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CURRENT HOUSING STATISTICS

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CURRENT HOUSING STATISTICS

Section I Introduction

1.   The purpose of this paper is to discuss the various types of
current housing statistics[1] which are required to serve the needs of
housing policies in countries in the course of industrialization.
Consideration is given to the different statistical series needed,
the concepts and definitions to be used for these statistics, the
priority to be attached to the different requirements and the sources
from which the data may be obtained.

2.   The scope for the improvement and expansion of housing statistics
is in most countries limited by the practical possibilities and the
available resources. A programme for immediate action can therefore
be relatively modest in its objectives, and be limited to the statistics
most urgently needed. It is nevertheless desirable that in drawing up
such a programme consideration be given to the ultimate objectives to
be pursued, in order to ensure a balanced long-term development of the
statistics in question.

3.   For this reason the present paper consists of two parts. The
first part sets out the various purposes for which current housing
statistics are required and the different types of series which are
theoretically needed for these purposes (section II).   In the second
part the priorities to be attached to the various requirements are
discussed and suggestions are made concerning the contents of a minimum
statistical programme. These questions are considered under three
headings, statistical series to be compiled (section III); concepts
and definitions (section IV) and sources and methods of collection
(section V).

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[1]   The term "current" is used in the present paper in the sense of
"compiled at annual or more frequent intervals". It does not
cover housing censuses and housing surveys, which are generally
taken at longer intervals.

4.   In connexion with this paper attention should be drawn to the work
which is at present being carried out in Europe (under the auspices of
the Conference of European Statisticians and the Housing Committee of
the Economic Commission for Europe) on the preparation of a Programme
of Current Housing and Building Statistics.   The object of this work
is to draw up a set of recommendations concerning the development of
national statistics in this field (items of data, definitions,
classifications and the international standardization of these statistics).
An outline of this programme has been prepared [2]/ and work is continuing on
the drafting of the different sections of the programme.   Although this
programme is likely to be too ambitious for most Latin-American countries,
it may well serve, with suitable adaptations, as a long-term objective for
this region.

Section II   Purposes for which current housing statistics are needed and the type of statistics required for these purposes

5.   In broad terms, the main purposes which housing statistics have to
serve may be described as the provision of data for studies of the situation
and trends in the field of housing and the formulation of policies
affecting this field.   As house-building generally accounts for a
significant proportion of a country's total production and total capital
formation, housing statistics are also needed for more general analytical
purposes and as a basis for the formulation of general economic policies.
It is therefore convenient to consider the purposes and requirements
under the following three headings: (a) the establishment of housing
programmes, (b) the implementation of housing programmes and (c) requirements
for general purposes.

(a)   Establishment of housing programmes

6.   The establishment of a housing programme calls for (i) an assessment
of the housing requirements at the moment when the programme is drawn up
and of the development of these requirements during the period to which
the programme relates and (ii) a decision concerning the extent to which
the requirements should be met during the period covered i.e. the volume
of building provided for in the programme and its distribution over time.

2/   Copies will be available at the Seminar (HOU/Working Paper No. 120;
    Conf.Eur. Stats/113).

7.   For the assessment of current housing needs, data are needed on the housing stock and its utilization. These data are normally obtained in censuses or sample surveys of a similar nature. Current housing statistics are generally not suitable for this purpose. As housing censuses and surveys are discussed in other papers presented at this Seminar, they need not be considered here.

8.   For forecasting future housing needs, data are required on demographic developments and household formation. These statistics are also dealt with in one of the other papers.

9.   The volume of building to be provided for in the housing programme should be decided upon in the light of (i) the capacity of the house-building industry and the possibilities of increasing this capacity and (ii) the desirable share of housing in the country's total resources.

10.   The assessment of the present and future capacity of the house-building industry requires a detailed analysis of the trends in production and the factors affecting these trends. Data are therefore needed in the first place on output. Output is usually measured in terms of the number of dwelling units constructed. It is desirable that, in addition, output be expressed in terms of number of rooms, square metres of surface or other units which provide an indication of the size of the dwellings constructed. In order to enable the supply of dwellings to be related directly to requirements, it would also be desirable that the data on the number of dwellings constructed be cross-classified by size, i.e. number of rooms or square metres of surface per dwelling.

11.   As the stock of dwellings is affected not only by the construction of new dwellings but also by other building operations which add dwelling space to the existing stock, data would be required both on new dwelling construction and on reconstruction repairs, extensions and conversions.

12.   A number of other cross-classifications of the total number of dwellings constructed may be useful for the study and analysis of current trends, e.g. by investor, by tenure status, by type of material used etc. Also, as the housing situation and housing requirements may vary between the different regions of the country, it is generally necessary to classify output by geographical areas.

13. Statistics on input of the house-building industry are needed in conjunction with statistics on output to show to what extent the capacity of the construction industry has been used i.e. whether any factors have limited construction activities or whether there is room for their further expansion; to what extent changes in building techniques have contributed to a better adaptation of supply to demand; to what extent different types of building material are substituted one for another etc. Thus data are required on employment and unemployment, wages paid, materials used, the cost of these materials and possibly also of the use of equipment.

14. Difficulties may arise in collecting these data since many factors of production are used both in house-building and in other construction. Whenever possible, however, separate data should be obtained for each of the different activities.

15. In addition to data on input of labour and materials, it would also be desirable to have information on the financial resources available for the construction of dwellings and on the costs at which finance can be obtained.

16. As a basis for decisions on the allocation of resources as between housing and other sectors, statistics are needed for the different sectors which can be readily compared one with another and which fit into the framework of general economic statistics. The requirements for this purpose are considered under (c) below.

(b) The implementation of housing programmes

17. Once a housing programme has been established, it is necessary to check regularly whether the calculations and the assumptions on which it is based are still valid and whether the objectives of the programme are being implemented. The results of this analysis should provide a basis for deciding on the policy measures to be taken in order to promote the implementation of the programme and on the adjustments which should be made to the programme.

18. Special measures may be needed or adjustments required for various reasons:

(i) <u>deficiencies of the original programme</u> e.g. in the estimation of housing requirements or in the assumptions concerning demographic trends. In particular in cases where no adequate data were available on which the housing programme could be based and considerable use has had to be made of approximate data and estimates, frequent checks of the validity of the programme should be made. In such cases a flexible approach to programming is desirable and adjustments and improvements should be made whenever possible;

(ii) <u>non-realization of the targets set in the programme</u>, e.g. because of insufficiency of the supply of dwellings. In such cases it is necessary to investigate whether the differences between the programme targets and their realization are likely to be temporary or permanent, whether the targets themselves are realistic, and whether measures are desirable and possible to stimulate building activity;

(iii) <u>changes in general economic development</u>: It is desirable to examine periodically (in particular when the housing programme covers a relatively long period) whether or not the programme continues to fit into the over-all economic conditions of the country. Changes in general economic developments not foreseen at a time when the programme was drawn up may necessitate changes in the objectives of the programme;

(iv) <u>differences between the estimated objective of housing requirements on which the programme is based and the effective demand for housing</u>

19. For the current review of housing programmes two categories of data are needed: statistics relating to the demand for housing and the different demand factors; and statistics relating to the supply of dwellings and the different supply factors.

<u>Statistics relating to the demand for housing</u>

20. Ideally, the same kind of data should be available as those on which the original programme was drawn up, i.e. data on the housing stock and its utilization. In practice such data can be obtained on a current basis only if permanent housing registers are kept, by which census data are kept up to date, or if sample surveys similar to the

censuses are made at frequent intervals. In the absence of such data,
it is necessary to rely on more approximate estimates, e.g. by relating
changes in the stock of dwellings (estimated by extrapolation of the
census data by means of current building statistics) to changes in the
number of households (estimated on the basis of demographic statistics).
These estimates however can only provide indications on the average
density of occupation, and are therefore only broad measures of changes
in the housing situation. Some refinements can be made if the data on
the housing stock can be compiled in some detail, e.g. broken down by
dwellings of different types or size. It is desirable that such
refinements be made whenever possible. It is also desirable that the
data both on the stock of dwellings and on their occupants, be available
by different regions of the country, so that the trends in density of
occupation can be analysed separately for these regions.

21. For the study of the effective demand for housing, data are required
on the various factors affecting the decisions of households, i.e. data
on rents (indices of rents, the relative importance of rent in total
consumer expenditure), the price paid for new houses, sources of capital
available for investment in residential building, the cost at which
these funds can be obtained, etc.

Statistics relating to the supply of housing

22. The statistics required are similar to those discussed under (b) above
in respect of the establishment of housing programmes, i.e. data are
needed both on output and on input of the house-building industry. The
data on output could possibly be sub-divided by size and type of dwellings,
investor, tenure status, etc. They should include, and distinguish
separately, all types of building operations, i.e. reconstruction repairs,
extensions and conversions, as well as new building.

23. While for the purpose of drawing up a housing programme the main
interest is in statistics showing the longer term trends in building
activity and it is therefore sufficient to have annual statistics for
the purpose of examining the implementation of the programme some shorter
term statistics are also required in order to permit quick action when
the need arises. For the same reason it is desirable that in addition

/to statistics

to statistics of dwellings completed, data be compiled also on the
different stages of work in progress; dwellings begun and dwellings
under construction.   Statistics of building permits may be useful
as indicators of the expected future development of building activity,
unless the number of permits remaining unused for different reasons is
important and varies over time.

(c) Housing statistics needed for general purposes

24. Most of the statistics referred to in the previous paragraphs relate
to series expressed in physical terms.   They are therefore not suitable
for direct comparisons with statistics in other fields and do not fit into
the framework of general economic statistics. For the latter purpose,
data are required which are expressed in terms of a unit common to all
sectors of the economy i.e. in terms of value.

25. The statistics to be compiled should permit at least three types
of comparison: (i) comparison of the level of output of the house-
building industry with that of other branches of building and construction,
(ii) comparison of output with that of other sectors of the economy, (iii)
comparison of capital formation in dwellings with that in other types of
capital goods, other building and construction, machinery and equipment.

26. This implies that consistency of concepts and definitions should be
sought with those adopted in respect of output (gross output, net output)
and capital formation in general, i.e. in particular with those adopted
for national accounting purposes. Consistency of concepts and definitions
with those adopted in general economic compilations would of course also
be required in respect of a number of other data mentioned in the previous
paragraphs of this section, e.g. data on rents, housing finance, wages, etc.

27. The statistical series referred to above will normally be expressed
in terms of current prices.   It is useful to have in addition corresponding
data on prices so as to permit the elimination of price fluctuations from
the value series.

III. Statistical series

III. Statistical series to be included in a minimum programme

28. The statistical requirements set out in the previous section
constitute a statistical programme of considerable size which even
countries with well developed statistics would find difficult to
implement in full. In planning the development of national statistics
it is therefore necessary to decide on the priorities to be attached
to the different requirements and to establish a more modest programme
for immediate action (which may be referred to as the 'minimum programme').

29. In drawing up such a minimum programme two factors should be taken
into consideration, (i) the importance of the various statistics for the
formulation and pursuance of housing policies and (ii) the practical
difficulties involved in compiling the statistics in question. These
factors vary in significance according to the level of economic develop-
ment and the administrative and statistical organization of the countries
concerned. Although, therefore, it is not possible to indicate precisely
what the contents of the minimum programme should be, it would seem that
national needs and policies have enough issues in common to permit some
general suggestions concerning the lines along which such a programme
should be developed.

30. Broadly speaking, the greater the need for housing the less need
there is for refined figures. In these circumstances which are
characteristic of countries in the earlier stages of industrialization,
the building programme is determined by supply possibilities rather
than by requirements. The main concern is to increase the volume of
construction as much as possible and to ensure that the right types of
dwelling (i.e. dwellings designed to accommodate the typical family)
are constructed in the right places.

31. In developing housing statistics, therefore, it is logical that
first priority be given to statistics relating to supply. The most
urgent need is for statistics on the completion of dwellings. As it is
desirable to follow the trends in different parts of the country, these
data should be classified by geographical areas. In countries in the
earlier stages of industrialization, reconstruction repairs, extensions
and conversions are likely to be of relatively little importance. In

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the beginning, therefore, it may not be necessary to compile statistics
on these building operations. The ultimate objective of developing the
statistics should be the compilation of all data needed for the assessment
of current changes in the dwelling stock. A further developed programme
should therefore include statistics on all building operations which increase
the stock of dwellings as well as statistics on actions which withdraw
dwellings from the dwelling stock (demolitions etc.).

32. While there may not be an immediate need for statistics on the various
stages of building - building permits granted, dwellings begun, dwellings
under construction - these statistics can often be obtained at a low
additional cost and might therefore be included in a minimum programme.

33. As regards sub-divisions of the data on dwellings completed, the first
need is for a classification which gives some indication of the kind of
dwelling constructed. It would therefore be desirable that provision be
made for at least a simple classification by some suitable criteria of size
or type.

34. Since the main objective is to maximize output and to increase the
capacity of the building industry, it would be useful if the minimum
programme could also provide for the collection of some information on
important input factors, in particular data showing the availability of
unused production factors: e.g. data on employment and unemployment and
data on the availability of certain key building materials.

35. Although in the earlier stage of industrialization the precise
assessment of requirements is of lesser importance and statistics on the
demand should therefore be given lower priority, it may be desirable to
include in the minimum programme at least some data relating to demand
factors - for instance, statistics on rents - as these data may be of
assistance in deciding on the policy measures to be taken for regulating
the supply of dwellings.

36. There is probably no need to include in a minimum programme data on
the value of construction or on capital formation in dwellings. The latter
data are needed mainly in order to ensure a proper balance in the allocation
of resources to housing and to other uses and, as pointed out above, this
problem is of much less importance in the earlier stages of industrialization
than in the later stages.

/IV. Concepts

IV. Concepts and definitions

37. The question of concepts and definitions relating to housing statistics has been discussed in detail at various meetings of the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics of the Housing Committee of ECE and (in the context of housing censuses) at meetings under the programme of the Conference of European Statisticians. Standard definitions have been drawn up for a number of concepts. These standard definitions are used in the statistical publications issued by the Economic Commission for Europe. They will eventually also be included in the European Programme for Current Housing and Building Statistics referred to in the introductory section of this paper.

38. The purpose of drawing up standard definitions was to promote international standardization of the main statistical series in this field. Although it is not the immediate objective of the present seminar to draw up international standards, it is believed that the experience gained in Europe in the course of this work will be of direct interest also to Latin American countries. The standard definitions are based on the practical experience in a great number of countries, and have proved their value in actual practice. It would therefore seem that, with suitable adaptations to allow for differences in national circumstances, they could also porfitably be used by countries in other regions. Moreover, though it must be recognized that in the development of national statistics national needs should have priority over international needs, the advantages of international comparability should not be overlooked when statistical programmes are drawn up at the national level.

39. The present section is limited to those concepts in the field of housing statistics which have been discussed in Europe, and for which standard definitions have been drawn up. These definitions are listed, and for each definition the main considerations which led to its adoption are given.

Dwelling

40. For the purpose of housing censuses the dwelling ("conventional dwelling") is defined as "a room or suite of rooms and its accesories in a permanent building or structurally separated part thereof which by the

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way it has been built, rebuilt, converted, etc., is intended for private
habitation and is not, at the time of the census, used wholly for other
purposes. It should have a separate access to a street (direct or via a
garden or grounds) or to a common space within the building (staircase,
passage, gallery and so on) ╱⁻a detached one-family house, a semi-detached
house, a terraced house, a self-contained flat, an apartment, janitor's
quarters, etc.⁻╱. Detached rooms for habitation which are clearly built,
rebuilt, converted etc., to be used as a part of the dwelling should be
counted as part of the dwelling. ╱⁻A dwelling may thus be constituted by
separate buildings within the same enclosure provided that they are clearly
intended for habitation by the same private household, e.g. a room or rooms
above a detached garage, occupied by servants or other members of the
household.⁻╱ 'Permanent building' in this definition refers to a structure
which may be expected to maintain its stability indefinitely (ten years or
more).3/

41. The definition of a dwelling adopted for current housing statistics is
basically the same as that recommended for censuses, with one major exception,
namely that the words "and are suitable for this purpose" are substituted
for "and is not at the time of the census, used wholly for other purposes".

42. When these concepts were discussed, two different concepts of a
dwelling were considered: the concept according to which a dwelling is
defined on the basis of its structural characteristics, and is therefore inde-
pendent from the household concept; and the concept which identifies the dwelling
with the household. It was considered that the first concept was to be preferred,
because it provided a better basis for studies of overcrowding and estimates
of housing requirements.

43. The difference between the concepts adopted for censuses and current
statistics, respectively, is due to the different nature of these two types
of enquiry. For the purpose of assessing the housing situation, the first
concept is preferable, since it defines the housing stock as those dwellings
actually available for dwelling purposes. In current statistics, however,
it is not possible to obtain data on the intended use of dwellings.

3/ See the European Programme for National Population Censuses (Conf.Eur.
Stats/WG.6/82, paragraph 12. This definition is identical with that
given in the General Principles for a Housing Census, drawn up by the
Statistical Commission of the United Nations. /Room 44.

Room

44. The definition of a room adopted for the purpose of housing censuses is as follows:

"A room is defined as a space in a dwelling enclosed by walls reaching from the floor to the ceiling or roof covering or at least to a height of 2 metres above the ground, of a size large enough to hold a bed for an adult (4 m^2 at least) and at least 2 metres high over the major area of the ceiling. In this category should fall normal bedrooms, dining-rooms, living rooms, habitable attics, servants' rooms, kitchens and other separate spaces used or intended for dwelling purposes. Kitchenettes, corridors, verandahs, lobbies, etc., as well as bathrooms and toilets, should not be counted as rooms. Countries which in their censuses exclude kitchens from the count of rooms, should indicate in their census results the appropriate number of kitchens so excluded."[4]

45. The corresponding definition for current housing statistics is:

"Rooms are normal bedrooms, dining-rooms, living-rooms, habitable attics, servants' rooms, kitchens and other spaces designed for dwelling purposes in dwellings, separated from one another by walls reaching from the floor to the ceiling and of a size large enough to hold a bed for an adult (4 m^2 at least), and of at least 2 m high over the major area of ceiling. Kitchenettes, corridors, verandahs, lobbies, etc., not falling under the above definition, as well as bathrooms and toilets, should not be counted as rooms".

46. The purpose of the concept of a room is to provide a measure of the "capacity" of the dwelling to which the density of occupation can be related. It is therefore desirable to include in this concept only those spaces in the dwelling which should be taken into account in calculations of the density of occupation. The main factors to be taken into consideration in deciding whether or not a given space should be regarded as a room are: the size of the space in question, and the use which is made of it (or the purpose which it is intended to serve).

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[4] See Conf.Eur.Stats/WG.6/82, paragraph 24.

47. Most countries include in rooms only spaces above a certain minimum size. The actual minimum size adopted varies somewhat from country to country.(in Europe it appeared to vary between 4 and 6 m^2). As the number of these very small spaces is likely to be few, it is probably of little significance where the borderline is precisely drawn. It is desirable to define the minimum size in terms not only of surface, but also of height.

48. As regards the use of the rooms, the same problem arises as in the case of dwellings: in censuses it is possible to obtain information on the actual use, but in current statistics only on the intended use (i.e. the use for which the room is designed). This question is mainly of importance in respect of rooms used for professional purposes. According to the international definition quoted above, only rooms designed for non-dwelling purposes should be excluded. This implies that, strictly speaking, in order to obtain comparability between current statistics and census data, rooms used for professional purposes, though not designed for them, should be regarded as rooms. If different definitions are used in censuses and current housing statistics, it would be desirable to sub-divide the data in such a way that they can be compared between the two enquiries.

49. The main point on which national definitions differ from one another is that of the treatment of kitchens. Some countries regard kitchens as rooms, others exclude kitchens. In a number of countries, only kitchens above a given size (which are assumed to be used both for cooking purposes and for living purposes in a narrower sense) are included.

50. Usually, no distinction is made between rooms of different sizes (except that spaces below a given size are not regarded as rooms). Some countries, however, express the size of the dwelling in terms of units, which reflect not only the number of rooms, but also their size, e.g. small rooms are counted as one unit, medium-size rooms as $1\frac{1}{2}$ units, and big rooms as two units.

Floor space and volume

51. During the discussions held in Europe, it was agreed that more than one
measure of floor space was necessary to characterize the "capacity" of
dwellings for living purposes.   Two standard concepts were adopted, the
first - "useful floor space" - relating to the whole of the area in the
dwelling, the second - "living floor space" - relating to that part of
the dwelling which is designed to be used for living purposes.   The
definition of these two concepts are as follows:

    (i) Useful floor space is the floor space measured inside the outer
walls, excluding cellars, non-habitable attics and, in multi-dwelling
houses, all common space.

    (ii) Living floor space is the total area of normal bedrooms, dining-
rooms, living-rooms, habitable attics, servants' rooms, kitchens and
other spaces designed for dwelling purposes in dwellings separated
from one another by walls reaching from the floor to the ceiling and
of a size large enough to hold a bed for an adult (4 m^2 at least),
and of at least 2m high over the major area of ceiling.

52. The concept of "volume" of the dwelling is of relatively little
importance for the study of living conditions, density of occupation, etc.
It is, however, a useful concept in connexion with the study of the cost
of building. A standard concept of volume (which, incidentally, is
applicable both to residential and to non-residential building) has been
adopted, which is as follows:

Gross volume is the total space between the outer surface of the outer
walls, the level of the lowest floor and the exterior of the roof. When
the ground level is lower than the lowest floor, the gross volume should
be measured from the ground level. In the case of common walls the
measurement should be made from the centre line of these walls. Out-
buildings that are structurally similar to the main buildings (e.g. made
of the same building materials) should be included.

Stages of building work

53. The following definitions have been adopted for European purposes:

(a) Work authorized: Building projects for the carrying out of which
    a permit has been issued.

                                                       /(b) Work begun:

(b) <u>Work begun</u>: Work is begun when the first physical operations are undertaken on the building site after the planning and designing stages. Examples are: site-preparation; the delivery of materials and equipment to the site; the start of excavations or the laying of foundations.

(c) <u>Work under construction</u>: Work begun but not yet completed.

(d) <u>Work completed</u>: Work is completed when the building is physically ready to be occupied.

54. Since the statistics in question are often obtained in connexion with administrative control operations, the definitions of these concepts to be adopted depend to a large extent on the building regulations existing in the various countries, in particular on the frequency and timing of the different checks provided for in these regulations.

<u>Types of building activity</u>

55. The definitions adopted in Europe are as follows:

(a) <u>New building</u>: Means the erection of an entirely new structure, whether the site on which it is built has before been occupied or not.

(b) <u>Reconstruction repairs</u>: Means repairs by which at least one dwelling or other structure is effectively reinstated and where substantial parts of the existing structure are used.

(c) <u>Extensions</u>: Relate to the enlargement of buildings by which space is added.

(d) <u>Conversions</u>: Relate to structural changes carried out within a building.

56. The main purpose of these concepts is to describe the various types of building operation which may lead to changes in the housing stock and thus to provide a basis for the extrapolation of estimates of the housing stock over time.

57. The size of the housing stock may be measured in "terms of various units: the number of dwellings, the number of rooms, the surface of the dwellings. While the first two types of building activity (new building and reconstruction repairs) always lead to changes in the housing stock, irrespective of the units in which it is measured, this is not so in the

case of extensions or conversions. Extensions may relate to:
  (i)   enlargement of residential buildings by which an additional
        dwelling is created;
  (ii) enlargement of a residential building by which one or more
        additional rooms are created but the number of dwellings is
        not changed;
  (iii) enlargement of a residential building by which additional
        surface is added to existing dwellings but no additional
        dwellings and no additional rooms are created.

If the housing stock is measured in terms of dwelling units, only
extensions of type (i) should be taken into account in the compilation
of changes in dwelling stock; if, however, the dwelling stock is measured
in terms of number of rooms or square metres, extensions of types (i) and
(ii), or types (i), (ii) and (iii), respectively, should be included.
58. Similarly, conversions may affect the number of dwellings; or the
number of rooms, but not the number of dwellings: or the living floor
space, but not the number of dwellings or rooms. The concept of
conversions also includes building by which neither the number of
dwellings, nor the number of rooms, nor the floor space is affected
(e.g. conversion into a bathroom of spaces not designed for living
purposes). In compilations of changes in the dwelling stock only the
appropriate categories of conversions should be included. It should
also be noted that the concept of conversions includes conversions of
dwellings into non-residential buildings and vice-versa. The change
in the dwelling stock due to conversions may therefore, under certain
circumstances, be negative.[5]

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[5] There is, of course, also a negative change in the housing stock
    (measured in terms of dwelling units) in the case of two dwellings
    which are combined into a single dwelling.

/V. Sources and

V.   Sources and methods of collection 6/

59.   As in many other fields of statistics, the sources to be used for the collection of current housing statistics and the methods by which the data are to be compiled depend on the particular circumstances of the country concerned, and decisions on this question have to be taken at the national level in the light of the country's possibilities and institutional arrangements. It is nevertheless useful to have a general exchange of views on these questions, so that the various countries may benefit from the practical experience of others.

60.   The contents of the present section of this paper are largely based on the descriptions of national methods of collection which were submitted a few years ago by the countries participating in the work of the Working Party on Housing and Building Statistics of ECE. These national reports, however, are mainly drawn up in general terms and they do not provide detailed information on many of the specific practical problems which are likely to be of particular interest to the participants in this seminar. As this is a field in which the ECE secretariat has little practical experience, it has now been possible to include in the present paper a more complete assessment of the value of the different sources and methods and of the practical problems to which they give rise. It is hoped that those national experts participating in the seminar who have personal experience in this field will contribute to the discussions and that it will be possible to include a number of specific conclusions in the seminar's report. 7/

6/   This section is limited to the problems arising in the collection of current housing statistics in the narrower sense, i.e. data on the production of dwellings, with the various sub-divisions required. Various types of other statistics required in connexion with the establishment and implementation of housing statistics are part of broader fields of statistics - e.g. statistics on building materials, rents, finance. The collection of these statistics raises a number of problems, which should be considered in the context of the particular statistical field to which they belong, rather than in the context of housing statistics.

7/   It should be noted that a further study of methods of collection is at present being undertaken in Europe, in connexion with the work on the preparation of the European Programme of Current Housing and Building Statistics. It is envisaged to collect detailed information on national practices by means of a standard questionnaire, and to include an analysis of the replies received in the final version of the programme. Although this programme is drawn up primarily for the use of European countries, it is expected that in particular the section on methods of collection will also be of interest to countries in other regions.

/61. While

61. While data on the size of the housing stock (in censuses or sample surveys) are normally obtained from the occupants of the dwellings, this source can generally not be used for the collection of data on changes in the housing stock. Even if, in principle, certain data could be obtained from occupants, this method would be expensive and would be unlikely to yield adequate results.

62. It follows that reports made by the building industry are the main source for current data on housing. Such reports may be made specifically for statistical purposes and submitted directly by the building enter- prises to the statistical authorities; or they may be part of the reports made in connexion with the existing regulations concerning house-building and be submitted to the statistical authorities through the authorities in charge of the control of the building regulations. The latter authorities may transmit the original data as receir..l from the building undertakings or they may be responsible themselves for the first processing stage of the data.

63. The advantages of the first method are that it provides the statistician with a more direct control of the concepts and definitions used, and enables him to obtain, within certain limits, the kinds of data most useful for the various purposes for which they are to be used. The method is, however, used only in a small number of countries (at least in Europe), probably because it also entails a number of disadvantages:

    (i)   when statistics are collected as a separate operation, the cost of the collection is higher and the burden on the respondents greater;

    (ii)   checks on the reliability of the data and on their complete- ness may be more difficult to carry out;

  (iii)   building carried out outside the building industry will generally not be covered, and it may be difficult to obtain separate data on this activity (which may be significant in some countries).

64. When the second method is used, the collection of statistics and the administrative procedures required by the laws and regulations are made

part of one operation. A number of variants of this method may be distinguished. A method frequently used in Europe consists in obtaining through local offices such as building offices, town planning services, etc., the information on each building project that the builder supplies in his application for a building permit. These data are recorded in a register of building projects maintained by the Statistical Office, or other authority in charge of the collection of statistics, and are kept up to date on the basis of information on the progress of work done, provided either by the builder or by the local authorities. The usefulness of this method depends on various factors, such as:

(i)   the nature of the data supplied in applications for building permits (or the possibilities of including data especially for statistical purposes, if the data required for administrative purposes do not meet the requirements of the statisticians);

(ii)   the extent to which permits are required for different building projects (all projects, projects above a certain value, new building only, etc.);

(iii) the type of information which the builder is required to supply under existing regulations on the progress made during the successive stages of building;

(iv)   the extent to which local authorities are informed of the progress made on the different projects in their area.

An advantage of this method is that it provides the statistical authorities with the basic data relating to each individual project, and that they have full control of the processing of the data. In some countries, however, the processing of the data collected locally is in the hands of the local offices concerned. It would seem that this method makes it more difficult for the statistical authorities to check the consistency and completeness of the data submitted.

65. Statistics may also be collected in connexion with the provision of finance for house-building. It may be possible to obtain useful

information of this kind on specific types of building projects, or on
building projects in particular areas, or for particular groups of the
population, but not on house-building as a whole.

66. The main difficulty arising in this field, irrespective of the
method of collection used, is to obtain reliable data for rural areas
and smaller localities. Statistics for the bigger urban agglomerations
can usually be obtained without great difficulties. The local authorities,
or local office, responsible for the collection of the data are usually
well organized for this purpose and have their specialized departments
dealing with these matters. To create a similar organization in smaller
localities would involve unduly high cost.

67. In a number of European countries it was found necessary to carry
out periodic (usually annual) surveys for the purpose of correcting such
deficiencies in the more frequent statistics as incomplete geographical
coverage, omission of projects for which no building permit is required,
unauthorized construction work, delays in reporting, and building permits
unused.