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PUBLICATIONS AND DOCUMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In document A/9189 of 5 October 1973, the Secretary-General submitted a report on publications and documentation in the United Nations, which provided details on the implementation of recommendations of the General Assembly for the control and limitation of documentation, drew attention to the possibility of introducing certain technological innovations in the United Nations system of documentation and stressed the desirability of dealing with certain outstanding problems not within the control of the Secretariat.
2. By a decision of 18 December 1973, the General Assembly decided to defer consideration of the question until its twenty-ninth session. In recommending this course, the Fifth Committee expressed confidence that the Secretary-General would continue to implement earlier decisions of the General Assembly relating to the control and limitation of documentation.
3. The present brief report updates the information contained in the previous report concerning the control and limitation of documentation, gives further details of possible technological innovations, and, in the light of the increasing pressure arising from the growing programme of the United Nations conferences, calls for a review of current United Nations practices concerning documentation.

Results achieved

4. The annex to this report contains the final figures for documentation in 1973, compared with those in previous years, as well as tentative figures for documentation in the first half of 1974. It also contains various charts and diagrams which make clear in more concrete fashion the general trend of

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\* A/9700.

documentation within the United Nations. The figures confirm the statement made in the previous report that in 1973 the reduction in the volume of documentation originating in the Secretariat, other than meeting records, would be at least 25 per cent, compared with the base year of 1970. The reduction throughout the Organization was 27 per cent. Nevertheless, the record varied from office to office and the Secretary-General has noted with some regret that the reduction at Headquarters was only 21 per cent. As the annexed statistics show, there was a modest increase in quota documentation at Headquarters from 1972 to 1973, which continued in the first half of 1974, attributable mainly to expanded programmes and conferences in the economic and social fields.

5. The Secretary-General has instituted, through the Publications Board, improved procedures for reviewing classes of publications and individual manuscripts, with a view to ensuring that those publications are really useful.

6. Despite the continued efforts to practise discipline and economy, the more general statistics for the documentation of the United Nations show that the reduction achieved since 1970 in areas under the direct control of the Secretariat have in most categories been wiped out by increases in meeting records, in documents reproduced at the specific requests of organs and in material submitted by delegations.

#### Possible technological innovations

7. In connexion with the preparation of the programme budget of the biennium 1976-1977, consideration is being given to the expansion, on a modest scale, of those innovative technologies already in use of the Secretariat, including an increase in the microfiche programme and the greater use of computer-assisted composition.

8. The microfiche programme is operating soundly and on an increasing scale and a number of delegations have come to realize that it is the most practical method of maintaining reference collections of United Nations documentation. A demonstration project is being organized during the twenty-ninth session to bring the advantages to the attention of other delegations. So far the programme has been functioning in addition to the conventional system of documentation. However, the time has now come when it should be considered in substitution for some of the bulkier publications, including official records, which unfortunately are often published only after the need for more than occasional reference is over, the Treaty Series and certain statistical publications. Savings that might be achieved by this means would be considerable and continuing, even if the United Nations were to pay the one-time costs of the provision of reader-printers to the main recipients of such documentation.

9. It would cost considerably less to provide delegations with the magnetic tapes of the meetings with which they are concerned than with summary records, which as noted in paragraph 13 below are so heavy a charge on the budget and the staff resources of the Organization.

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10. It would be possible to introduce a major modernization of the system of United Nations documentation by the introduction or increased use of computerized methods at various stages, including registration and control, editing and revision, composition, and storage and retrieval. Such a modernization would require detailed feasibility studies, estimates of costs, and considerable planning. While some of these studies are being carried out within existing resources, others would be costly; the Secretary-General would therefore welcome an indication by Member States of their interest in having them carried out.

#### Recommendations for action

11. In presenting his previous report on the subject, the Secretary-General was able to deal with what he described as continuing problems. In the succeeding year these problems have developed into a significant imbalance between the demands on the conference services of the Organization and the ability to provide such services within the existing establishment.

12. The General Assembly will have been provided in the report of the JIU and in the comments of the Secretary-General on that report with ample information on the growth of the conference programme with its heavy implications in terms of documentation. In 1974, the problem has been further complicated by an extension of official and working languages, by the holding of several large conferences away from established United Nations conference centres and the addition of unscheduled meetings. The servicing capacity of the Secretariat is under great strain.

13. The level of conference activities affects the level of documentation most seriously when meeting records are requested. As long as it is held that not only major organs and conferences, but also many subsidiary bodies require meeting records, those records will take a large share of the translation resources of the Secretariat. Summary records are drafted by staff who would otherwise be available for translation and must be translated under heavy time pressure into as many as five additional languages. Based on current salary levels and other costs, <sup>1/</sup> it is estimated that the preparation of summary records for a meeting of 2 1/2 hours (15 pages) costs approximately \$600 for each language. Thus the summary records of a meeting of a Main Committee of the General Assembly (in six languages) would cost \$3,600, of a meeting of a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly (up to five languages) up to \$3,000, and of the Economic and Social Council, its sessional committees, and subsidiary bodies (in three languages) \$1,800. These costs take into account reproduction costs and costs involved in producing final meeting records, but do not include overhead. At these rates the cost of providing summary records for meetings at Headquarters in 1973 would have been \$2.1 million, of which summary records of the Main Committees of the General Assembly would have amounted to nearly \$1 million. The cost at Geneva would have been approximately \$1.2 million.

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<sup>1/</sup> The term "cost" as used in this document means the calculated value of the internal services involved; it does not mean an identifiable accounting expense.

14. The Secretary-General reiterates, with increased concern, the hope that it will be possible to reduce the number of bodies for which summary records are provided. Previous appeals by the General Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council, together with the decision that summary records should be provided only when expressly authorized by the decision establishing an organ, have not stopped the upward trend, despite the commendable decisions of some regional and functional commissions of the Council to dispense with records in whole or in part. The Secretary-General recalls that the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the former Committee on Conferences, considered at one time establishing a short list of bodies entitled to summary records. He considers that it would be appropriate for the General Assembly to take such action.

15. The Secretary-General reiterates the other suggestions contained in his previous report, in particular that the reports of bodies that have meeting records should not include summarized accounts of debates. He also wishes to renew his appeal to delegations to exercise restraint in their calls for documentation; in the light of an additional year's experience, he has come to the conclusion that voluntary appeals to the membership of particular bodies must, to be fully effective, be supplemented by the adoption of additional norms by the General Assembly itself. At the very least, the practice of having statements made at meetings issued as documents of the body concerned should be prohibited.

16. The Secretary-General is taking further steps to analyse the costs of various operations in the preparation of documents with a view to the increased allocation of such costs to individual programmes, supplementing the first step taken in this direction, as regards printing costs, in the programme-budget for the biennium 1974-1975. This will facilitate the weighing of benefits against costs in particular cases, which remains one of the main approaches to keeping documentation within reasonable bounds.

17. In this regard, the sharp increase in unit costs must be borne in mind. On the basis of some preliminary studies carried out in 1968, the cost of producing documentation internally in the original and three languages of translation was estimated to be of the order of magnitude of \$90 a page. Since then staff costs have increased by about 60 per cent and paper, which was formerly regarded as a very minor cost factor, has become very much more expensive and difficult to procure. Thus the current cost of producing documentation internally must now be of the order of \$150 a page for an original and three other languages and as much as \$225 a page for the documents of the General Assembly and its Main Committees (original and five other languages).

18. The other approach lies in some over-all limitation on the programme of conferences. The internal quota system for documentation has been useful within its limits, but an over-all quota system of conferences and documentation is also necessary. In the present climate of greater multilateral attention to world and regional problems, the increase in documentation places a heavy strain not only on the conference staff required to produce it, but, as has often been stated, on the capacity of delegations and their Governments to assimilate it. The Secretary-General wishes to emphasize that, if the programme of conferences continues to expand, it cannot fail to strain the documentary capacities of the Organization, inevitably requiring additional staff and financial provision over and above the high cost of providing the present copious documentation in an increasingly multilingual organization.

Annex I

STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON THE DOCUMENTATION QUOTA SYSTEM

1. The documentation quota system was established under the provisions of General Assembly resolution 2836 (XXVI), paragraph 2, with 1970 as the base year.
2. The results of applying the system are shown below:

A. Comparison between 1970 quota base and 1973 quota submissions

	<u>Number of pages</u>			<u>Reduction achieved</u>	
	<u>1970 base</u>	<u>1972 submissions</u>	<u>1973 submissions</u>	<u>1973 Pages</u>	<u>Percentage of 1970</u>
Headquarters	104,000	78,000	82,000	22,000	21%
Geneva	78,700	54,900	53,800	24,900	32%
<u>including</u> UNCTAD	16,000	9,400	12,900	3,100	19%
ECE	35,700	21,500	25,000	10,700	30%
UNIDO	46,900	34,700	37,900	9,000	19%
ECA	34,300	17,500	25,600	8,700	25%
ECAFE	36,800	26,700	31,700	5,100	14%
ECLA	32,300	23,000	10,500	21,700	67%

B. Quota submissions for partial years  
 (Number of pages)

	<u>30 June 1973</u>	<u>30 June 1974</u>
Headquarters	44,200	49,600
Geneva	27,600	26,300
<u>including</u> UNCTAD	7,000	7,500
ECE	12,000	12,800
UNIDO	22,800	14,200
ECA	14,500	9,100
ECAFE	14,100	9,600
ECLA	10,600	N.a.

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Annex II

GENERAL PRODUCTION STATISTICS FOR HEADQUARTERS AND THE  
 UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA

	<u>Headquarters</u>			
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>
Meetings provided with:				
Verbatim records . . . . .	410	376	311	353
Summary records . . . . .	1,020	1,011	1,031	1,120
Pages of translation and revision (in all languages) . . . . .	237,767	247,624	233,037	254,864
Pages of typing (in all languages) .	487,222	508,298	533,822	529,270
Pages edited for inclusion in the official records . . . . .	99,174	115,112	121,160	128,682
Page-units reproduced internally . .	547,899,325	557,768,550	518,837,445	507,256,429

	<u>Geneva</u>			
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>
Meetings provided with summary records . . . . .	596	695	534	517
Pages of translation and revision (in all languages) . . . . .	137,556	147,036	127,863	149,296
Pages of typing (in all languages) .	359,043	400,636	333,189	377,318
Pages edited . . . . .	41,998	42,530	50,668	40,386
Page-units reproduced internally . .	225,101,093	233,792,780	231,302,220	211,122,467

Annex III

FIGURES ILLUSTRATING PRODUCTION STATISTICS AT HEADQUARTERS

Figure 1

Headquarters  
1973 : Documentation and meetings records.  
Pages of original submission by category

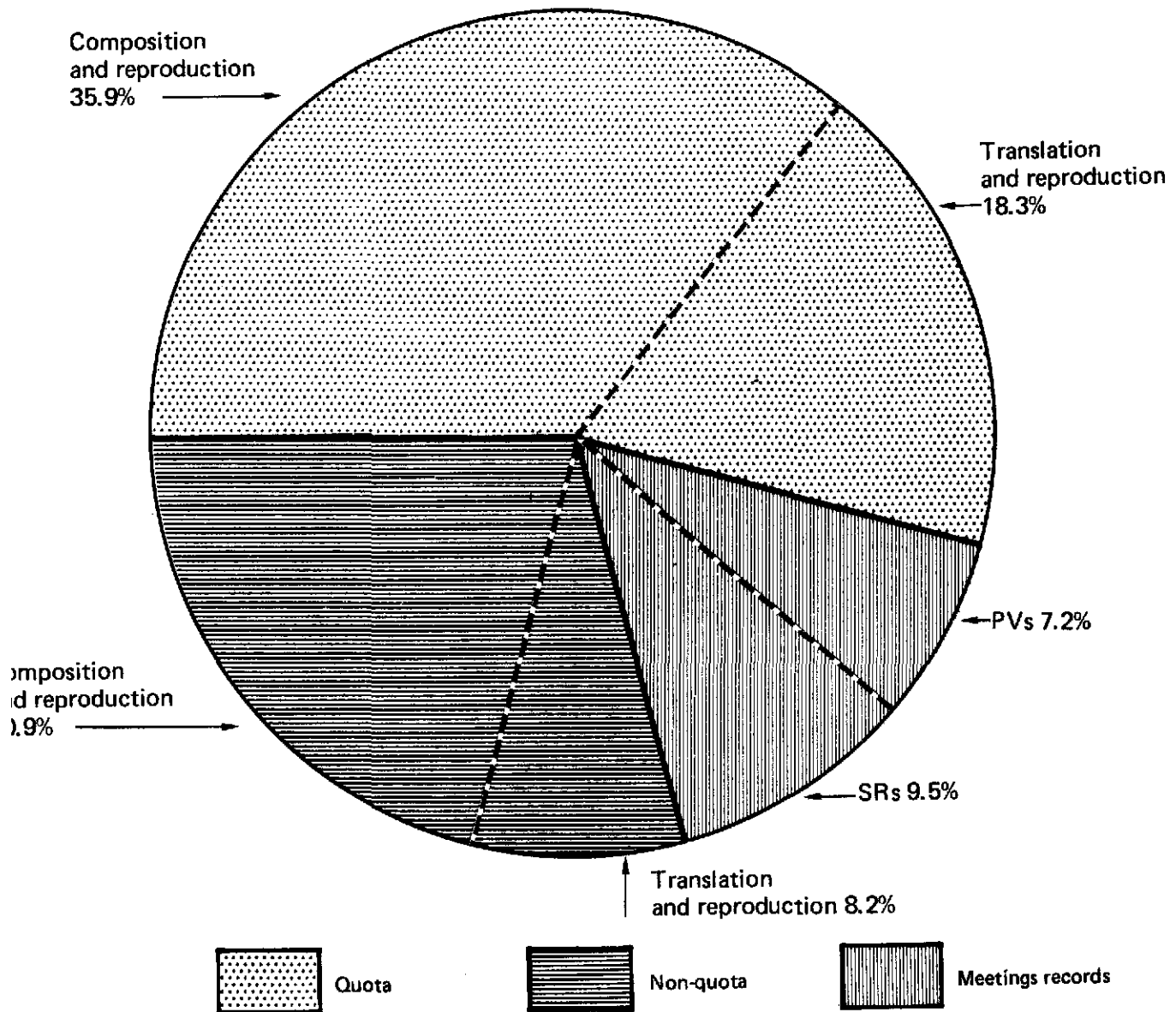
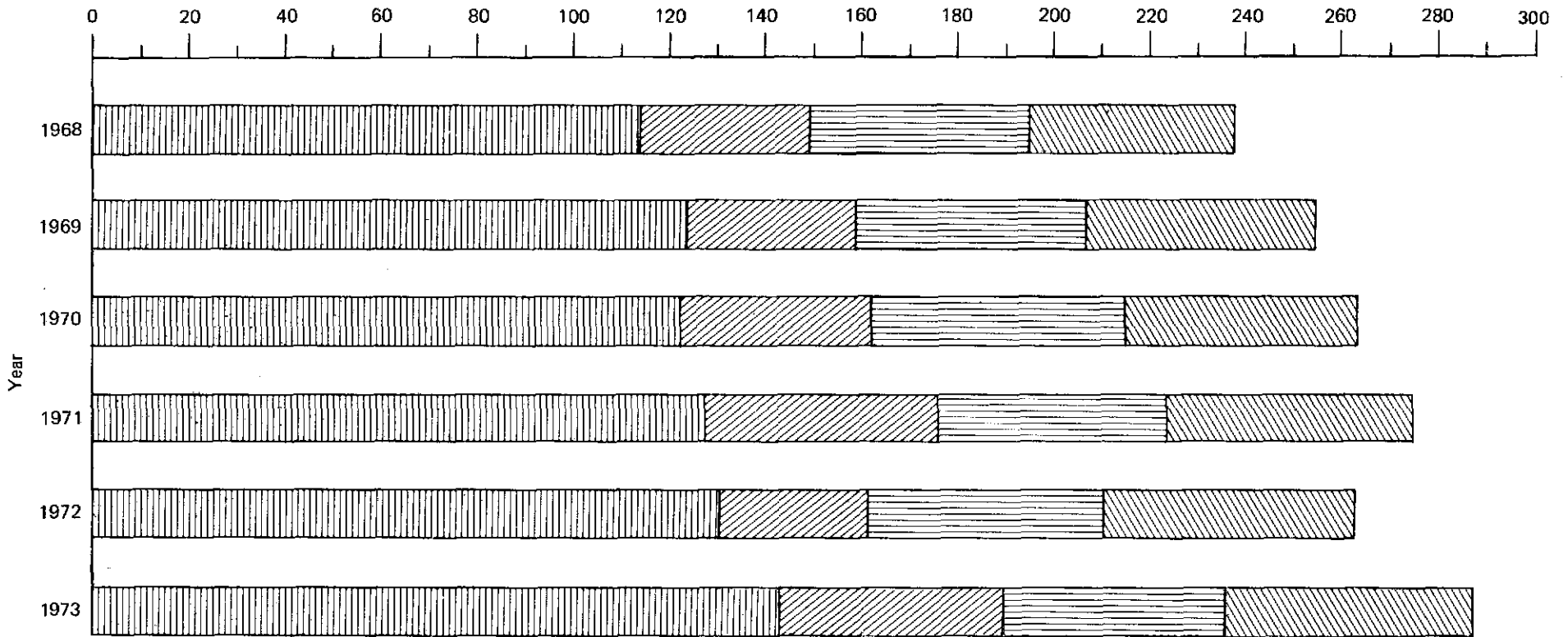


Figure 2

Headquarters

1968-1973: Documentation and meetings records.  
 Production statistics

Translation and meetings records (thousands of standard pages)



Internal

Documents, annexes  
 and supplements



Verbatim reporting  
 (all languages)



External

Translation and revision  
 (all languages)



Summary records  
 (précis-writing and translation)

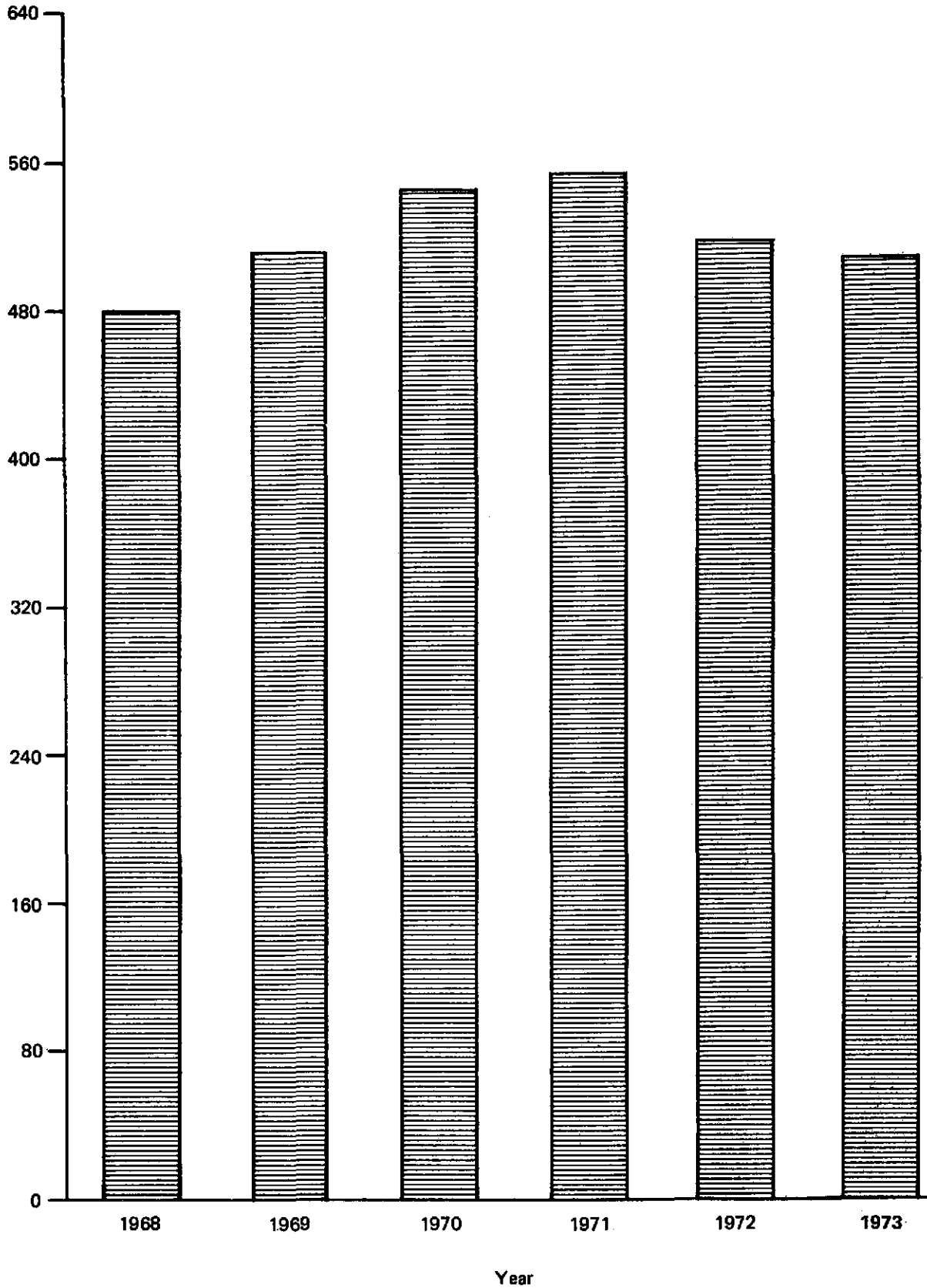


Figure 3

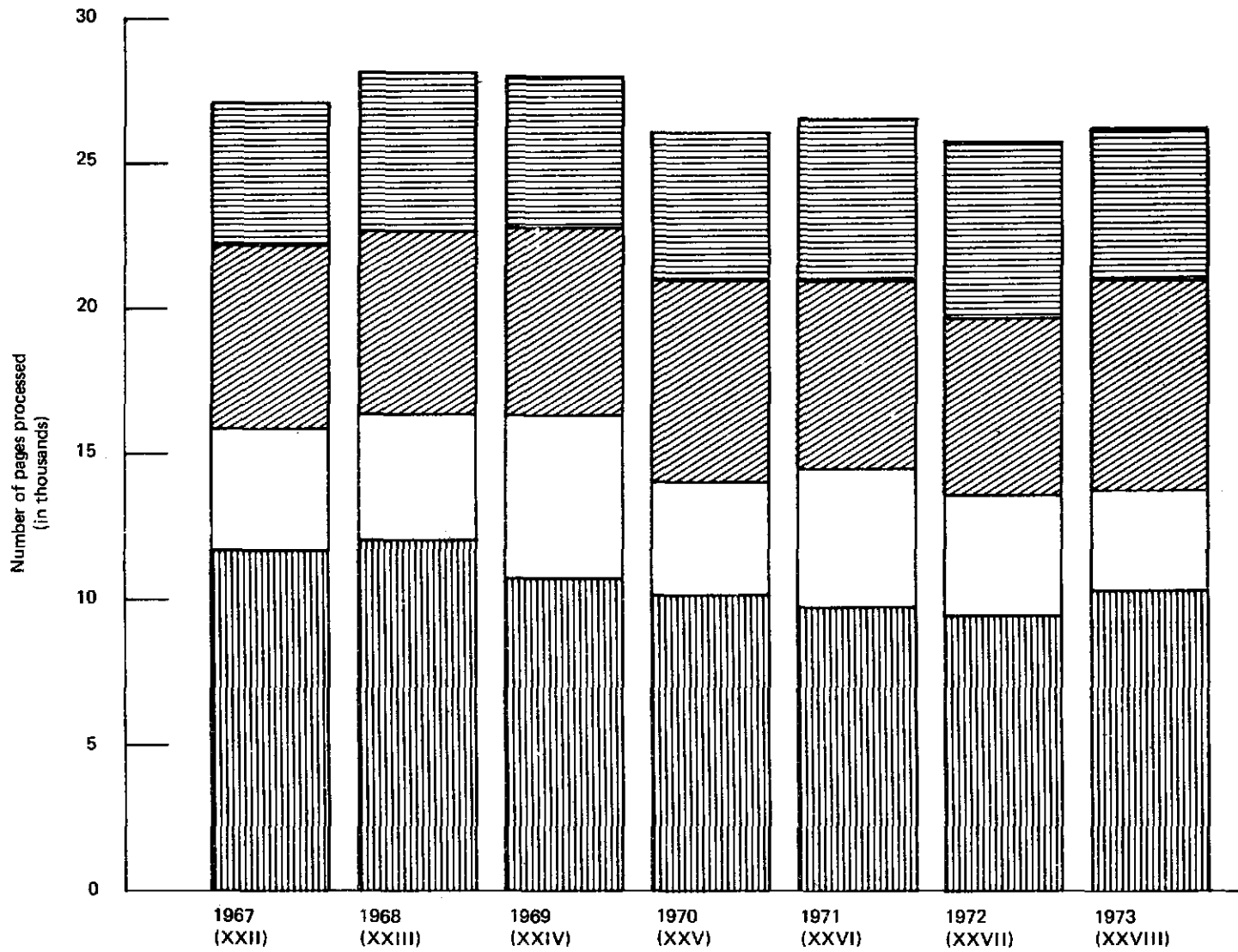
Headquarters



1968-1973: Documentation and meetings records.  
Production statistics



Internal reproduction (millions of page units)



GENERAL ASSEMBLY – PAGES OF DOCUMENTATION AND MEETINGS RECORDS



 Pre-session documents  
 In-session documents

 Verbatim records  
 Summary records

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY-TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Plenary and Committees	Number of Meetings	Pages of Documentation <sup>a/</sup>			
		Pre-Session	In-Session	Verbatim Records	Summary Records
Plenary A/PV.2117-2206	90	2,449	409	4,183	-
General A/BUR/SR.206-216	11	302	84	-	90
Credentials A/CR/SR.59-60	2	-	17	-	22
First A/C.1/PV.1921-1985	65	1,504	379	2,217	-
Special Political A/SPC/SR.856-903	48	541	187	73	644
Second A/C.2/SR.1514-1585	72	970	441	-	1,339
Third A/C.3/SR.1976-2050	75	1,011	362	-	1,206
Fourth A/C.4/SR.2025-2077	53	384	206	-	818
Fifth A/C.5/SR.1560-1632	73	2,087	918	-	1,194
Sixth A/C.6/SR.1394-1459	66	923	435	-	892
		10,171	3,438	6,473	6,225
<b>Total</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>26,307</b>			

<sup>a/</sup> Standard pages (330 words) in original language; committee reports to the Plenary are attributed to the respective committees on basis of pages in final report, no separate count is included for draft reports.