

STATISTICS

Resolution of 28 October 1949

(E/CN.11/223 Rev. 1)

THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE FAR EAST

HAVING CONSIDERED

(1) the Report on the Availability and Supply of Statistical Data in the ECARF Region (E/CN.11/203 and Corr. 1) and the two Annexes A and B (E/CN.11/203 Annex A and Add. 1 and Annex B and Add. 1) and

(2) the recommendation on the collection and analysis of existing transport statistics of the Meeting of Inland Transport Experts held in Singapore between 5 and 10 October 1949 (E/CN.11/204 page 7);

APPROVES in general the programme of work of the Statistics Section;

RECOMMENDS

(1) that governments consider the desirability of reviewing and improving their national statistical systems;

(2) that governments which need assistance in improving their statistics should take advantage of the United Nations technical assistance programme;

(3) that governments should supply the Secretariat as early as possible with information on their national statistical organizations and activities;

(4) that governments should regularly supply the Secretariat with current statistical data, where possible on a monthly or quarterly basis, and with any statistical publications not already supplied;

(5) that governments consider the desirability of publishing explanatory notes, in so far as these are not published already, on the scope and methods of compilation of their various statistical series;

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(6) that the Executive Secretary, after consultation with member and associate member governments, request the United Nations Statistical Office to arrange a regional conference of statisticians to discuss problems of common interest,

(7) that the Executive Secretary should endeavour to collect and analyse existing transport statistics for the region as recommended by the Meeting of Inland Transport Experts held at Singapore between 5 and 10 October 1949;

(8) that governments should take full advantage of the facilities provided by the International Census Training School at New Delhi and, at a further stage, contemplate the desirability of organizing local training centres at various levels which would enable the extension, in the languages required, of comprehensive training to officials who are not qualified to take advantage of the advanced training of the regional centre.

(9) that the Economic and Social Council take action to enable the Executive Secretary to expand the staff of the Statistics Section in order that it can adequately carry out the new programme of statistical work approved by the Commission (See Annex).

/ANNEX

ANNEX

to Resolution E/CN.11/223 Rev.1

PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE STATISTICS SECTION

1. Maintenance of basic series

To meet the ever-increasing statistical needs of ECAFE publications and documentation, files on basic statistical series are being compiled. Files of this kind make basic materials always available, and save the labour of having to go through the original data each time when need arises; it also eliminates to a certain extent the inconsistency of statistics on the same subject once conflicting data are thoroughly examined and possible discrepancies resolved. So far, files based on existing materials have been completed on cost of living, wholesale and retail price indices, coal, iron and steel production, and transport. Statistics on foreign trade, and on production, consumption, trade and prices of staple commodities such as tin, tungsten, antimony, rice, cotton and cotton goods, rubber, silk, jute, tea, sugar, vegetable oils, etc., are being compiled. Gradually, the files may be so extended as to cover statistics in all major fields, including information required for special studies such as mineral surveys, export trends of dollar-earning commodities, etc.

2. Study of methodology and comparability of basic series

Variations are found from country to country, and in certain cases from series to series within a country as well in regard to the character of primary data, the coverage of statistics, the type of concepts used, the definition of statistical units, the methods employed in the enumeration or collection of data, the methods of estimation or interpolation, the original aims of statistics that are being compiled, the sub-classification of a series, etc. These render different statistical series non-comparable. A study of the methodology underlying the collection and compilation of statistical series may help understanding of each series, leading to a

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better utilisation of data and to the avoidance to a great extent of misuse of statistics. In this connection the Statistical Office of the United Nations has been covering the following programmes from a global point of view:- minimum list of trade classification; national income estimates, indices of industrial production and various types of overall figures reproduced in the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, the Statistical Year Book and the Demographic Year Book, etc. However, many problems still have to be solved concerning the region, and in many fields the regional commission needs more detailed materials such as production, consumption, trade and prices of certain staple commodities, commodity breakdown of trade by countries, etc. In case such a study reveals serious divergencies in methodology an important series that make comparability impossible, meetings of statisticians from different countries in the region may be convened with a view to devising and implementing measures toward standardization. A beginning towards the study of methodology by the Secretariat has just been made. Published materials on the methods used in many of the statistical series are usually too brief for the purpose of evaluation; it is hoped that member governments explore the possibility of including notes on the scope and methods of compilation with the publication of basic statistical series.

3. Location of statistical gaps

Certain statistics may be available for a particular country, which for one reason or another are not yet available to the Secretariat. More often, genuine gaps exist where national statistics remain to be collected or compiled by the countries concerned on a regular basis. In compiling

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basic statistical series, the Secretariat has come across many gaps in national statistical compilations. Check lists issued as Annex B to document E/CN.11/203 indicate these gaps. Similar reviews will have to be undertaken under other heads before a comprehensive picture of statistical gaps of the region can be given.

4. Compilation of special statistical series

In the absence of certain basic statistical series, ways must be explored of constructing provisional series, needed for the presentation of an overall picture of the economic situation. For example, many countries do not have import and export price indices and figures on the volume of trade. With very rough methods the latter may be approximated to meet present needs. There are no official indices of industrial production for various countries of the region; but output figures for important commodities of the region are available, and it would be useful to work out interim indices of industrial production with provisional figures for value of output.

The Secretariat therefore proposes to build up provisional series on these lines as a temporary measure until official series are started, whenever staff availability permits.

5. Functions of the regional Statistical Section

(a) Assistance to specialized agencies in data collection

When a specialized agency requires specific data, the U.N. Statistical Office and the regional secretariat make available to it all the material they have; the problem lies in assisting them to check existing data, get additional material wherever possible, and assess the trends whenever government data are not available. The regional secretariat can

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assist the specialized agency with knowledge of the local situation. Thus, the ECATE Secretariat has recently been asked by the International Monetary Fund to collect data on balance of payments, according to the questionnaire framed by the Fund. Normally, of course, specialized agencies collect their own statistical data direct, after clearance with the U.N. Statistical Office.

(b) Assistance to U.N. Statistical Office

Material for U.N. Monthly Bulletin of Statistics is at present collected by the Statistical Office of the United Nations from member governments, specialized agencies and other sources. The scope of the Bulletin is extended from time to time depending on the availability of additional material on a regular basis. It may be possible to include tabulations which are of special interest to the region; and the regional secretariat could assist in choice of sources of information, supply of specialized series, attempts to reduce time lag, etc. While the Statistical Office maintains overall data, the regional commission could attempt to build up component series. Thus although total values of trade are published by the Statistical Office, the regional statistical section could maintain in its records detailed breakdowns of commodity and geographical distribution. To avoid duplication, it has been agreed that questionnaires on basic statistics should be issued by the regional secretariat only after clearing the draft with the Statistical Office. Further, whenever the latter has specific difficulties about a particular set of data collected from the region, the regional secretariat could be asked to look into the matter, e.g. appropriate conversion rates of foreign exchange, the margin of error involved in accepting a set of government estimates.

The Statistical Office has been issuing Statistical Notes publishing all information on statistical schemes, publications and personnel. It has been agreed to send the officer-in-charge all such information relating to this region as and when available at the regional secretariat. The regional secretariat could also arrange to get material for the Statistical / Office such as

Office such as population census, training schools, available mechanical facilities in the region for compilation, printing, etc. The Statistical Office is directly concerned with the long-range problem of improving world statistical systems. The regional statistical section would assist in this task.

6. Publicity of information collected and/or compiled:

In the course of implementing these tasks, a considerable amount of primary as well as secondary material would accumulate in the Research and Statistics Division of the Secretariat. It has been suggested that an Economic Bulletin might be compiled to include economic reviews of Far Eastern problems and special regional statistics collected by the Secretariat whenever staff availability permits. It may also be possible for the U.N. Statistical Office to widen the scope of the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics so as to include special tables prepared by the regional secretariat

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