 24 June 1988, 22 countries had provided replies to the questionnaire: Australia, Canada, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland, Germany, Federal Republic of, Ghana, Hungary, India, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Panama, Poland, Spain, Thailand, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Venezuela and Zambia.

16. Although 14 countries had not responded to the Statistical Office inquiry by the cut-off date, on the basis of the information received some general points can be made about the issues related to the selection and recruitment of professional staff for work in national statistical offices.

A. Procedures in recruitment and selection

17. The first set of issues covered by the questionnaire related to various aspects of the process of recruitment and selection. It was pointed out that this process included four major activities: (1) identification of personnel needs, (2) the provision of financial support, (3) identification of potential candidates and (4) pre-selection and selection of candidates. The respondents were asked to provide a brief description of the procedure in their country and pay particular attention, in their response, to "identification of potential candidates" and "pre-selection and selection of candidates". They were also asked to explain where the responsibility rested in connection with these activities.

1. Identification of personnel needs

18. The strength of a statistical service, be it at the national or the regional level, depends to a great extent on the availability of highly qualified human resources in sufficient numbers, so that the various objectives covered by the work programme of such a service can be met in the most effective manner. Therefore, the identification of personnel needs, listed as one of the major activities in the process of recruitment, is the first step towards achieving organizational strength.

19. The majority of the respondents indicated that the identification of personnel needs is essentially made by the national statistical offices themselves as a result of a review of their work programmes and the approved posts in their operational structure, and a consultative process involving individual divisions.

20. The Central Statistical Office of Hungary replied that staff needs were determined to a large extent by the quantity and quality of the tasks planned to be accomplished; such important factors as "the rapid development of the central state statistics, the integration of computer technology into the statistical system, as well as modifications in the division of labour among central and regional statistical organs" were taken into consideration in identifying those needs.

21. The information provided by Australia reflected two different approaches to the identification of needs. At the junior level (described as the "base level" by Australia) the needs are determined through an informal consultative process within the organization, taking into account the experience gained from past practice and the projections made in connection with the work programme. At higher levels, however, "identification occurs when positions become difficult to fill from within the Australian Public Service".

2. Provision of financial support

22. With respect to the provision of financial support for the recruitment and selection of professional staff, it was evident that national statistical authorities were mainly guided by the limits established through the governmental budgetary process. As is the case for practically all departments in government, expenditures for personnel have to be kept within the confines of the financial budget as regulated by law.

3. Identification of potential candidates

23. Recruitment activities of national statistical services vary in complexity and size. In smaller countries with similarly small statistical organizations, the requirements for statistical services and resources are naturally limited and relatively simple. In larger countries, however, demands for statistical production become more complex and call for a statistical organization that is not only large in size but also capable of handling a wide variety of functions in diverse fields.

24. The recruitment process aimed at choosing the right human resources for work in statistical services is made up of a number of initiatives, starting with the identification of potential candidates. Once qualifications and other criteria for identifying potential candidates are prepared, the next step is to advertise vacancies, providing a detailed outline of the job description and qualifications. The vacancies may be advertised internally or by external means such as newspapers, magazines, professional journals or communications with universities and similar professional institutions. For senior-level posts, identification gives high priority to promotion within the national statistical office of junior-level staff.

25. For many countries, the minimum qualification for the candidates to be considered for an appointment is a university-level diploma. In Kenya, for instance, the recognized qualifications to be considered for an appointment at the entry grade are "(a) a First Class or an Upper-Second Class honours degree in Economics and Statistics or Mathematics, (b) a relevant Bachelor of Philosophy degree in Economics or a Masters degree, and (c) an equivalent degree in Mathematics with a bias in Statistics, Economics, Computer Science, Survey techniques, Demography or Business Administration".

26. In Australia, at the base level, "final year undergraduates have been identified as the [Australian Bureau of Statistics'] greatest potential source of applicants". Above the base level, single or small numbers of positions are advertised inside the civil service through the Australian Commonwealth Gazette, or externally in the national press.

27. The statistical personnel sought for service in the Statistical Institute of Spain are divided into two groups: (1) the Certified Technical Statisticians and (2) Expert Statisticians. Candidates for the first group are required to have a university degree equivalent to three years of study and those for the second must have an advanced university degree.

28. In the case of the United Kingdom, "advertisements are placed in the national press and professional journals inviting applications from professionally qualified statisticians, usually new university graduates. Individual posts are not advertised nor is any specific number of vacancies quoted."

29. Another approach to identifying potential candidates involves the formation of close ties between the national statistical organization and the universities. Czechoslovakia and Hungary are two of the countries making use of this approach. In Hungary, for instance, the Central Statistical Office has established a

co-operative relationship with the Department of Statistics of Budapest University that provides the opportunity for the staff of both organizations to maintain regular contacts with each other. As a result of these exchanges, opportunities constantly come up to either identify students with potential or cultivate in students some interest for work in statistics. In its search for young economists, the Hungarian Central Statistical Office also maintains similar contacts with a number of universities in the country. In the case of Czechoslovakia, in addition to the method of advertising vacancies in the mass media, the central statistical bodies and the universities in Prague and Bratislava have concluded agreements of co-operation for the recruitment of graduates specializing in the fields of economic statistics, electronic data processing and administrative work.

4. Pre-selection and selection of candidates

30. The majority of respondents indicated that in this phase of the recruitment process they rely, to a significant degree, first on the factual information on the candidates, such as their written application, educational credentials and past experience, and then on a personal interview.

31. It was evident that the interview of a candidate is considered a crucial element of the selection phase as it can provide valuable information about an individual that would not otherwise be possible through written material. Replies revealed that both the substantive staff and the recruitment (personnel) officers were involved in this evaluation process. Although the use of competitive examinations was not commonly employed in the pre-selection and selection of candidates, a few of the respondents reported that they had utilized such examinations to guide them in the selection of qualified candidates (additional information is provided in paras. 48-58 below).

B. Interface between the central Government and the national statistical service in recruitment

32. Comments elicited from countries with regard to the institutional arrangements in recruitment brought out some distinctly different practices. As indicated in paragraph 9 above, in theory the role of the statistical service in the recruitment process can range from minimal to extensive. It appeared, however, that in most of the countries the responsibility for recruitment was, either to a significant degree or totally, delegated to the national statistical services.

33. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) replied that the "responsibility for base level recruitment initially rests with the Australian Public Service Commission acting as a co-ordinating agency for a civil service-wide campaign. Selection is then made from a sub-set of applicants who have identified the ABS as a preferred employer. The exception to this is economists. The ABS has sole responsibility for recruiting its own economists as it has needs which differ from the rest of the Australian Public Service. All above base level recruitment rests solely with the ABS."

34. In the case of Canada, "the Public Service Commission is the agency responsible for the administration of the Public Service Employment Act, which governs staffing in the Federal Public Service of Canada. The Commission has exclusive authority to make appointments in all departments and agencies of the Government of Canada. The Public Service Employment Act allows the Commission to delegate any of its functions to departments and agencies. Approximately 98 per cent of staff of activities governed by the Act have been delegated."

35. Chile, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Panama, the USSR and Venezuela reported that, in accordance with the rules and regulations as applied to the civil service, the responsibility for recruitment rested entirely with their national statistical offices. Similarly, in Mexico, once the overall operating budget was negotiated within the context of the organizational structure approved by the Civil Service Administration, all recruitment and selection functions were the sole responsibility of the Central Statistical Office.

36. India explained that "the statistical system in India at the central level is essentially supported by officials of the Indian Statistical Service (ISS) controlled by the Department of Statistics. The status of the Service, by and large, corresponds to other organized central civil services. The ISS caters to the needs of statistical personnel at professional level in the central ministries/departments." The recruitment of staff through competitive examinations is, however, carried out by the Union Public Service Commission.

37. In Kenya, all recruitment functions involving the statistical needs of the Government are handled by the Central Statistical Office in consultation with the Public Service Commission. In New Zealand, the responsibility of the Department of Statistics is limited to the recruitment of its own personnel; the statistical staff in other government departments are recruited independently of the Department of Statistics.

38. Thailand reported, on the other hand, that, as was the case with all other government officials, selection and recruitment of the National Statistical Office staff were performed by the Civil Service Commission.

39. The reply from the United Kingdom reflected a substantial presence on the part of the British Civil Service Commission. According to the British system, all recruitment of professional statisticians at the entry level is carried out by the Commission in consultation with the Central Statistical Office.

C. Recruitment of staff to deal with various subject-matter skills

40. As the staffing requirements of a statistical office cover skills in such subjects as economics, demography, accounting, data processing and administration, in addition to mathematical statistics, the question was asked whether national statistical offices made any special efforts to address those needs in the process of recruitment and selection.

41. Most of the replies received from the respondents indicated that their needs in various subject-matter skills were indeed taken into account in the recruitment process. Some pointed out that their job advertisements in the media were directed at specific skills in the light of the requirements demanded by the vacancy in question. Others explained that in contacts with universities and other academic institutions, they looked for graduates with particular skills.

42. Australia replied that the subject-matter needs of the organization were met by advertising campaigns directed at specific disciplines. Such campaigns were run by the Australian Bureau of Statistics alone or in conjunction with the Australian Public Service Commission.

43. Canada reported that for junior level positions its primary source was recent university graduates. For positions above entrance level, however, Canada employed the method of promotional competitions open "to specific portions of the public service where special subject-matter or functional skill requirements are used for selection purposes. In some instances complementary competitions open to the general public are used to recruit experienced professionals into major professional groups (mathematics, computer systems administration, economics and subject-matter statisticians)."

44. The approach employed by Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Kenya, New Zealand and Zambia is the academic degree in a specific field for consideration for a particular vacancy. Similarly, for Czechoslovakia and Hungary, universities are the source of recruitment for economists, computing staff and mathematicians, among others.

45. India, on the other hand, places the emphasis in the selection of candidates on "those having proficiency in statistics, mathematics or economics as the principal subject at degree level". Entrants to the system are then provided training by the Indian Statistics Service (ISS) with a view to enabling them to handle assignments on different subjects. The responsibility for filling positions requiring expertise in the field of economics belongs to a separate agency, the Indian Economic Service, which is similar in structure to ISS.

46. A number of respondents indicated that they also employed the training approach, either internally or externally, to strengthen the expertise needed in a particular area. Egypt, for instance, pointed out that in order to improve skills, the staff were continually provided with a number of options ranging from on-the-job training to external studies involving Master's or doctoral programmes in or outside the country.

47. The reply from the USSR revealed that improvement of professional skills in the State Statistical Services is acquired by the provision of training opportunities including full-time and part-time study at the National Economy Management Institute of the Academy of the National Economy (Council of Ministers) and at the Planning and Economic Academy of the USSR State Planning Committee (for periods ranging from 3 to 26 months) and post-graduate study at the Scientific and Research Institute of the State Committee of the USSR on Statistics and at other institutes of higher education. In addition, courses are provided at the

Inter-industrial Institute to improve the skills of administrative and managerial personnel and professionals in the field of accounting and statistics; these courses include programmes of current and prospective issues relating to statistics and economic analysis, computer applications and new technology of data processing. Training and improvement of skills are also provided at specialized training centres (combinates) and schools within the framework of the State Committee of the USSR on Statistics.

D. Competitive examinations

48. Another issue explored in the questionnaire was the use of competitive examinations to identify candidates for professional posts. Countries were asked to explain to what extent, if any, they made use of competitive examinations. They were also requested to provide a brief description of the nature and scope of these examinations.

49. Most of the countries replied that they did not conduct competitive examinations in the process of recruitment of professional staff. In principal, academic qualifications and an interview were the criteria used in the selection of candidates. Respondents using these criteria in recruitment for entry level positions included Australia, Canada, Chile, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Panama, Poland, Thailand, the USSR and Venezuela.

50. India and Spain were the only respondents confirming that competitive examinations were used as a means of identifying candidates for work in statistical services.

51. Recruitment to the Indian Statistical Service for junior professional positions is made through two channels: (a) a competitive examination (a written part followed by an oral part), by which about 60 per cent of staff are selected and (b) promotion of statistical personnel immediately below junior-level professionals for the remaining 40 per cent. Examinations are conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) throughout India among candidates possessing a university degree in statistics, mathematics or economics. The written portion of the examinations consists of five papers each of three hours' duration - three of them relate to subjects in statistics, one tests the candidates' knowledge in English and another relates to general studies. Candidates who are successful in the written examination are then invited to take the oral examination. Those who are finally selected are offered a probationary appointment of two years.

52. Vacancies at higher levels are generally filled by promotion on the basis of seniority and merit. Some infusion from the outside is possible for certain high-level posts, provided that candidates possess the requisite academic qualifications and relevant work experience and pass an interview conducted by UPSC.

53. In the case of Spain two types of examinations are given. The first type is for "Certified Technical Statisticians", that is, candidates with a university degree requiring three years of study. This group is expected to take tests

involving problems and exercises in descriptive statistics; micro-data processing; Hypothetical problem on a statistical processing project; questions on legislation; and exercises and questions on basic statistical theory.

54. The second type of examination is for "Expert Statisticians", that is, candidates with an advanced university degree. The tests that this group are expected to take are more complex and consist of the following: questions and exercises on all topics; theory - one oral and one written topic; economic theory - one written topic; theory of probability sampling - one oral topic; applied statistics and economics; English and French - direct written translation and possible oral test; and legislation - one written topic.

55. In addition, some successful candidates may be required to take a course lasting from three to six months, depending on the area in which they would be working. After satisfactory completion of this course, they are given a definite appointment.

56. The response from the United Kingdom describes a somewhat different process called the "assessment centre system". The United Kingdom states that the system is "not a competitive exam in the usual meaning of the word".

57. Under the assessment centre system, once the qualified candidates are established they are invited to participate in a series of interviews and tests (mainly written), lasting a day and a half, at the Civil Service Selection Board. The procedure includes "written exercises in the application of statistical method and analysis and an essay on a fairly broad topic capable of statistical treatment". A discussion by candidates in small groups and two cognitive tests are also included in the procedure.

58. At the interview stage, each candidate is considered by four assessors, a senior government statistician, a university statistician and two non-statistician assessors (an administrator and a chairman appointed by the Civil Service Commission). After considering all relevant information about the candidates, the assessors recommend those suitable for appointment. The level of the appointment is determined by the successful candidate's age, experience and qualifications.

E. Special measures to ensure equity in representation

59. One of the questions posed to the national statistical services was whether, in recruiting and selecting candidates, any special measures were taken to ensure equity in representation of special population groups (for example, minorities and women), regional areas and the like.

60. Most of the countries replied that no special measures were taken in this respect and that the staff were selected solely on the basis of merit. Several respondents indicated that they were "equal opportunity employers" and that this was reflected in their recruitment process.

61. Canada added, however, that "when recruiting graduates, interviews are held at both English and French universities located in all regions of the country. Managers are kept informed of the achievement towards the representation of special population groups and are urged to increase this representation to the extent possible and feasible."

62. India explained that "in keeping with the declared policy of the government, a special consideration is given to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (socially/economically disadvantaged groups). Up to certain levels of posts, the respective reserved shares are 15 per cent and 7.5 per cent." As for women and minority communities no quotas applied.

63. In addition to expressing its commitment to the "Equal Employment Opportunities Programme", New Zealand reported that every selection panel included at least one male and one female member.

64. The reply from the USSR indicated that practically all nationalities of the Soviet Union were represented in the state statistical institutions and more than 80 per cent of the staff were women. Similarly, in Hungary, 76 per cent of the staff in statistics were women.

F. Major problems faced in the recruitment and selection of professional staff

65. In response to the question of major problems faced in the recruitment and selection of professional staff, the national statistical services have provided varied answers. Among these, however, two problems that stand out and appear to be the most common are (a) the absence of a sufficient number of qualified candidates in most developing countries and (b) low salaries compared with those offered by the private sector.

66. The problem of a lack of suitable candidates for recruitment is often further compounded by the high turnover rate of officers trained in specialized fields through the efforts of national statistical offices. Zambia reports, for instance, that "these problems have been so acute that there has not been any time when all professional posts have been appropriately filled up in the statistical office".

67. In contrast, Canada indicated that it does not have any difficulty in the recruitment of professional staff, but it does experience problems in attracting the most qualified personnel particularly in the area of computer systems administration owing to more inviting benefit packages offered by the private sector.

68. Even such developed countries as Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany and New Zealand expressed concern that the public service has become less attractive to qualified candidates because of competition from the private sector.

69. The responses from Czechoslovakia and Hungary to this question reveal that similar problems are being experienced in competition with "economic

enterprises/organizations" that offer a higher compensation package, including attractive social benefits, for qualified staff.

G. Staff mobility, training, retention and career management in national statistical services

70. Discussion of additional concerns such as staff mobility, training, retention and career management again brought into focus the difficulties that national statistical services have been experiencing in retaining their staff. As pointed out in discussing the major problems faced in recruitment, the retention issue was found to be a dilemma shared by several countries, both developed and developing, because of competition mainly from the private sector. Well-trained, qualified statisticians and computer systems administration and data-processing personnel in particular were offered much better benefits outside the public service, so that national statistical services were having great difficulty in keeping them.

71. Another reason that would explain the loss of staff was the relatively small number of senior positions to which they could aspire, as in the case of Australia.

72. Replies from practically all of the respondents reflected the importance they assigned to the training of staff. It was recognized that through the training of its staff an organization would be better able to meet the challenges in a constantly changing world.

73. For some statistical services, particularly many of those from the developing world, however, there appeared to be serious difficulties in providing training. Kenya, for instance, reported that at times it had difficulty in obtaining funds for suitable specialized training, and Zambia indicated that it had no facilities to satisfy the needs for specialized training in a specific statistical area and consequently staff were sent outside the country, provided that fellowships were available for such training.

74. Australia reported that, during their first year, newly recruited staff "undergo relatively intensive training, both internal and external to the [Australian Bureau of Statistics], to introduce them to the organization and the public sector work environment". Internal and external courses for ongoing development are also made available to already established staff. In addition, provision has been made for a study leave scheme.

75. Canada replied that "on-the-job training continues to be the primary vehicle for upgrading the skills of professional staff". The information provided by Statistics Canada revealed a wide variety of training programmes not only to improve professional qualifications of staff in their own field, but also in other areas such as computer technology, statistical survey design, sampling theory, accounting and the like. Reference was also made to a management training programme for junior, middle and senior level managers provided for the public service as a whole by the Public Service Commission.

76. In the case of Czechoslovakia, staff are provided with follow-up educational opportunities under the guidance and responsibility of the Training Institute of the Federal Statistical Office. The follow-up educational activities may be either internal or external and provide a variety of options, including independent study in a particular new area, post-graduate studies linked to the already completed university education and scientific education for highly qualified professionals that may last as long as five years.

77. The response from Hungary indicated the availability of various training possibilities, both internal and external, the latter within the scope of "contracts of co-operation with educational institutions". To encourage the use and expansion of computer application, courses were also provided for staff during working hours.

78. Training opportunities provided by the USSR for professional staff are on a voluntary basis and cover a wide variety of subjects. Reference has already been made to training in paragraph 47 above.

79. In its reply, the United Kingdom reported that newly recruited personnel participate in an induction course followed by a course on practical aspects of government statistical work. Furthermore, training opportunities are available to staff throughout their career with the organization. Post-graduate studies at a university and management courses to meet specific needs of staff at all levels of experience are also provided.

80. On the basis of the information received from the national statistical services, the issues of staff mobility and career management could only be discussed in the context of large organizations where the size of the structure as well as the number of staff employed would make mobility and career progression feasible. It appeared that measures to improve staff skills in various subject-matter disciplines and training in management programmes were two principal ingredients of staff mobility and career development.

III. PROCEDURES FOR RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF UNITED NATIONS STAFF AND THEIR APPLICATION TO STATISTICAL POSTS 6/

A. General information

81. The Office of Human Resources Management is responsible, in response to actions taken by legislative bodies and to administrative decisions, for a coherent personnel policy and its consistent application in the United Nations Secretariat. The Office is in charge, inter alia, of the recruitment and the administration of the staff of the Secretariat. The primary objectives of the Office in this respect include the following: identification of personnel needs, development of a mechanism for accurate forecasting of actual vacancies for the recruitment and selection of the best possible candidates, implementation of the General Assembly resolutions calling for equity in representation of Member States and an increase in the representation of women in the Professional category and above, in posts subject to geographical distribution, to at least 30 per cent of the total number

of staff by 1990, and the development and implementation of a comprehensive career development system for all categories of staff and a more systematic approach to the placement and rotation of staff, taking into account the human resources needs of the Organization.

82. The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) is also involved in personnel issues. The Commission was established by the General Assembly in 1974 under Assembly resolution 3357 (XXIX). According to articles 1 and 9 of its Statute, the mandate of the Commission is to regulate and co-ordinate the conditions of service of the United Nations common system with the objective of developing a single unified international civil service through the application of common personnel standards, methods and arrangements. The Commission reports annually to the General Assembly. On the basis of the Commission's reports, the General Assembly takes decisions which may affect matters within the purview of the Office of Human Resources Management.

83. The selection and appointment of staff to Professional posts in the statistical occupation is undertaken within the context of the basic principles governing recruitment contained in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular, Articles 8, 100 and 101. Article 8 reads: "The United Nations shall place no restrictions on the eligibility of men and women to participate in any capacity and under conditions of equality in its principal and subsidiary organs." Paragraph 1, of article 100 reads: "In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization. They shall refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization." Paragraph 1 of article 101, reads: "The staff shall be appointed by the Secretary-General under regulations established by the General Assembly." Paragraph 3 of that article reads: "The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible."

84. Succeeding General Assembly resolutions (namely 31/27, 32/17, 33/143, 34/219, 35/210, 37/235, 39/245, 40/258, 41/206, 42/220) have further interpreted these principles and elaborated on them. Assembly resolutions 33/143 and 35/210 set the major framework for recruitment reforms, while the other resolutions reaffirm these principles. These resolutions primarily mandate the improvement of the geographical and gender distribution of the Professional staff in the Secretariat posts subject to geographical distribution.

85. In section I of resolution 33/143, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to adopt, among others, the following measures and guidelines regarding recruitment of Professional staff:

"(a) Bulletins containing a statement of all existing vacancies as well as all those expected to arise in the course of the following year should be issued every six months, in order to facilitate the submission by Member States of candidates for recruitment;

"(b) Publicity should be given to the recruitment of personnel in co-operation with Member States, inter alia, through United Nations offices, universities and professional organizations, including women's organizations whenever appropriate, to fulfil the recruitment policies outlined in the present resolution;

"(c) Composition of the [Roster of External Candidates] should be improved, in order to make it more geographically representative and make it better reflect the recruitment needs of the Secretariat among various occupational groups as well as to increase the number of women on the roster, and, prior to filling a vacancy, a thorough search should be made of the roster for suitable candidates;

"...

"(h) Competitive methods of recruitment should be used in consultation with the Governments concerned, organized on a national, subregional or regional basis, for selection of staff at the P-1 and P-2 levels with a view to making the geographical distribution of posts in the Secretariat more equitable".

86. In section II of resolution 33/143, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General:

"To establish a target of 40 per cent of all vacancies arising in Professional posts subject to geographical distribution during the period 1979-1980 for the appointment of nationals of unrepresented and under-represented countries, in order to ensure that all such countries achieve their desirable ranges [7/] during that biennium, while ensuring that the representation of countries which are within desirable ranges does not decrease" (para. 1).

87. In section III of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General:

"To take the necessary measures to increase the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution to 25 per cent of the total over a four-year period in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution and [requested] other United Nations organizations similarly to establish targets for this purpose" (para. 1).

88. In section I of resolution 35/210, the Assembly reiterated a number of its previous requests for action by the Secretary-General and requested the Secretary-General, among other things:

"To establish and pursue an active recruitment policy in order to raise the levels of personnel recruited from unrepresented and under-represented countries and countries below the midpoint of their desirable ranges to the extent possible towards this midpoint" (para. 2);

"To continue to permit replacement by candidates of the same nationality within a reasonable time-frame in respect of posts held by staff members on fixed-term contracts, whenever this is necessary to ensure that the representation of Member States whose nationals serve primarily on fixed-term contracts is not adversely affected" (para. 4).

B. Selection for statistical posts from within the Organization

1. Selection for entry-level posts

89. In 1979, the Secretary-General established annual competitive examinations by occupational groups as the basis for selecting staff members in the General Service and related categories for promotion to posts in the Professional category subject to geographical distribution. This new policy was based on a request made by the General Assembly in its resolution 33/143. As a result, posts at the P-1/P-2 level are primarily filled through either the internal competitive examinations, generally referred to as G to P examinations, or national competitive examinations (see sect. C below).

90. Specific provisions concerning the examinations for promotion from the General Service to the Professional category are laid down in yearly administrative instructions as applicable to pre-selected occupational groups. So far, the following 15 specialized areas have been identified for the holding of competitive examinations: (1) Administration, (2) Economics, (3) Electronic data processing and information systems, (4) Engineering, architecture and related work, (5) Finance, (6) Education and languages, (7) Legal and related work, (8) Library and related work, (9) Nursing, (10) Political affairs, (11) Public information, (12) Publishing and printing, (13) Security and safety, (14) Social development, and (15) Statistics. The format of the examinations is announced in information circulars which provide examples of the types of questions included in the examinations. These examinations are normally open to all United Nations staff members in the General Service and related categories, with at least five years of continuous service in the Secretariat, who meet the eligibility criteria.

91. The examinations include a written component (80 per cent) and an oral component (20 per cent). Candidates who do not score at least 20 per cent of the marks allotted to the written component in a particular occupation are not eligible for the next calendar year's examination in that occupation.

92. A Central Examination Board (CEB) of five members is appointed by the Secretary-General for one year. The Board is responsible for overseeing the procedures and arrangements for the examination, selecting the occupational groups and the posts, screening the applications, reviewing and evaluating appeals by candidates, reviewing and deciding on recommendations made by the Specialized Boards of Examiners (see para. 93 below), and recommending possible procedural improvements in the examinations.

93. Specialized Boards of Examiners are appointed by the Secretary-General for each occupational group in which examinations are held. Their responsibility is to review and mark the written examinations, conduct the oral examinations and make final recommendations to CEB.

94. Placement of successful candidates is made by the Secretary-General on the recommendation of CEB.

95. With regard to the occupation of statistics in particular, four examinations have been held thus far: in 1981, 1983, 1985 and 1987. Successful candidates from these examinations and from examinations in the fields of electronic data processing and economics were selected for posts in the various statistical offices throughout the Secretariat. Prior to the introduction of these examinations in 1979, staff members in the General Service and related categories were promoted to the Professional category in this occupation as a result of an annual promotion exercise. A study of incumbent statisticians conducted in the latter part of 1985 indicated that 30 per cent of the staff in this occupation were previously in the General Service category.

2. Selection for middle-level and senior-level Professional posts through internal vacancy announcements

96. The introduction of the Vacancy Management and Staff Redeployment Programme on 22 December 1986 established procedures for filling essential vacant posts through redeployment of staff.

97. The procedures for selecting the most qualified staff for the vacant posts include the participation of the Office of Human Resources Management, the Appointment and Promotion Board, a joint staff-management advisory body (see para. 115 below), and the department or office concerned.

98. The procedures include the screening of applications for eligibility and qualifications and the evaluations of candidates by departments or offices. The joint reviewing body evaluates information provided by the Office of Human Resources Management and the department or office concerned and establishes a short list of up to three names from which the department or office selects a candidate to be recommended to the Secretary-General for appointment.

C. Recruitment for statistical posts from outside the Organization

1. Selection for entry-level posts by means of national competitive examinations

99. By resolutions 33/143 and 35/210, the General Assembly established the principle of competitive examinations for recruiting at the P-1 and P-2 levels. Parallel mandates of the General Assembly emphasized the need to bring all Member States that are inadequately represented on the staff of the Secretariat within

their desirable ranges. One of the key methods selected in achieving this goal is national competitive examinations, which have been held primarily in unrepresented and under-represented Member States.

100. These examinations are devised in consultation with the Governments concerned. A list of Member States participating in each examination is drawn up in advance for occupations in which a given number of vacancies are identified. The Office of Human Resources Management suspends all other recruitment action relating to the P-1 and P-2 posts in the occupations specifically identified for the national examinations. The number of posts available each year determines the number of participating countries.

101. Examinations are open to both men and women who may not be more than 32 years of age by the end of the calendar year in which the examination is held. Candidates should hold at least a first-level university degree in a field directly related to the occupational group of the examination. As mandated by the General Assembly, examinations must be organized by broad occupational groups. They are, therefore, designed to test the ability of the candidates to perform a wide variety of functions in the occupational group concerned and to assess their knowledge of key substantive issues, rather than detailed knowledge of the narrow area of specialization involved in the duties of the P-1 and P-2 posts to be filled through the examination. In the case of recruitment for statistical services, an educational background in statistics or related fields would be relevant. The national competitive examination comprises written and oral components. The written component of the examination is normally given in English or French, the working languages of the Secretariat. However, parts of this component may be taken in another official language, where appropriate. The oral component is given in English or French. The written component includes a general section common to all occupational groups and a specialized paper for each occupational category. The oral component is not intended to test substantive knowledge, but is designed to evaluate the candidates' ability to communicate and to state their views in a clear, understandable and concise way. A Board of Examiners, established by the Secretary-General, screens applications and decides on who should be admitted to the examinations. After the completion of the written and oral examinations, the Board recommends the most suitable candidates for employment.

102. As regards procedures for the assignment of successful candidates, the following factors are taken into account in arriving at the final decision: the order of priority given by the substantive unit, the requirements of the specific posts, the candidates' academic and professional background, and the preferences expressed by the individual candidates. Additionally, simplified appointment procedures have been developed for the successful candidates in order to facilitate the filling of vacancies as expeditiously as possible. These candidates are normally appointed for a fixed term of two years.

103. It is worth while mentioning that reserve lists are established as part of the national competitive examination procedures in order to provide a roster of qualified candidates for vacancies to be filled through the external examination process.

104. National competitive examinations in the field of statistics were held in the USSR in 1983, the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan in 1984 and Japan and the USSR in 1987. Eight candidates were appointed from the 1983 and 1984 examinations and, as of August 1988, three successful candidates from the 1987 examinations have accepted an offer of appointment.

105. The overall results of the competitive examinations have demonstrated that they significantly contribute to an improved geographical balance and, at the same time, help to bring fresh young talent into the Organization.

2. Other special measures for the recruitment of statisticians

106. The 1985 G to P examination in statistics and the national competitive examinations in statistics did not produce a sufficient number of qualified candidates and the reserve lists from previous examinations were exhausted. In view of that fact and pursuant to the General Assembly resolutions requiring that entry-level posts be filled through competitive methods of selection, it was proposed that a recruitment mission be organized which would, through standardized questions and structured interviews, contain the competitive elements required. Extensive preparations were undertaken to organize a special recruitment mission to Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands in March 1986. Standardized questions in English and French were prepared, taking into account materials submitted by individual staff members of the Statistical Office and the Population Division of the United Nations Secretariat. The purpose of the mission was to fill a specific number of entry-level Professional posts and to establish reserve lists of qualified candidates.

107. In order to attract a sufficient number of applicants, in addition to those identified through the permanent missions of the three participating countries, which responded enthusiastically with active participation, more than 125 universities, professional associations and agencies were contacted by letter. Advertisements were placed in seven publications and the appropriate United Nations information centres were also contacted. Out of more than 250 applications received, some 30 candidates were convoked for interviews.

108. As a result of the adoption of a recruitment freeze in March 1986, not all of the successful candidates could be recruited. However, the Secretary-General exempted from the freeze the appointment of two such candidates, for posts deemed vital.

3. Recruitment procedures for middle-level and senior-level Professional posts

109. When the Office of Human Resources Management has determined that a qualified candidate is not likely to be found internally to fill a vacant post, a vacancy announcement, based on an approved classified job description, is issued world wide and circulated for a period of eight weeks. Vacancy announcements concerning the field of statistics are also sent to the national statistical offices of

unrepresented and under-represented Member States. A search of the computerized Roster of External Candidates is conducted during this period to identify other qualified candidates. Posts that are determined to be technical in nature and difficult to fill may also be advertised in appropriate publications. As soon as the deadline has passed, applications and files are screened with a view to providing the department concerned with a short list of only the most qualified candidates for evaluation. These evaluations, together with a recommendation concerning the leading candidates, are submitted to the appropriate department or office by the Office of Human Resources Management. Interviews of leading candidates are conducted by representatives of the department or office and the Office of Human Resources Management when necessary.

110. The particulars concerning the selected candidate and all collaterals are then presented to the appropriate appointment and promotion body (see sect. E below), which makes a recommendation to the Secretary-General. After the Secretary-General has approved the recommendation, provisional offers, which are subject to a candidate's completion of various pre-recruitment formalities, are initiated. Qualified candidates not selected for a specific post may then be added to the Roster for future consideration against appropriate vacancies.

D. Roster of External Candidates

111. Applications for specific vacancies or for general consideration are received on a regular basis in the Recruitment and Placement Division of the Professional Staffing Service (PSS), Office of Human Resources Management. Recruitment and Placement Officers and other staff of PSS and the Technical Assistance Recruitment and Administration Service (TARAS) are responsible for the identification of potential candidates for the Roster of External Candidates by applying the following general criteria: (a) appropriate university degree; (b) overall suitability for United Nations programmes; (c) nationality consonant with recruitment targets; and (d) age considerations, as mandatory retirement age is 60.

112. The departments or offices concerned are requested to evaluate the qualifications of such applicants and recommend for inclusion in the Roster only those who are likely to be given serious consideration in the event of a suitable vacancy. Staff of PSS analyse the information in the applications and code all relevant information on special forms for inclusion of the qualifications of suitable candidates in the Roster.

113. A comprehensive review of the occupational structure of the Roster of External Candidates has been initiated with a view to improving its usefulness as a tool in the recruitment process. This includes a review of the occupational descriptors of occupations represented in the Secretariat.

114. Candidates currently on the Roster will be contacted to update their curricula vitae and the qualifications of eligible candidates will be evaluated by the appropriate departments or offices to ensure their suitability.

E. Appointment and promotion bodies

115. The Appointment and Promotion Board and Committees are established by the Secretary-General in accordance with staff rule 104.14 to advise him on the appointment, promotion and review of staff in the Professional category up to and including the D-1 level. Excluded are staff members appointed through competitive examinations, as described in section B above.

116. Recommendations for all such actions are presented to the respective appointment and promotion body by the Office of Human Resources Management after consultation with the substantive department concerned.

F. Recruitment, assignment and development of General Service staff for the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat

117. Jobs in the General Service category in the statistics occupation range from G-4 to G-7, with more than 80 per cent of the posts classified at the G-6 level. Vacancies are advertised internally and external recruitment is undertaken at the G-4 and G-5 levels only if no internal candidates are identified. The main criterion for posts in this occupation is successful completion of the Statistical Clerk Examination, which is held periodically. The names of successful candidates, both internal and external, are rostered as meeting the minimum qualifications for posts in the occupation. For posts at the G-6 level and above, a good knowledge of college-level mathematics and economics and an understanding of computer operations is normally also required.

118. No formal training in the statistics occupation has been designed for staff in the General Service and related categories. However, the Statistical Office provides training in computer programming, on an informal basis, for its staff in the General Service category. A large number of staff in the General Service and related categories acquire training in computer programming on their own initiative.

IV. POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

119. The Commission may wish to discuss the subject, bearing in mind, particularly, the implications for the recruitment and selection of Professional staff for work in the Statistical Office of the United Nations Secretariat and in the statistical units of the regional commissions. To this end, the Commission may wish to comment on:

(a) The general issues reviewed in section I above;

(b) The relevance of the national experience, summarized in section II, to the recruitment and selection of Professional staff working in the Statistical Office and the statistical units of the regional commissions;

(c) The procedures used in the United Nations for recruiting and selecting Professional staff working in statistics, summarized in section III, in the light of national experience;

(d) Other related issues.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1987, Supplement No. 6 (E/1987/19), para. 218.

2/ Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Co-ordination on its twelfth session (E/CN.3/1989/20), para. 4.

3/ Ibid., para. 8.

4/ See Organization of National Statistical Services: A Review of Major Issues, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 21 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.77.XVII.5), para. 75.

5/ See Handbook of Statistical Organization, vol. I. A Study on the Organization of National Statistical Services and Related Management Issues, Studies in Methods, Series F, No. 28 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.XVII.17), chap. VIII, sect. D.

6/ The information provided in this section is based on materials prepared by the Office of Human Resources Management of the United Nations Secretariat.

7/ A desirable range for the number of their nationals in the staff of the Secretariat is calculated for each Member State on the basis of three factors: the membership of the State in the United Nations, the contribution of each State to the regular budget and the population of each State. These three factors are given relative weights of 40, 55 and 5 per cent respectively. The desirable ranges provide a yardstick for judging the adequacy of each Member State's representation within the Secretariat.