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## CURRENT HOUSING STATISTICS (Memorandum by the Secretary-General)

### I. Introduction

1. The Statistical Commission has on several occasions considered problems of housing statistics and has emphasized the importance of adequate and up-to-date statistics in this field. The present document is a progress report on current housing statistics prepared in accordance with the recommendations made by the Commission at its eighth session. <sup>1/</sup>
2. Current housing statistics are part of the system of housing statistics outlined in the General Principles for a Housing Census along with the housing census and the housing survey. <sup>2/</sup> As therein stated, the housing census provides a statistical description of the basic items of the housing inventory on broad lines, serves as a general frame for sample studies and constitutes a benchmark-reference for current housing statistics. It provides information for small areas that would not be reached by general sample surveys. Housing surveys are designed to answer additional questions which would not be answered by the census or which may be more efficiently solved by this type of inquiry. Questions relating to the quality of housing, such as the need for repair, the demand for certain types of dwellings, the economic activity of the owner and other matters which require the participation of specially trained enumerators, represent cases which could be solved more appropriately through housing surveys than by the

<sup>1/</sup> E/2569, para. 59.

<sup>2/</sup> Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 28, para. 201.

census. Current housing statistics indicate how many new dwellings or other specified classes of housing units, and of what types are being constructed, demolished, or destroyed per year, and the natural, economic and social factors which have a bearing on the rate of change of the housing available to the population. Current housing statistics, thus, provide a continuous up-to-date picture of changes in the stock of dwellings and their characteristics and provide data on current activities, especially in the economic sector, related to residential construction needed for the assessment of the inter-censal housing situation and for the formulation of housing programmes.

3. The possibility of developing in consultation with other interested agencies a set of principles for a system of current housing statistics is now under study. Such principles would provide a framework for the continuous and systematic collection and publication of current housing statistics which might include series relating to changes in the existing stock of dwellings due to decreases (e.g. demolitions, conversions, etc.) and increases (e.g. new dwellings completed, under construction, completed by type, by builder, by number of rooms, etc.); facilities of completed dwellings; and such other series which may be useful to meet national needs.

## II. Regional Programmes

4. The Housing Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe and its Statistical Working Party have at various sessions taken up for discussion several aspects of current housing statistics. Agreement was reached on the definitions of a number of important concepts, such as dwelling unit<sup>3/</sup>, room<sup>3/</sup>, floor space, gross volume of the dwelling, the different stages in building operations (begun, under construction, completed), type of building operations (new building, reconstruction repairs, extensions, conversions). Preliminary conclusions were also reached on the type of statistics required

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<sup>3/</sup> These concepts, with a number of small amendments were subsequently adopted by the Statistical Commission and the Conference of European Statisticians for inclusion, respectively, in the General Principles for a Housing Census (Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 28) and the European Programme for National Housing Censuses (Conf. Eur. Stats/WG.6/82 and Rev. 1).

on value of construction, building cost, building activity, and on the definitions to be applied in these fields. The ECE Secretariat has prepared and published for several years a Quarterly Bulletin of Housing and Building Statistics for Europe and is now also publishing an Annual Bulletin. These Bulletins are subject to periodic review by the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics of the Housing Committee.

5. In carrying out their task the Housing Committee and its Statistical Working Party have been aware of the need for co-ordinating their activities with those of the Conference of European Statisticians. At its plenary sessions the Conference of European Statisticians has regularly reviewed the statistical work under the programme of the ECE Housing Committee, and has several times given advice on different aspects of this work. At the request of the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics the Conference has also undertaken the study of three subjects (indices of rent, statistics of housing finance and sampling surveys of the housing situation) which extended beyond the field of competence of the Working Party.

6. At its Seventh Session, held in June 1959, in Geneva, the Conference of European Statisticians agreed<sup>4/</sup>:

"a. that a European programme for current housing and building statistics was needed as a supplement to the European programme for housing censuses;

"b. that preparatory work could start in 1959/60 provided it did not interfere with work on the other items in the Conference's programme."

7. At its eighteenth session the Housing Committee of ECE considered concrete proposals concerning the preparation of a statistical programme of the type envisaged by the Conference. It was agreed that, as a first step the Secretariat should prepare a detailed outline of a statistical programme (including draft texts for those parts of it which deal with subjects which have already been considered by the Working Party on Housing and Building

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<sup>4/</sup> Conf. European Statisticians/112. 24 June 1959. Report of the Seventh Session. paras. 91-94.

Statistics), for examination by both the Housing Committee, in June 1960, and the Conference of European Statisticians, in September 1960. The text of the proposals which the Housing Committee considered and approved are reproduced in the appendix to this paper. The experience of the European countries in collecting current housing statistics will be very valuable as a basis for the development of a set of international principles for current housing statistics.

8. The Third Inter-American Statistical Conference, held in Brazil in June 1955, considered current housing statistics. The Conference found that there was a need for current data on housing and expressed the view that it would be desirable that the data would be developed in such a way as to achieve international comparability at the Inter-American level. The Conference adopted a resolution<sup>5/</sup> recommending that the American countries consider the possibility of developing a programme of current housing statistics.

9. The Inter-American Statistical Institute included in its programme of work<sup>6/</sup> a study of the methodology of current housing statistics based on the resolution No. 23 of the Third IASC<sup>5/</sup>. The object of the study is stated to be the establishment of definitions and concepts for application in current housing statistics, and to improve procedures employed in the compilation of these statistics, as well as to extend the usefulness of these tabulations, with the aim of achieving a reasonable degree of international comparability.

10. The IASI proposes to carry out this programme during the period 1960/61. The first stage of the programme involves the compilation of the principal

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<sup>5/</sup> Organization of American States and Inter American Statistical Institute. Third Inter-American Statistical Conference Quitandinha, Petropolis, Brazil, June 9-23, 1955. Resolution No. 23. Current Housing Statistics. Rio de Janeiro, pp. 142-144.

<sup>6/</sup> Inter American Statistical Institute, Bases for the Program of Activities of the Department of Statistics of the Pan American Union and General Secretariat of the Inter American Statistical Institute for Fiscal Year 1960/61. Document No. 3886a-3/12/59-35. March 1959, page 25.

results of current housing statistics available in the hemisphere to serve as the basis for studies of standards, schedules, etc., to bring about possible uniformity in these statistics. The second stage involves the preparation of these standards, their circulation to national statistical services for comment to permit a revision of the standards before the presentation of a definitive draft for the consideration of the Committee for the Improvement of National Statistics (COINS).

### III. International Principles for Current Housing Statistics

11. It is hoped that a set of draft principles can be drawn up during 1960/61 and circulated to national statistical offices for comment so that a revised draft can be considered by the Commission at its 12th session. The ECE expects to complete its full European programme within two years and it appears that the IASI programme will involve a similar period.
12. The Commission is invited to express its views regarding future work on the development of principles for current housing statistics.

Appendix I

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEE<sup>1/</sup>

Addendum

APPENDIX VIII

EUROPEAN PROGRAMME FOR CURRENT HOUSING AND BUILDING STATISTICS

1. The following note sets out proposals on the preparation of a programme of current housing and building statistics for Europe, as envisaged in HOU/Working Paper No. 110, paragraph 4(f).
2. By the term "statistical programme" is intended a statement on statistical series which countries should endeavour to collect and publish, together with standard definitions to be used. For some countries such a programme would constitute a set of long-term objectives to be implemented by stages, and it should therefore include indications as to priorities to be given to the compilation and improvement of the different series. The programme need not necessarily include definite recommendations on methods of collection of the statistics included, since these may depend to a considerable extent on the statistical organization and institutional arrangements in the countries concerned; but it might include a description and appraisal of the methods most commonly used. It should, however, include an assessment of the practicability of obtaining and publishing at an early stage the more important statistical series in question.
3. During its previous sessions the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics has discussed a wide range of subjects in the field of current statistics. Many of these statistics are now published regularly in the Annual and Quarterly Bulletins of Housing and Building Statistics for Europe. The conclusions already reached on a number of items provide the basis for the preparation of substantial parts of the statistical programme

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<sup>1/</sup> Reproduced from HOU/Working Paper No.110/Add.2.

envisaged and these parts could be drafted without further discussion.

4. It should be recalled that in addition to periodic review of the statistical Bulletins, the Working Party's programme includes the following items, work on which has not yet been completed:

- (a) index of construction activity;
- (b) housing and building production (in terms of square metres, cubic metres, etc.);
- (c) calculation of housing shortage and housing needs<sup>1/</sup>;
- (d) current data on increases and decreases of the housing stock<sup>1/</sup>;
- (e) equipment and other characteristics of dwellings completed;
- (f) manpower statistics;
- (g) production of building materials and components.

Furthermore, on certain questions on which the Working Party has already reached conclusions concerning the concepts and definitions to be used, further discussion on the provision of data in accordance with the agreed concepts may be necessary. An important example is the need for the collection as soon as possible of statistics of fixed capital formation<sup>2/</sup>, both in dwellings and in other forms of construction.

5. It should also be recalled that the Working Party has referred three subjects to the Conference of European Statisticians for study, namely:

- (a) indices of rent;
- (b) statistics of housing finance;
- (c) sampling surveys of the housing situation.

The Conference agreed to undertake the study of these subjects, although it has not yet been able to start work on them. It would seem that most and perhaps all of the subjects which remain in the Working Party's programme and also those which have been referred to the Conference of European Statisticians should ultimately be included in the programme envisaged for current housing and building statistics.

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<sup>1/</sup> See in this connexion the suggestions for an up-to-date review of the European housing situation, set out in HOU/Working Paper No.110/Add. 1 (appendix VII).

<sup>2/</sup> See HOU/97, paragraphs 6 to 9.



6. Although it is not possible to draw up a complete statistical programme before the subjects referred to above and possibly others have been discussed more fully, it is suggested that a decision should be taken on the scope of the programme and on the arrangements to be made for starting the work. The Secretariat will prepare a detailed outline of a programme of current statistics on housing and building, including draft texts for those parts of it on which agreement has already been reached by the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics. It is suggested that this outline should then be circulated to governments for comments, in particular concerning the scope of the programme. Thereafter the outline, together with an indication of comments received from governments, might be considered by both the Housing Committee and the Conference of European Statisticians at their meetings in June 1960 and September 1960 respectively.

7. It is assumed that in considering these questions the Housing Committee will prefer to confine itself to general aspects and will leave the discussion of the detailed contents of the statistical programme to the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics. It is suggested that in order to make more rapid progress rapporteurs should be appointed at the appropriate stage to prepare discussion papers on some of the detailed questions involved. Specific arrangements for carrying out the stages of the work referred to above and for securing proper cooperation between the Housing Committee and the Conference of European Statisticians might be considered at the June 1960 session of the Housing Committee (and at the September 1960 session of the Conference of European Statisticians).