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SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

TOURISM STATISTICS

Summary of comments on "Draft guidelines on statistics of
international tourism" (E/CN.3/486)

Prepared by the Secretariat

SUMMARY

The document "Draft guidelines on statistics of international tourism" (E/CN.3/486) was circulated for comment to 92 countries and 7 international bodies in February 1976. In addition, it was considered at a Meeting on Statistics of Tourism of the Conference of European Statisticians, held in April 1976. Comments received from 33 countries and 6 international bodies and those contained in the report of that meeting (CES/AC.39/10) are summarized in the present document.

The draft guidelines presented in E/CN.3/486 were designed as a simplified programme, omitting a number of aspects of these statistics and, in order to tailor them to the possibilities of countries, arranged in four phases of increasing difficulty. Nevertheless, the main theme running through the comments received is doubt of the feasibility of carrying out the recommended programme. Many commentators expressed the view that the guidelines should be recast as an explanation of possibilities in this area, rather than as recommendations, and that for international reporting purposes the recommendations should be substantially scaled down. Apart from this question, the comments dealt mainly with sources and methods - especially the difficulties arising from the general decline in frontier formalities - and with rather specific classification questions.

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I. ACTION BY THE COMMISSION

1. The Statistical Commission may wish to take the comments summarized in the present document into account in its consideration of E/CN.3/486, as well as in its consideration of priorities for further work in this area as outlined in the "Draft recommendations on statistics of international migration (E/CN.3/483, para. 4 (c)), also before the Commission.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS

2. A general question running through a substantial part of the country comments and also the report of the Meeting on Statistics of Tourism of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) related to the coverage and level of detail of the recommendations in the guidelines (E/CN.3/486). There was, for the most part, general approval of the kinds of data called for, but there was a widespread response that these were too detailed, too ambitious and too burdensome for respondents. Accordingly, it was suggested that the amount of detail should be left to the discretion of each country, as long as the data that are supplied are internationally comparable. In this vein, one commentator proposed that an appropriate set of guidelines might, while covering the same or similar subject matters as the present paper, be recast to explain and illustrate possibilities. Suggestions on recommended tabulations might then be much more limited than in the present version. Another commentator expressed the hope that the methods and procedures outlined in the proposed technical manual to follow would be sufficiently detailed so as to achieve a workable balance between international standardization and the special needs, problems and resource limitations of individual countries.

3. A second general question raised by many commentators in many contexts related to the implications for the methodology of data collection of the general decline in border formalities now occurring. Many countries no longer have facilities for collecting any statistics at some or all border crossing points, even on a sample basis. Even where such facilities do exist, it was felt that the attempt to collect detailed information in this way would generate much resistance. There was, therefore, substantial interest in alternative sources of data, and a number of comments dealt with the relative merits of various possible sources. A number of types of sample survey were mentioned, all of which were thought to be useful for some kinds of information, although expensive. Surveys of departing travellers would yield demographic information, and information on length of stay, purpose of visit, and localities visited. Surveys of accommodation facilities would give information on their usage and receipts. Household surveys would yield demographic information and information similar to that obtainable from departing travellers on trips taken, and, in addition, might also supply expenditure information; but countries would need a certain amount of altruism to use this source, since it is expensive and the resulting information would be primarily of benefit to other countries. Other sources mentioned included banks, police records and sellers of goods and services to tourists, such as travel agents, transportation companies and providers of accommodation facilities. It is clear that a fuller discussion of this problem would generally be found useful.

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4. A third general question related to the possibility of duplication of work. It was pointed out that a number of organizations are now working in this area including members of the United Nations family, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Economic Community (EEC), the Nordic Council and the Association Touristique de l'Océan Indien. Some commented that work in this area might best be left to the WTO but others saw the need for integration of tourism statistics with other kinds of economic and social statistics, at least on the level of a skeleton international common denominator. On this latter point, several comments raised the possibility of regional guidelines or manuals. The CES meeting, however, concluded that no special regional version was needed for the countries of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

III. DEFINITION OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

5. Apart from the general questions mentioned above on sources of data and level of detail, which were frequently raised in the context of chapter III of E/CN.3/486, most of the comments dealt with borderline classification questions of the same types that arise in connexion with the definition of "resident" for national accounts purposes: the treatment of seasonal workers, students, diplomats, school-children on vacation, transport crews. Most asked for clarification, not alteration. One point did arise with some frequency, that is, the question of the distinction between tourists and excursionists. One or two commentators thought that this distinction would be useful, but most thought it either not feasible or not useful.

IV. ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES AND LENGTH OF STAY

6. Many of the comments on chapter IV of E/CN.3/486 concerned sources of data, expressing the view that the guidelines should devote more attention to alternatives to reliance on border formalities, for the reasons noted above. Many commentators were also concerned with the level of detail. Several thought that there was no need for data on both arrivals and departures, all necessary information being available from the latter. It was pointed out, furthermore, that much of the detail recommended could only be obtained from surveys and would therefore only be available at infrequent intervals. Conversely, others questioned the proposed phasing on the ground that it was often no more difficult to get monthly data than to get annual data, the latter being built up from the former.

7. Various commentators proposed alternative classifications in specific cases. It was noted that the classification of age proposed did not agree with that proposed by the CES Working Party on the System of Social and Demographic Statistics. Socio-economic class was thought preferable to occupation, and country of residence to legal nationality. Alternative breakdowns were proposed for purpose of visit, type of transport and regional groupings.

V. TOURIST ACCOMMODATION STATISTICS

8. In this area also, the classifications proposed in chapter V were thought to be too detailed. In particular, a number of commentators questioned the feasibility of separating the shares of receipts of accommodation facilities derived from residents and non-residents. On the other hand, several favoured greater detail regarding the regional distribution (within the country) of tourist activity and considered that tourist accommodation statistics offered the best way to get at the regional dimension of tourism. Specific classification questions raised touched upon such matters as the appropriate treatment of residence facilities maintained by universities for foreign students.

VI. CONSUMPTION EXPENDITURES OF INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS

9. Comments on chapter VI again contained the same two themes. Questions were raised about the need for the degree of detail shown on consumption expenditures of international tourists and about the feasibility of collecting it. A number of comments dealt with sources of data and most concluded that the main source would have to be household surveys, although some information could be obtained from surveys of tourists and from the providers of tourist services. For reasons of cost, it was not thought likely that this information could be obtained very frequently. Several commentators noted that household survey information would have to be collected by tourism-generating countries, but would mainly benefit tourism-receiving countries.

10. In addition, a number of comments and questions dealt with specific aspects of the proposed classifications. Some expressed the view that it was not feasible to obtain separate data for residents and non-residents from establishments providing services, but others emphasized the importance of such a breakdown, especially for carriers.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

11. It was suggested that a first step in further work should be to make an inventory and a comparative study of national practices relating to the types of data collected, methods used, problems encountered and resources involved. The main purpose of such a study should be to indicate the most common points and practical methods of achieving greater comparability in statistics of tourism. It should be restricted to the essential aspects, in order to simplify the general approach and to speed up the future work.

12. It was also suggested that complementary work should be pursued on domestic tourism. Although the reasons for confining the present guidelines to international tourism were recognized, it was pointed out that in many countries domestic tourism is as important as, or more important than, international tourism. The preparation of such supplementary guidelines would involve further study of the types of data that can be collected in household surveys and from accommodation establishments. As the possibility of collecting data on international tourists in connexion with border crossing formalities diminishes, the distinction between sources and methods for domestic tourism and those for international tourism will also diminish.