



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

# EVALUATION REPORT

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### **Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the Population Division**

*“The Population Division successfully produces ‘numbers that really matter in the world’, but needs to collaborate more strategically with other entities in the field and focus on improvements in innovation and internal management to ensure it remains an authoritative source”*

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## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

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### FUNCTION

*“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;” (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).*

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## **Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the Population Division**

*“The Population Division successfully produces ‘numbers that really matter in the world’, but needs to collaborate more strategically with other entities in the field and focus on improvements in innovation and internal management to ensure it remains an authoritative source”*

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Inspection and Evaluation Division of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) identified the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#) as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment carried out in 2008. This evaluation report on the [Population Division of DESA](#) is one of 11 detailed assessments of DESA’s 10 divisions and offices and its Executive Direction and Management, and will be issued to DESA as an internal management report.

This evaluation is the first to be conducted on the Population Division by OIOS since 2001. The Population Division is mid-sized when compared with the other divisions and offices of DESA, with USD 13.5 million estimated expenditures in regular budget and 45 staff posts for the 2010-2011 biennium.

In undertaking the evaluation, OIOS examined the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of the Division. It used a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, including a document review, staff and stakeholder interviews, staff and stakeholder surveys, field missions, direct observation of intergovernmental meetings, a bibliometric analysis of the usage of DESA publications and an expert panel review of the quality of a sample of key Division publications. The evaluation was undertaken in accordance with the norms and standards for evaluation established by the [United Nations Evaluation Group \(UNEG\)](#).

The evaluation results showed that the Population Division had far-reaching impact, particularly within the United Nations system. Its role in providing world population estimates and projections is one of the longest-standing functions of the United Nations and was one of the areas in which its role and effectiveness were seen most clearly. The Division’s population estimates and projections were its most widely visible and utilized product and were greatly valued by its stakeholders. The parliamentary documentation provided to the Commission on Population and Development was of high technical quality and relevant to Member States. The Population Division fulfilled a unique role in the United Nations system by providing population data and analysis which were essential for decision-making related to social and economic development. It also contributed to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through its contributions to monitoring their progress and by improving the coherence of methods and data across the United Nations system. The staff of the Division were recognised for their technical expertise in the area of demography and population affairs.

Nevertheless, a number of factors appeared to threaten its continued credibility and leadership. The Division requires a strong information technology (IT) infrastructure to support its work; however, it faced limitations in regard to the acquisition and maintenance of cutting-edge IT resources and lacked adequate staff to support enhancements. The impending loss through retirement of the Division's three most senior leaders was of concern to both staff and stakeholders, and careful planning will be required to ensure continuity of knowledge and processes through the transition period.

The Division's attempts to promote coordination and cooperation within the population field have had mixed results. The Division has successfully developed coordinated arrangements in the area of migration, but was seen as engaging some partners less effectively than it might, particularly within the United Nations system. Its relationship with UNFPA has improved but there was still room to build on existing synergies. Opportunities also existed to leverage partnerships better, including by obtaining support for areas of divisional weakness, such as its IT infrastructure.

The Population Division operates within a complex Department and fostering collaboration was an ongoing management challenge. Opportunities for both inter- and intra-divisional collaboration and complementarities have not been fully exploited. Where such opportunities have been seized, the benefits have been acknowledged by staff and stakeholders. However, a more systematic approach to the identification of such synergies is needed within the Department as a whole.

The intellectual leadership in the Division was not always supported by effective management practices. Staff concerns about the transparency and consistency of decisions and the quality of consultation, communication and support for career development within the Population Division have been noted in previous OIOS reports and were again evident in this evaluation. Better communication between the management and staff could improve these perceptions.

OIOS recommends that DESA:

- Promote greater coordination and collaboration with partners;
- Expand the capabilities of the Division's IT infrastructure, including through seeking extra-budgetary support;
- Improve internal work processes, including communication within the Division, career development and knowledge management, and ensuring technical knowledge of Division staff is aligned with the latest developments in the field.

<b>Contents</b>	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction	1 – 6	6
II. Methodology	7 – 10	6 - 8
III. Background	11 – 17	8 - 10
IV. Results		
A. The work of the Population Division was of fundamental importance to the United Nations system and the international community, notwithstanding some challenges	18 – 34	10 - 16
B. The technical expertise of staff and high quality of work have given the Division strong credibility within the population field	35 – 44	16 - 19
C. The Population Division successfully integrated human rights and a gender perspective into its work	45	19 - 20
D. Several factors threatened the Division’s ability to sustain credibility and leadership within the field of demography	46 – 50	20 - 21
E. The Population Division has had mixed results in promoting coordination among United Nations entities in the field of population and contributing to the activities of the United Nations system on issues related to population	51 – 62	21 - 25
F. Management practices created inefficiencies and were seen as hampering career development	63 - 66	25 - 26
V. Conclusion	67 - 73	26 - 27
VI. Recommendations	74 - 76	28 - 29
Annex A		30 - 33

## I. Introduction

1. The [Inspection and Evaluation Division \(IED\)](#) of the [Office of Internal Oversight Services \(OIOS\)](#) identified the [Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\)](#) as a priority programme for evaluation based on a strategic risk assessment exercise carried out in 2008. The Programme Evaluation of DESA will be considered by the [Committee for Programme and Coordination \(CPC\)](#) at its fifty-first session.<sup>1</sup> The selection was formally mandated by the ensuing General Assembly Resolution 64/229 on Programme Planning.

2. This evaluation of the [Population Division](#) is being issued to DESA together with detailed assessments of all of DESA's divisions and offices, as well as its Executive Direction and Management, as an internal management report. The evaluation was the first to be conducted on the Division since 2001, when OIOS conducted an in-depth evaluation of the United Nations population programme.<sup>2</sup>

3. In accordance with the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (PPBME), the overall objective of the evaluation was to determine, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness (including impact) of the Population Division's programme of work.

4. This evaluation considered DESA's Strategic Framework and budget for the 2010-2011 biennium as the primary benchmark against which to measure the performance of the Population Division, but also reviewed data from the past three biennia.

5. This final report incorporates revisions based on comments received through ongoing dialogue with the Population Division during the drafting process. The Division's final comments are appended in full.

6. OIOS expresses its sincere appreciation for the collaboration and cooperation offered by the Population Division and DESA management and staff in the undertaking of this evaluation.

## II. Methodology

7. In conducting this evaluation, OIOS utilised a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on data from the following twelve sources:

- i. A **document analysis** of DESA's strategic framework and other programme and project documents; service delivery records; monitoring and reporting information from IMDIS and senior management compacts; General Assembly resolutions; and prior evaluations;

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, A/64/16, July 2009; paragraph 41

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the population programme, 2001 document No: E/AC.51/2001/3

- ii. **10 interviews of all Population Division senior managers;**
- iii. **5 interviews of a stratified random sample of Population Division staff;**
- iv. **22 interviews of stakeholders** (including government officials, civil society organisations, academics, and staff and management from the United Nations System), conducted in New York and over the phone;
- v. **Field missions** to Thailand, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa;
- vi. **A web-based survey of all 40 Population Division management and staff;**<sup>3</sup>
- vii. **A web-based survey of 239 key subprogramme level stakeholders;**<sup>4</sup>
- viii. **A web-based survey focused on DESA as a whole of 40 United Nations entity heads;**<sup>5</sup>
- ix. **A survey focused on DESA as a whole of all 192 Member State permanent representatives of the United Nations;**<sup>6</sup>
- x. **Observations of 5 meetings of the 2010 Commission on Population and Development** serviced by the Population Division;
- xi. An **independent expert panel review** of the quality and usage of two key Population Division publications, including a major database; and
- xii. A **bibliometric analysis** of the usage of DESA publications, including citation metrics (Google Scholar), website traffic data, publication download data, and the dissemination practices of the same Population Division publications also assessed by the expert panel.

8. The evaluation results are derived from a combination of documentary, testimonial, observational and analytical evidence. Data were triangulated to strengthen the robustness of the evaluation.

9. At the request of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Task Force on Human Rights and Gender Equality, the evaluation participated in the pilot of a handbook currently

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<sup>3</sup> The total number of posts for the Division in 2010-2011 was 45; 5 posts were under recruitment or vacant during the period of the evaluation. 31 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 77 per cent.

<sup>4</sup> OIOS requested the Population Division to identify its key stakeholders from United Nations entities (Secretariat and other), Member State representatives, academic/scientific institutions, non-governmental organizations, and others. OIOS reviewed the list to ensure comprehensiveness and reached out to other pertinent stakeholders where there were gaps. 86 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 36 per cent.

<sup>5</sup> OIOS identified a list of key stakeholders within the United Nations system. 17 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 43 per cent.

<sup>6</sup> 27 responses were received, yielding a response rate of 14 per cent.

being developed to assist evaluators to incorporate human rights and gender equality into evaluations in the United Nations system.

10. The evaluation had four main limitations. First, the stakeholders interviewed were purposively selected from a list of stakeholders provided by Population Division and may not be representative of the totality of the Division's stakeholders. Second, relatively low response rates achieved in the stakeholder and Member State surveys mean that the results cannot be generalized to represent the views of DESA's stakeholders and Member States as a whole. Third, the expert panel review included only two Division publications; although these were recommended by the Division as representing its key publications, the small sample size limits the extent to which findings of the review can be generalized to all Division publications. Lastly, the bibliometric analysis permitted only limited comparability of the bibliometric data from one type of publication to another and noted the inherent difficulties of capturing information about these types of publications through conventional index citation.

### III. Background

11. Population matters have been of fundamental importance to Member States since the establishment of the United Nations. The Population Commission, the ECOSOC subsidiary body focused on population issues, was established on 3 October 1946. The Commission was mandated to look into factors associated with population changes and policies, the inter-relationships of economic and social conditions and population trends and migratory movements.<sup>7</sup> In 1947, ECOSOC provided the mandate for the Secretary-General to initiate work in the field of population by recommending that he "provide means whereby the population statistics, estimates, and studies needed ... be supplied in collaboration with the agencies concerned..."<sup>8</sup>

12. The mandate and work of the Population Division have unfolded against the backdrop of a series of United Nations conferences and summits involving the adoption of an array of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Its current mandate derives from the 1994 decision of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) to develop a comprehensive approach linking population with human development, in particular poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and environmental protection.<sup>9</sup> The ICPD was subsequently integrated into the work of the Division. The Division's objective for the 2010-2011 biennium is "To strengthen the international community's capacity to effectively address current and emerging population issues and to integrate the population dimensions into the development agenda at the national and international levels."<sup>10</sup>

13. In order to achieve its objective, the Population Division's strategy is to<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations, Resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council during its Third Session from 11 September to 10 December 1946 (E/245/Rev.1, 3 May 1947)

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council during its Fourth Session from 28 February to 29 March 1947 (E/437, 1947)

<sup>9</sup> ICPD website: <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd2.htm> (accessed on 9 February 2011)

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, Proposed strategic framework for the period 2010-2011: Programme 7 Economic and Social Affairs, A/63/6 (Prog.7), p.11

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

- i. Provide substantive support to United Nations intergovernmental bodies, in particular to the Commission on Population and Development;
- ii. Facilitate the discussion of key or emerging population issues by experts or government representatives;
- iii. Prepare comprehensive studies on population issues and population trends;
- iv. Disseminate population information and policy-relevant findings in the area of population, in particular through the Population Division websites; and
- v. Build capacity to address population issues at the national level through workshops or the dissemination of technical material, such as manuals and software.

14. The Director of the Population Division is responsible for the overall direction, supervision and management of the division in the implementation of its mandates and approved programme of work. There are two branches in the division: 1) the Demographic Analysis Branch, which includes three sections dealing respectively with fertility, mortality and migration, and 2) the Population Studies Branch, which also has three sections dealing respectively with population estimates and projections, population and development, and population policy.

15. When compared with other divisions of DESA, the Population Division ranked in the middle in the size of its estimated Regular Budget (RB) expenditures (USD 13,521.7 thousand), and last in the size of its Extra-Budgetary (XB) resources (USD 205.0 thousand). The Division's 2010-2011 RB budget was around 17 per cent higher than its 2006-2007 level. The Division had 45 staff, 28 (62 per cent) of whom were at the professional level or above (see table 1).

<b>Table 1. Population Division budget and posts by biennium</b>			
<b>Component</b>	<b>2006-2007</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2010-2011</b>
<b>C. Programme of work</b>			
<b>Regular Budget (RB) (USD'000)</b>	11 527.0	12 384.7	13 521.7
<b>Extra-budgetary (XB) (USD'000)</b>	153.0	-	205.0
<b>Total (USD'000)</b>	<b>11 680.0</b>	<b>12 384.7</b>	<b>13 726.7</b>
<b>Total Posts (RB + XB) (number)</b>	45	46*	45

Source: Proposed Programme Budget 2006/7, 2008/9 and 2010/11: A/60/6 (Sect.9); A/62/6 (Sect.9); A/64/6 (Sect. 9)

\*The Division held an interregional advisor post during the biennium; it was subsequently reallocated to another Division.

16. Population estimates and projections of the world population have been published regularly by the United Nations since 1951.<sup>12</sup> The *2008 Revision of the World Population Prospects (WPP)* represented the 21<sup>st</sup> revision of the publication, providing population estimates and projections for 230 countries and territories. The WPP estimates are based on official demographic statistics for key development indicators, such as population by 5-year age groups and sex, child mortality and infant mortality, and the projections are made for five-year intervals from 2010 to 2050. *World Urbanization Prospects (WUP)* has been published

<sup>12</sup>Population Bulletin of the United Nations, "The past and future growth of world population - a long-range view", No. 1, December 1951 (United Nations publication, Sales No. 52.XIII.2), pp.1-12.

since 1988 and provides estimates and projections of the urban and rural populations of all countries in the world and of their major urban agglomerations.

17. The OIOS in-depth evaluation of the United Nations population programme completed in 2001 concluded that, “The work of the Population Division is an important part of the world professional discussion on demographic issues. The value of the Division’s reports and publications as reference work, as well as their comprehensiveness, and technical quality, is well recognized.”<sup>13</sup>

## **IV. Results**

### **A. The work of the Population Division was of fundamental importance to the United Nations system and the international community, notwithstanding some challenges**

18. The Population Division has had a long-standing mandate to produce official world population estimates and projections, and this has been one of the most successful and prominent areas of its work. The Division has also successfully supported Member States through its support for intergovernmental processes and by supporting the monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

*The Division’s estimates and projections have filled a unique niche by providing a comprehensive and consistent source of globally representative population trends dating back to 1950*

19. The estimates and projections produced by the Population Division are of fundamental importance to the international community. The vast majority of stakeholders interviewed and surveyed, including individuals from entities that produced their own population projections, emphasised the importance of the Division’s estimates and projections to those who produce or analyse indicators with population components.<sup>14</sup> As noted by one stakeholder but echoed by many others, “The Division has, for many years, been an invaluable resource for demographers and statisticians around the world.”

20. The Division’s work is seen as producing the “official” estimates for the United Nations. For example, in 2007, the United Nations Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG indicators decided that in order to ensure consistency and comparability in the MDG database, all United Nations entities responsible for monitoring MDG indicators should use the most recent revision of the population estimates produced by the Population Division. The estimates are also used beyond the United Nations: in an article a representative of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA)<sup>15</sup>, a prominent research institution in the field

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations, Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the population programme, 2001 document No: E/AC.51/2001/3

<sup>14</sup> 90% (20/22) of interviewees commented that the division’s work was key for their own work. In the OIOS stakeholder survey, 71.4% (60/84) responded that the work of the Population Division is ‘very important’ to their work; 22.6% (19) responded ‘somewhat important’ and 6% (5) ‘not very important’.

<sup>15</sup> IIASA is an international research organization that conducts policy-oriented research into global challenges. IIASA’s main funding came from prestigious scientific institutions, National Member Organizations (NMOs), in

of demography, wrote that “the United Nations Population Division publishes the only urbanization projections on a global level, with updates every two years.”<sup>16</sup> The vast majority (93 per cent) of respondents to the OIOS stakeholder survey agreed that the Division’s work filled a unique niche in the Organization.

21. Several entities, including the World Bank, the United States Census Bureau (USCB), the Population Reference Bureau (PRB)<sup>17</sup> and IIASA, provide estimates and projections for the world’s population. However, the estimates and projections of the Population Division are considered among the most comprehensive and consistent, as identified in the OIOS review of population literature and widely recognized by stakeholders interviewed<sup>18</sup> and surveyed<sup>19</sup> for this evaluation. For example, an article explained that “...there is no doubt that the UN population projections dominate the field. This is mostly owing to their long and well-established tradition and the easy availability of country-specific data for both estimates and projections (from 1950 to 2050).”<sup>20</sup>

22. The Population Division’s methodology for projecting population data is also widely used. All the entities mentioned above reported that they used the Division’s population estimates and/or methods for their own projections. The World Bank, for example, which produces projections covering nearly 200 economies and groups, stated in its technical note on population projections that it used “mainly” Population Division estimates as input for those projections.<sup>21</sup> The USCB, which released its first set of comprehensive estimates and projections in the 1980s for over 200 countries and areas of the world, referred at least 8 times to the methods of the United Nations in its own methodology note and noted that it used the Population Division’s model life tables and its method for estimating the impact of HIV on mortality.<sup>22</sup> The IIASA, which produced projections for 13 regions of the world, also used Population Division estimates as input to its projections of educational attainment for 120

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17 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe. Visit their website at:

[http://www.iiasa.ac.at/docs/IIASA\\_Info.html](http://www.iiasa.ac.at/docs/IIASA_Info.html)

<sup>16</sup>Wolfgang Lutz & Samir KC, “Dimensions of global population projections: what do we know about future population trends and structures?” *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* (2010) 365, 2779–2791; Downloaded from [rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org](http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org) on January 27, 2011; p.2786

<sup>17</sup>PRB is a not-for-profit entity that seeks to inform people around the world about population, health, and the environment. PRB’s work is funded by private foundations, government agencies, and individual donors. Visit their website at: <http://www.prb.org/>

<sup>18</sup> When asked about the value-added of the Population Division, 100% of interviewees commented favourably on the technical quality of the Division’s work.

<sup>19</sup> When asked about the value-added of the Population Division in the OIOS survey of PD stakeholder, 88% (37/42) of survey comments specifically referred to the technical quality of the estimates and projections. For example, one stakeholder commented that the value-added was “to produce broadly consistent population projections of all countries in the world with sufficient detail to allow users to interrogate and make maximum use of them.”

<sup>20</sup>Wolfgang Lutz & Samir KC, “Dimensions of global population projections: what do we know about future population trends and structures?” *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* (2010) 365, 2779–2791; Downloaded from [rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org](http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org) on January 27, 2011; p.2786

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, Population Projections technical notes; accessed online on 10 February 2011 at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTHNPSTATS/Resources/dp\\_notes.doc](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTHNPSTATS/Resources/dp_notes.doc)

<sup>22</sup>United States Census Bureau, International Data Base Population Estimates and Projections Methodology, June 2010; accessed online on 31 January 2011 at: <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/estandproj.pdf>

countries, among other purposes,<sup>23</sup> as did the PRB for its projections for all geopolitical entities with populations of 150,000 or more and all members of the United Nations.<sup>24,25</sup>

***Concerns were expressed, however, about methodologies used and methodological innovation in the Population Division***

23. Despite the importance of the Population Division's work, some stakeholders from academic institutions and international organizations interviewed for this evaluation expressed frustration with the pace of methodological innovation in the Division.<sup>26</sup> For example, the Division's methodological manuals and software package Mortpak had last been updated over a decade ago. At the time of the evaluation UNFPA was working with a partner institution to update *Manual X*<sup>27</sup>, methodological guidelines originally published in 1983 by the Population Division and referred to by several stakeholders interviewed as the "bible" of demography (the manual was actually authored by the United States National Research Council). The Population Division was providing technical advice on the revision of the Manual.

24. The pace at which the methodologies employed for the world population estimates and projections were updated by the Division was of particular concern to these stakeholders. Two demographers suggested that probabilistic methods were needed to properly account for uncertainty and had been employed by some other organizations since the 1980s. A review by OIOS of literature in the subject confirmed that other experts in the field concurred with this view.<sup>28,29,30</sup> Although the Division had engaged in dialogue on the subject and held expert group meetings in both 2006 and 2010 at which probabilistic methods were discussed, a probabilistic methodology was not incorporated until the 2010 revision of the WPP, at least ten years after the first probabilistic projections were completed at the global level.<sup>31</sup> The Division

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<sup>23</sup> Lutz et al, "Reconstruction of populations by age, sex and level of educational attainment for 120 countries for 1970 -2000" Vienna Yearbook of Population Research, 2007, pp. 193-235; accessed online on 10 February 2011: [http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/publications/VYPR2007/Yearbook2007\\_Lutz-at-al-Education\\_pp193-235.pdf](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/publications/VYPR2007/Yearbook2007_Lutz-at-al-Education_pp193-235.pdf); & IIASA, Asian Demographic and Human Capital, Data Sheet 2008; accessed online on 10 February 2011: [http://www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/POP/datasheets/VID\\_asianDataSheet08\\_web.pdf](http://www.iiasa.ac.at/Research/POP/datasheets/VID_asianDataSheet08_web.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Population Reference Bureau, *World Population Data Sheet*, July 2010; accessed online on 11 February 2011: [http://www.prb.org/pdf10/10wpds\\_eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf10/10wpds_eng.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> O'Neill et al, "A Guide to Global Population Projections", *DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH*, VOL. 4, p 203-288 13 June 2001; accessed online on 1 February 2011: [www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol4/8/](http://www.demographic-research.org/Volumes/Vol4/8/)

<sup>26</sup> When asked what the Division could change, 23% (5/22) of stakeholders interviewed by OIOS specifically mentioned that methodological advancement was needed. No comments were received on this issue in the stakeholder survey.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations (1983). *Manual X: Indirect Techniques for Demographic Estimation* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.83.XIII.2); access online at: [http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/Manual\\_X/Manual\\_X.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/Manual_X/Manual_X.htm)

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Lutz & Samir KC, "Dimensions of global population projections: what do we know about future population trends and structures?" *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* (2010) 365, 2779–2791; Downloaded from [rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org](http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org) on January 27, 2011; p.2786

<sup>29</sup> B.O. Daponte, J.B. Kadane, and L.J. Wolfson, "Bayesian Demography: Projecting the Iraqi Kurdish Population, 1977-1990" *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, Vol. 92, No. 440 (Dec., 1997), pp. 1256-1267; accessed online on 2 Feb 2011 at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2965396>

<sup>30</sup> United Nations, Heilig, et. al, "A probabilistic version of the UN WPP: Methodological Improvements by Using Bayesian Fertility and Mortality Projections," April 2010; accessed online on 2 Feb 2011 at: [http://esa.un.org/peps/doc/S6\\_WP\\_14\\_Lisbon%20proceedings\\_Rev7.pdf](http://esa.un.org/peps/doc/S6_WP_14_Lisbon%20proceedings_Rev7.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> See the Division's WPP website for a description: [http://esa.un.org/peps/wpp2010\\_what-will-be-new.htm](http://esa.un.org/peps/wpp2010_what-will-be-new.htm)

acknowledged that while no universally accepted approach to measure uncertainty of population projections had been developed and more research was necessary, probabilistic methods could provide decision-makers with measures of uncertainty in future trends of specific demographic parameters.<sup>32,33</sup> OIOS was not able to establish whether or to what extent the slow adoption of probabilistic methodology had adversely affected the quality of the projections.

25. In response to OIOS questioning about the factors affecting decisions on methodological innovation, the Division's senior management indicated that close consideration is given to new methodologies but that experimental approaches are inappropriate where reference series are produced and consistency over time is important to users. The Division's approach to the adoption of new methodology included:

- i. keeping abreast of the relevant scientific literature;
- ii. attending meetings and conferences where estimation and projection methods and their results are presented and discussed;
- iii. making presentations on the Division's work at professional meetings to elicit comments and suggestions;
- iv. proactively seeking collaboration with researchers, mostly in academic institutions, to jointly explore ways of improving methodology, and
- v. paying attention to the comments and requests made by users of population estimates and projections.

26. The Division reported that other forms of innovation have occurred more frequently in the Division, many of which likely went unnoticed by data users. For example, the mortality models were extended to ages above 80, and the Division's AIDS Module was constantly updated as new treatment protocols were developed and used. Senior management acknowledged that the Division could do more to keep stakeholders aware of the innovations introduced and their approach to fostering innovation within the Division.

27. Despite these innovations, several factors appeared to limit the pace of methodological advancement in the Division. Inadequate resources to assess and implement the necessary changes to systems and approaches were perhaps the major constraint. Systemic constraints may also have played a role. For example, the Population Estimates and Projections (PEP) Section, which is responsible for the preparation of the official United Nations population estimates and projections prepared biennially, consisted of only six professional staff and three administrative staff as of early 2011.<sup>34</sup> This number was low compared with the average of ten professionals working on national estimates and projections in the National Statistical Offices

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<sup>32</sup>Wolfgang Lutz & Samir KC, "Dimensions of global population projections: what do we know about future population trends and structures?" *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* (2010) 365, 2779–2791; Downloaded from [rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org](http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org) on January 27, 2011; p.2786

<sup>33</sup>United Nations White Paper, Raftery et al, "Probabilistic Projections of the Total Fertility Rate for All Countries for the 2010 World Population Prospects," 1 November 12, 2009; accessed online on 2 Feb 2011 at: [http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM-Fertility2009/P16\\_Raftery.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/EGM-Fertility2009/P16_Raftery.pdf)

<sup>34</sup>Chief of Section (P-5), Population Affairs Officers (two P-4, two P-3, and one P-2), two computer programming assistants (G-7) and one editorial assistant (G-5) plus the overall direction provided by the Directors of the Division (D-2) and Branch (D-1).

of developed market economies.<sup>35</sup> Each Population Affairs Officer in the PEP Section was responsible for the population estimates and projections of over 45 countries and the city projections for over 1,000 cities. The Section also produced reports, databases, wall charts and other technical material for the dissemination of results. This workload likely impacted the opportunity to dedicate time to innovation. One stakeholder responding to the OIOS survey recommended “revision of their [PEP Section] work cycle ... to improve the capacity of the Population Division to adapt its work to the changing needs and priorities of the international community.” The Division noted that the length of the work cycle was mandated by the CPD and responded to the needs of users within the UN system.

28. Several stakeholders interviewed stated that they approved the most recent efforts of the Division to make methodological advancements and hoped that this would continue.<sup>36</sup> “Given the things that they have to do, they respond well”, said one stakeholder. “ ... I know that the academic community has been saying that the current approach is deterministic and they [the Division] are trying to [...] do probabilistic fertility projections, [...] a key achievement from my point of view.” Member States at the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) also acknowledged the Division’s methodological advances. For example, Brazil commended the work of the Division in population estimates and projection and noted that it was important to stress the current efforts to develop alternative methodologies for the projection of fertility and mortality.<sup>37</sup>

### ***The Population Division provided valuable policy support to intergovernmental processes***

29. Policy support to intergovernmental processes was also a key achievement of the Population Division. Performance indicators including compliance with documentation deadlines, stakeholder satisfaction, and the quality of parliamentary documentation all recorded satisfactory levels. For example, the performance report for the 2008-2009 biennium revealed that 100 per cent of documentation had been submitted on time to both sessions of the CPD, facilitating timely preparation by Member States for those sessions.<sup>38</sup> The majority (83 per cent) of stakeholders who expressed an opinion were satisfied with the Division’s substantive servicing of intergovernmental meetings.<sup>39</sup> The reports produced by the Division were widely appreciated for their high quality and substantive contribution to policy deliberations; 53 per cent of stakeholders surveyed reported using the Division’s publications as input to policy work. The OIOS expert panel review of publications found the 2009 World Population Monitoring parliamentary document to be written in clear non-technical language and relevant

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<sup>35</sup> United Nations Population Division, “Report on the Inquiry on National Institutional Capacity to Produce Population Estimates and Projections,” Technical Paper No. 2010/1, page 7.

<sup>36</sup> When asked about the flexibility of the Population Division to the needs and priorities of stakeholders, 27% (6/22) of stakeholders interviewed by OIOS specifically mentioned their satisfaction with the Division’s current progress in updating their methodologies.

<sup>37</sup> Permanent Mission of the United Nations to Brazil, statement made to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of CPD; agenda item 5; Wed. 5 April 2010.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) programme performance for the biennium 2008-2009.

<sup>39</sup> OIOS survey of PD stakeholders: 45% (20/44) ‘very satisfied’, 38% (17/44) ‘satisfied’, 13% (6/44) ‘neither satisfied nor dissatisfied’ and only one person was ‘dissatisfied’.

to the formulation of country-level policies.<sup>40</sup> Lastly, a review of country statements made to the CPD also demonstrated the important policy support provided by the Division's parliamentary documentation: the majority of country statements referenced the Division's reports. For example, at the 2010 session, 54 per cent of the statements<sup>41</sup> made by Member States referenced or thanked the Division for the "high quality" reports provided for the session. The delegation representing Pakistan thanked the Secretary-General for his reports for the Commission, observing that the reports on the priority theme "provide[d] useful background for discussion on the changing nature of health, morbidity, mortality and development."<sup>42</sup>

30. The Division's work to identify global trends and issues within the population development field and their potential impact was also applauded by Member States. For example, at the 2007 session of CPD, the United States delegation thanked the Population Division for "its thorough and insightful analysis.... [that] highlight[ed] the importance of adjusting national policies to meet the needs of increasingly ageing populations and learning from each other's experiences." Several stakeholders pointed to the 2001 "Replacement Migration" report,<sup>43</sup> which identified migration as a means for countries to offset population decline and population ageing resulting from low fertility and mortality rates. Some viewed this as an example of how the Division had helped to raise awareness and shape the global population policy agenda, although others viewed it as entering controversial territory.<sup>44,45</sup> While subsequent publications have been less controversial, they do not appear to have had a similar impact.

31. In general, Member States showed appreciation for the neutral and objective perspective now offered by Population Division publications. For example, the Chinese delegation referred at the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of CPD to the "authority and objectiveness" of the Division's demographic data and analysis reports and commented that they "enjoy[ed] high reputation among the Chinese demographic circle." Stakeholders interviewed for the current evaluation also valued the neutral perspective provided by the Division. One stated that "There are no long range political objectives to their numbers... we use Population Division data instead of biased information from ... other institutions."

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<sup>40</sup>OIOS expert panel review: "World Population Monitoring, focusing on the contribution of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development to the internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Goals (2009)" pg. 14-16;

<sup>41</sup>In a review of statements made in English at the 2010 CPD, 28/52 referenced the quality of the Population Division reports.

<sup>42</sup>Pakistan Permanent Mission to the UN, Pakistan's Statement at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development 13 April 2010; accessed online on 11 Feb 2011 at:

[http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2010/Country\\_Statements/AgendaItem4/PAKISTAN.PDF](http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2010/Country_Statements/AgendaItem4/PAKISTAN.PDF)

<sup>43</sup>Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, "Replacement Migration: Is it a solution to declining and ageing populations?"

2001 <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/migration/migration.htm>

<sup>44</sup>See Population Reference Bureau for a discussion:

<http://www.prb.org/Articles/2000/TheFlapOverReplacementMigration.aspx>

<sup>45</sup>See UNFPA State of the World Population 2006:

[http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter\\_1/print/chapter\\_1.html](http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/english/chapter_1/print/chapter_1.html)

32. Despite this, there were areas where the Division's support to the CPD could have been improved. OIOS undertook several observations of the working group on draft resolutions of the 44<sup>th</sup> session of CPD held in 2010 and identified several logistical issues that adversely affected the efficient and effective running of the working group sessions.<sup>46</sup> The Division has made efforts to improve its methods for supporting the Commission in terms of draft outcomes as evidenced by internal documentation. Nevertheless, better planning and collaboration with the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management and other partners may have ensured a more effective and efficiently run session. Additionally, the establishment of a system for obtaining feedback from participants of the working group (through a survey, for example) may also have helped to ensure that lessons were learned.

***Contribution to monitoring progress of the MDGs has been substantial***

33. The Population Division has made valuable contributions to monitoring MDG status. Progress towards the MDGs is monitored using 21 targets and 60 official indicators, and the estimates and projections produced by the Division have been a critical input as a denominator in several MDG indicators. The majority of stakeholders surveyed (84 per cent) and interviewed agreed that the work of the Division was effectively contributing to the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the MDGs. In the words of one stakeholder interviewed, "Without a good understanding of demographic changes in the developing world, we simply cannot make any estimate of what it would take to reach the MDGs."

34. The Division directly monitored three of the four indicators pertaining to the target of attaining universal reproductive health under MDG 5 ("improve maternal health"). The Division also provided secretariat services to the Coordination Meetings on Estimation of Adult Mortality and participated as a member in the Inter-agency Groups for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME) and Millennium Development Goals (IAEG). These groups were established to share data, harmonize estimates within the United Nations system, improve methods and produce consistent estimates worldwide for reporting on progress towards the MDGs. One Divisional staff member reported that the work of the inter-agency group had resulted in significant decreases in the discrepancies in data between United Nations entities. Nonetheless, some stakeholders suggested that further harmonization of data between United Nations entities would be beneficial.

**B. The technical expertise of staff and high quality of work have given the Division strong credibility within the population field**

***Staff of the Population Division had the technical expertise required for their work***

35. The Population Division has made concerted efforts to recruit highly qualified staff to support the programme of work. Records at the time of the evaluation indicated that 89 per

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<sup>46</sup> For example, the working group on draft resolutions, where most delegations were represented, ran parallel to the plenary session, which meant that most delegations had minimal representation in the plenary session, possibly affecting the substance of plenary discussions. Also, several participants of the working group on draft resolutions expressed difficulty following edits made to the draft resolution.

cent (25/28) of professional and higher level staff were formally trained in demography, with 80 per cent of those (20/25) holding qualifications at the PhD level. All the stakeholders surveyed agreed that the substantive or technical expertise of the Division's staff was "excellent" or "good", with 70 per cent of stakeholders rating it "excellent". Strong links with the academic and professional demography community had contributed to the Division's success in recruiting highly qualified staff. *The Division has pointed out that the Organization's mobility requirements, together with limited opportunities for specialized demographers within the Secretariat, force staff to move to units that do not work on population issues. This threatens the Division's ability to retain its technical expertise.*

36. The Population Division has maintained a high level of credibility both within the population field and with other stakeholders. The vast majority (93 per cent) of stakeholder survey respondents were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with the quality of the Division's publications. Disaggregating the results by type of organisation responding revealed that the quality of the Division's publications was rated most highly by United Nations system entities outside the Secretariat and academic/scientific institutions.<sup>47</sup> Interviews with stakeholders confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the technical quality of publications. Several stakeholders recognized the Division's estimates as the "gold standard". One interviewee gave them "10 out of 10", saying "They are the standard for the rest of us. The publications are all excellent, they're well-written, they do what a publication needs to do."

37. Member States also accorded high credibility to the Division's outputs. All 15 Government and public administration entities responding to the OIOS stakeholder survey question regarding the quality of staff substantive or technical expertise believed that it was 'excellent' or 'good'; and the majority (87 per cent) were also satisfied with the quality of publications of the Division. In an email addressed to the Division, one Member State official noted that, "As far as world population-related matters are concerned, the Population Division's publications and materials on estimates and projections, population trends and policies etc are the most authorized source of reference." Member States also commented at the CPD on the high quality of work of the Division. For example, at the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of CPD, Norway stated, "It is hard to imagine what we would have done without the high-quality estimates, projections and analyses coming regularly from the Population Division."<sup>48</sup>

38. A comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the quality of population projections of the Population Division was completed by a panel convened by the National Research Council of the US National Academy of Sciences in 2000. The panel concluded that the Division's population projections were based on sound scientific evidence and provided plausible forecasts of demographic trends for the world. The panel report noted that the United

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<sup>47</sup> OIOS survey of PD stakeholders, per cent of respondents that were 'Very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the quality of Population Division publications: 100% (N=32) Academic/scientific institution; 100% (N= 15) Other United Nations entities; 87% (N=13) Government and public administration; 83% (N=5) United Nations Secretariat; 83% (N=5) Other; 83% (N=2) Civil Society Organization; 100% (N=2) Private Sector; 100% (N=1) Media;

<sup>48</sup>Permanent Mission of Norway, Statement made to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development; Agenda Item 5; Wednesday 5 April 2010.

Nations had projected the world population size for the year 2000 twelve times since the 1950s, and all but one of those projections had been off by less than 4 percent.”<sup>49</sup>

***Population Division outputs were widely used by international and national entities and academics***

39. The Division’s outputs have gained broad usage. The stakeholder survey revealed that 71 per cent of respondents regarded the Division’s publications and/or databases as “very important” to their work. 81 per cent of stakeholders surveyed reported using them for research purposes, and 53 per cent to assist with policy work. The World Population Prospects (WPP), which contains the estimates and projections, was by far the most widely used output of the division: 92 per cent of stakeholder survey respondents reported using the 2008 Revision.

40. The OIOS bibliometric data and expert panel reviews of publications also found the Division’s publications to be well cited and of high utility to stakeholders. Amongst DESA reports included in the bibliometric review of publications, the WPP was found to be one of the most widely cited reports, with over 10,000 citations in the Google Scholar open source database. The expert panel review of DESA publications was of the view that, “The population database is a key research source, which is widely used by academics and civil servants throughout the world. It is most likely that it is or will become the most widely used online database covering all countries after [the World Bank’s] *World Development Indicators*.”<sup>50</sup>

41. The Division’s work has also achieved wide use in the population field. The United Nations Task Team on Population Estimates, led by the Population Division, reported that several entities responding to a survey on the use of population estimates by international organizations indicated that they were intensive users of the United Nations population estimates and projections, “mainly because those estimates provide[d] a consistent and comparable time series of population data.”<sup>51</sup> Amongst United Nations entities surveyed by the Team, the main uses of the Division’s population estimates and projections were for modeling (including the effects of climate change) and the calculation of other indicators (such as GDP per capita), and some organizations simply published or redistributed the estimates and projections.<sup>52</sup> In the same survey, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reported that the United Nations population projections were recognized as “the standard” and were widely used by IMF researchers.<sup>53</sup> Several United Nations system stakeholders interviewed by OIOS noted that their key publications relied on the Division’s outputs, including UNFPA’s *State of the World’s Population*, UNDP’s *Human Development Report*, and UNODC’s *World Drug Report*. Stakeholders from other international organizations indicated in interviews that they

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<sup>49</sup> Population Reference Bureau, “Policy Brief: Understanding and Using Population Projections” Measure Communication; Dec. 2001; accessed online on 31 January: [http://www.prb.org/pdf/UnderStndPopProj\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf/UnderStndPopProj_Eng.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> OIOS 2010 Expert panel review of selected DESA publications, p.14

<sup>51</sup> United Nations Task Team on Population Estimates, Population Division, “Report on issues and practices in the use of population estimates by international organizations,” CCSA September 2008; SA/2008/10

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

also relied on Divisional publications for their own key publications; for example, IOM's *World Migration Report* utilized the Division's *Trends in International Migration*.

42. Demographers in national level entities also regarded the Population Division's population estimates and projections as the most frequently used in the field. The Population Reference Bureau's policy brief on understanding and using population projections stated that "UN projections are the most widely used worldwide."<sup>54</sup> One national level entity in a developed economy noted that the Mortpak software, which was developed by the Population Division to facilitate demographic analyses in developing countries, was utilized as an important tool to raise capacity in developing countries. That entity encouraged free access to this software.

43. Despite this, the usage statistics for the Division's outputs may under-estimate total usage. As noted above and pointed out by several staff members and stakeholders, the Division's estimates and projections were used in the flagship publications of other entities, including UNFPA and the World Bank, and were not necessarily always obvious as Population Division outputs. The Population Division has made an effort to enhance dissemination of its outputs and to track citations and references to its work in the field and in the media; initiatives included an email alert disseminated to 1,800 subscribers and a blog where "a sample" of stories in the international media referencing Population Division publications is posted.<sup>55</sup> While the Division encouraged the use of its products, senior management pointed to the risks involved in other entities repackaging the population estimates and projections for their own purposes; the Division loses control over the use of the numbers, which is not always to its benefit.

44. Stakeholders were also generally satisfied with the quality of the Division's website. However, several stakeholders noted that although the Division had made efforts to improve its databases, more improvements were necessary. One stakeholder noted in an interview that technological improvements to the database were overdue, and delays were limiting the extent to which the data could be used. Another referred to the limits on data access in other than premium-access packages. Senior management stated that advances in the area of website development were hindered by the limited staff expertise in IT within the Division.

### **C. The Population Division successfully integrated human rights and a gender perspective into its work**

45. Human rights, the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women are fundamental principles upon which the ICPD, and therefore the Population Division's work, was established. Many stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that human rights and gender equity principles were inherent in the Population Division's work and that the Division adequately disaggregated data by sex and age in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the progress of women and children on specific indicators, such as mortality. A little over two thirds (69 per cent) of stakeholders surveyed "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that the

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<sup>54</sup> Population Reference Bureau, "Policy Brief: Understanding and Using Population Projections" Measure Communication; *Dec. 2001*; accessed online on 31 January: [http://www.prb.org/pdf/UnderStndPopProj\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.prb.org/pdf/UnderStndPopProj_Eng.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> See: <http://unpdpress.blogspot.com>

Division effectively mainstreamed a gender perspective into its work, which, although a majority, leaves room for strengthening perceptions of this aspect of its work.

**D. Several factors threatened the Division's ability to sustain credibility and leadership within the field of demography**

***Outdated requirements for recruiting IT staff and upgrading IT infrastructure hampered the effectiveness of the Division***

46. The importance to the international community of electronic platforms for the dissemination and access to data cannot be overstated. The Population Division has recognised this and its work is now heavily reliant on advanced modelling techniques and complex databases, which require highly technical software and competent staff to support them. Nevertheless, inadequate information technology (IT) infrastructure was identified by the Division as the number one constraint to their work, and, as noted above (para 44), delays and other limitations on data access hampered the efforts of some stakeholders to access data efficiently.

47. Human resource recruitment procedures were identified by staff as the single major problem affecting IT operations in the Division. At the time of the evaluation, all specialist IT staff in the Division were employed at the general service level, and applicants for all general service staff positions were required to take a clerical exam that tests skills believed by the Division to be of little relevance for a software programmer. Staff noted that although the Division's general service IT staff were excellent, the lack of IT posts at the professional level may have been adversely affecting the Division's ability to attract and retain highly qualified IT staff. IT professionals could certainly find a more competitive salary outside the organization: the mean salary for a computer programmer in the US in 2009 was USD 74,690<sup>56</sup>, while at the United Nations Headquarters in New York the starting salary for the highest general service staff level (G-7) was USD 68,599.<sup>57</sup> Most of the software used by the division was not supported by the United Nations Office of Information and Communication Technology (OICT), which meant that in-house expertise was a necessity for the Division. The Population Division has explored options for establishing professional IT posts, as has been done in the Statistics Division, but without success. The options included reclassifying two General Service posts to a Professional post or seeking new Professional posts. Neither appeared likely to provide a solution, as the former would involve an unacceptable loss of computer assistants and the latter was seen as unlikely to succeed given the Secretary-General's recent request to reduce the programme budget.

***Leadership continuity was a critical challenge for the Division***

48. The senior managers of the Population Division, including the Director, were frequently acknowledged by stakeholders interviewed for their technical expertise and intellectual leadership in the field of demography. For example, an international migration

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<sup>56</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2009: [http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes\\_nat.htm#15-0000](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#15-0000)

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Office of Human Resources, 2008: [http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/salaries\\_allowances/salaries/salaryscale/gs/newyork/nygs0808.xls](http://www.un.org/Depts/OHRM/salaries_allowances/salaries/salaryscale/gs/newyork/nygs0808.xls)

expert interviewed by OIOS commented that the Division has “the most competent people in the international migration area. Knows the issues extremely well...” However, all senior level managers will be retiring within the next year and a half. This concerned both staff and stakeholders and posed a broader risk as well given the high level of dependence on the Division’s outputs in the United Nations system and beyond.

49. Although staff interviewed early in the evaluation indicated concern about an apparent lack of internal succession planning, senior management reported that a number of such initiatives were now well underway. These included the delegation to other senior staff of responsibilities for undertaking critical tasks, in order to build their capacity and facilitate the transition.

50. Staff interviews and surveys completed for the current evaluation confirmed earlier OIOS findings<sup>58</sup> that there was no formal mechanism for capturing and sharing lessons learned, which could facilitate a smoother leadership transition. The majority of staff surveyed (62 per cent) indicated that lessons were not effectively captured or shared and 55 per cent disagreed that critical work processes were well documented. As noted by one staff member and echoed by others, “Currently, information flow is very limited and there will be a tremendous vacuum with respect to institutional memory in the next year or two.” Although senior management reported some efforts to document internal work processes, attention to this issue is of critical importance.

**E. The Population Division has had mixed results in promoting coordination among United Nations entities in the field of population and contributing to the activities of the United Nations system on issues related to population**

*The potential for collaborative efforts has not been fully realized*

51. The mandate of the Population Division includes the promotion of coordination among United Nations entities in the field of population and contribution to the activities of the United Nations system on issues related to population.<sup>59</sup> The Division engaged in a number of collaborative activities aimed at the promotion of coordination on population issues, as seen in Table 2 below.

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<sup>58</sup> Both the 2009 Inspection of HR practices in DESA and the 2009 M&E Inspection of DESA found that there had been no system in place to share and retain knowledge and institutional memory within the Division. The self-evaluation processes showed weaknesses in measuring effectiveness and using self-evaluation for learning, accountability and decision-making. OIOS recommended that the division develop a more comprehensive system using both qualitative and quantitative programme data to monitor outcomes, capture lessons learned and inform future work plans.

<sup>59</sup>United Nations, Secretary-General’s Bulletin, ST/SGB/1997

Table 2. Coordination Activities of Population Division			
Intergovernmental Bodies serviced	Other Secretariat responsibilities	Member/ Focal Point / Other	Membership in other coordination mechanism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commission on Population and Development</li> <li>▪ General Assembly 2<sup>nd</sup> Committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Coordination meetings on international migration</li> <li>▪ Coordination meetings on estimation of adult mortality</li> <li>▪ Co-Convenor of the Population Cluster of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs (EC-ESA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inter-agency group for child mortality estimation (IGME)</li> <li>▪ Global Migration Group (on behalf of DESA)</li> <li>▪ Inter-agency and Expert Group on Millennium Development Goals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities</li> </ul>

52. A key achievement for the Division was its work in promoting coordination in the area of migration and development. The “Replacement Migration” report referred to earlier (para 30), was referenced by stakeholders as having contributed to the elevation of migration and development issues onto the international stage. Subsequently, the Population Division convened the first coordination meeting on international migration in 2002,<sup>60</sup> and in 2004 the Secretary-General formally established the Global Migration Group to promote inter-agency cooperation in the field of international migration. With its resolution 62/270 in 2008, the General Assembly formally recognized the establishment of the Global Forum on Migration, a State-led process to consider the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development. The Assembly had conducted a high-level dialogue on international migration in 2006, for which the Division provided substantive support, and has called for a second high-level dialogue on the same topic in 2013. One stakeholder involved in the Global Migration Group reported that the Group was a useful platform for sharing information particularly given the Division’s ability to mobilize academics in the field.

53. Efforts to work collaboratively with United Nations entities such as UNICEF and WHO to harmonize population estimates of adult and child mortality have also been fruitful. Prior to 2004, United Nations entities released individual estimates of child mortality, but since the establishment of the Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (IGME) a joint estimate has been released for the purpose of monitoring the related MDG.<sup>61</sup> However, both staff and stakeholders identified a need for the Population Division to engage in more collaborative efforts, and, in particular, to leverage the resources of regional and country levels counterparts in order to better inform the work of the division. The majority of stakeholders interviewed by OIOS on the field missions had no interactions with the Division. While stakeholders with experience of collaboration and/or partnerships with the Division were generally satisfied, interviews revealed that they would like more opportunities to collaborate with it. In the words of one stakeholder interviewed, “Staff members at [the Population Division] have very high technical skills, but they are often too busy to respond to our inquiries ... I feel they are not doing a great job with the outside world in collaboration, partnerships, communication, information dissemination, data openness, responding to inquiries.” Given the

<sup>60</sup> United Nations Population Division, <http://www.un.org/esa/population/meetings/firstcoord2002/Summary.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> See the terms of reference at: [http://www.childinfo.org/files/IGME\\_TermsOfReference.pdf](http://www.childinfo.org/files/IGME_TermsOfReference.pdf)

known utility of the Division's outputs, increased collaboration could facilitate the dissemination of the Division's work.

54. In particular, collaboration between the Population Division and UNFPA could be further strengthened. These entities are the two United Nations system bodies focused predominantly on population issues, and the efficiency and effectiveness of each could be enhanced by building on the synergies that exist. CPD resolution 2004/1 highlighted the need for the Division to work collaboratively with United Nations entities to monitor progress made towards the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action of the ICPD. The resolution "*Emphasize[d]* the need for the Population Division and the UNFPA, within their respective mandates, to enhance coordination and strengthen cooperation and collaboration between them to improve support for the implementation of the Programme of Action and the key actions for its further implementation."<sup>62</sup>

55. Senior Management of the Population Division reported that collaboration with UNFPA had improved significantly since 2004, in particular with respect to collaborative activities with the Technical Division of UNFPA. For example, UNFPA invited the Division to work collaboratively to prepare for the 2014 Special Session of the General Assembly to assess the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. Nevertheless, several staff and stakeholders suggested that the relationship between the two entities could improve further. Although stakeholders interviewed and surveyed for the current evaluation demonstrated understanding of the respective roles of UNFPA and the Population Division, many Division staff believed that confusion persisted in the public domain and that this was adversely affecting the Division's ability to raise extra-budgetary resources.

56. The Division recognized the need for enhanced engagement of stakeholders in its 2010 strategic framework, which included one indicator of achievement relating to "Increased interaction of the subprogramme with other key stakeholders in the area of population." However, examination of the performance measures in the framework revealed that "key stakeholders" were narrowly defined as "Government officials" and "participants at expert group meetings" and did not include other important stakeholders such as United Nations system entities or academic partners.

### ***The Population Division was not effectively engaging stakeholders in CPD processes***

57. Recognising the importance of effective collaboration to the CPD processes, the 39<sup>th</sup> session of CPD in 2006 "*Request[ed]* the Secretary-General to take appropriate measures to ensure strengthened cooperation and coordination between relevant entities of the United Nations system in the technical preparation of future sessions of the Commission." UNFPA also called for enhanced collaboration through its opening statement; in 2006, the Executive Director stated: "We also look forward to strengthening our collaboration with the Population Division."

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<sup>62</sup>United Nations, Report of the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development, 2004; E/2004/25 or E/CN.9/2004/9

58. Despite these pleas and some efforts made by the Population Division, the Division has not been seen as engaging other entities effectively in CPD processes. Stakeholders from various entities sought engagement in the preparation of the Secretary-General reports submitted to the CPD, because, in the words of one stakeholder interviewed, “the last report had very few references to [other entities’] activities.” OIOS reviewed CPD documents prepared between 2006 and 2011 on programme implementation and the progress of work in the field of population and found that the Division rarely mentioned collaborative efforts with other entities. In each of the 2006, 2007, 2008, 2010, and 2011 reports there were few references to collaborative efforts and none under the section on “monitoring, coordination and dissemination of population information” or on “technical cooperation”. Where instances of collaborative effort were described in the report, they focused on expert group and coordination meetings organized by the Division. The 2009 report mentioned two collaborative efforts with UNFPA under its description of technical cooperation work. The CPD presents an opportunity to highlight collaborative efforts of the Division, in particular because there may be systemic constraints to reporting in IMDIS<sup>63</sup> outputs that were jointly produced.

59. Increased transparency with respect to CPD processes was also sought by stakeholders and Division staff themselves recognized that tensions existed among some entities with respect to CPD processes. Senior management reported efforts to increase transparency with respect to planning the CPD and drafting the resolutions. For example, UNFPA was invited to be an observer in the Bureau of the CPD and all resolutions were drafted in consultation with UNFPA.

#### ***Internal collaboration within the division and DESA was also limited***

60. Several staff members expressed the need for improved collaboration and internal communication both within the division and DESA overall. The majority of staff surveyed (87 per cent) met “infrequently” or “never” with staff members from other divisions within DESA. In the words of one staff member, echoed by others, “At the Director’s level there is more interaction – as you go down the pyramid there is less interaction. We really don’t have much interaction with other divisions.” Over half of the respondents to the DESA staff survey (52 per cent) disagreed “somewhat” or “strongly” that communication between the Population Division and other divisions was effective overall.

61. While a few Division staff noted ad hoc efforts to work across divisions and/or had become involved on some DESA-wide task forces, a number suggested that the Division would benefit from more systematic cross-divisional collaboration at all staff levels. They suggested that this would not only be helpful to their work, but would also present an opportunity for career development, motivate staff to interact with others and build on synergies. Several also noted that staff would gain from a better understanding of how the work of the Division fitted into the wider Department, which could in turn add depth to the Division’s work. Senior management indicated that they had reached out to other Divisions, and that collaboration is dependent on the receptivity of the other parties involved.

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<sup>63</sup> The Integrated Monitoring and Documentation Information System (IMDIS) is the system for monitoring the progress against the expected achievements of the United Nations Secretariat’s programme of work.

62. One exception to the general lack of collaboration with other divisions was the Division's work with the Statistics Division, which was identified as the division with which it collaborated most frequently. Population Division staff described this relationship in interviews as excellent and believed that the respective roles and responsibilities were clear. The relationship was important, as the Population Division relies on the Statistics Division's compilations of official demographic and census statistics reported by National Statistical Offices and benefits from the Statistics Division's efforts to increase the statistical capacity of Member States, especially in relation to the population census. Nonetheless, it was noted that occasionally there was some overlap of work in terms of the support provided to the census and that this was an area that could benefit from improved communication between the divisions. Staff suggested systematic joint work planning and joint outputs as a potential means of improving internal collaboration with the Statistics Division.

**F. Management practices created inefficiencies and were seen as hampering career development**

*Staff expressed discontent with management practices*

63. While the intellectual leadership of the Division was recognized and appreciated by Population Division staff, there was widespread discontent with management practices. The 2009 OIOS Inspection of Human Resources Practices revealed that 50 per cent of staff survey respondents rated the management as "poor" and 17 per cent as "very poor"; while 43 per cent indicated that staff management had deteriorated within the past year. The survey results illustrated that the discontent existed across all staff levels. In particular, there was a perceived lack of transparency and consultation in decision making processes; the majority of staff survey respondents indicated that managers did not sufficiently elicit staff input and feedback. Staff also indicated that channels for staff to voice concerns to managers were not sufficient.<sup>64</sup>

64. The staff survey and interviews<sup>65</sup> undertaken for the current evaluation confirmed that these concerns persist. Frustration with work processes continued to be voiced: 54 per cent of respondents to the OIOS survey of Population Division staff disagreed that decision-making in the division was effective overall. One staff member commented in an interview on the time taken to clear reports for publication: "Once they are published, these reports are often outdated or obsolete. We do not have a good sense of message, priorities or deadlines in our work". Additionally, lack of communication within the division was identified as an issue of concern, with 50 per cent "strongly" disagreeing and 10 per cent "somewhat" disagreeing that internal communication in the division was effective overall. Just over half (6/11) of the additional comments provided by staff survey respondents were focused on frustrations with internal management. One staff member commented that the widespread discontent was "... approaching an emergency state. Many very talented staff are seeking positions outside of the

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<sup>64</sup>OIOS survey of DESA staff 2009, 41.7% strongly disagreed and 29.2% somewhat disagreed that managers elicited staff input and feedback; 41.7% strongly disagreed and 25% somewhat disagreed that there were sufficient channels for staff to voice concerns to managers.

<sup>65</sup>60% (9/15) of staff interviewed by OIOS expressed frustration with poor internal communication within the Division; 47% (7/15) of staff interviewed by OIOS expressed dissatisfaction with management in the Division.

Division or even outside of the UN System altogether. These would be extremely unfortunate and costly losses to the UN and DESA.”

***Opportunities for career development have been limited***

65. Staff morale within the Population Division also ranked low in the 2009 OIOS Inspection of Human Resources Practices; 50 per cent of staff indicated that morale was “poor” and 17 per cent that it was “very poor”. Lack of support from management for career development opportunities may have been a contributing factor, as the survey revealed that the majority of staff “somewhat” or “strongly” disagreed that career development was valued in the division. Staff interviewed and surveyed for the current evaluation confirmed these findings.

66. Senior management of the Division reported efforts to support career development. These included hosting internal seminars to bring new research to the attention of staff, involving staff in the preparation of expert group meetings, and inviting staff to make presentations in internal meetings and seminars. *The Division commented on the difficulties imposed by the Organization’s mobility requirements which effectively require specialized demographers to move to units that do not work on population issues.* Nevertheless, staff interviewed for this evaluation reported disappointment in aspects of career development opportunities in the Division, including the difficulty of obtaining funding support for participation in meetings or conferences in their areas of interest. Several stakeholders also commented that Division staff were unable to attend meetings to which they had been invited, and observed that the discussions would have greatly benefited from their presence. While participation must be dependent upon availability of financial resources, and while third party funding is often available only for the most senior representatives, staff indicated that decisions on participation in meetings were not transparent. Senior management also recognized that improvements could be made in the way decisions made by managers were communicated to staff and expectations aligned.

**V. Conclusion**

67. The Population Division fills an important role within the United Nations system and beyond. Its stakeholders include Member States (both directly and through their membership of the CPD), United Nations entities and the demographic community. Its work has a wide audience, and its quality influences in turn - and in no small measure - the quality and utility of the work of others. That the Division has continuing relevance within the United Nations system is unquestioned, and the technical expertise and reputation for neutrality that it has established ensure this.

68. The Division’s work is of high technical quality and relevant to national policy. Its work explores the impact of population dynamics on social and economic well-being and is used to inform critical decisions, such as those related to the potential impacts of ageing populations on social systems, and to model the effects of climate change over time. Without this work, policy debates in the United Nations system and beyond would be more difficult and

less well-informed. This quality reflects the intellectual leadership of its senior managers, its highly qualified staff and the links it has cultivated with the demographic community.

69. However, the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Population Division could all be improved by actions within the power of its management and of DESA in general in order to sustain its current expertise and standing. First, it must reinforce its efforts to promote coordination and cooperation within the population field. While it has done this successfully in a number of areas, including migration, it lacks a systematic approach. The scope of its work requires a multi-disciplinary understanding of population and the realities at the country level, and in order for it to fulfil its mandate, synergies should be built upon, particularly within the United Nations system. Relations with UNFPA, which has an extensive field presence, are particularly crucial. The Division must be creative and leverage resources in the field through collaborative efforts at all levels. Strengthened cooperation would reduce perceived and actual risks of duplication and encourage joint action. More effective engagement of stakeholders in the CPD processes has been requested by the CPD and should also be a priority for the Division.

70. Second, the Division's productivity and credibility are affected by strained IT resources, including its personnel and infrastructure. Improvements in IT would not only reduce the time and cost of producing the Division's outputs, but also improve the Division's effectiveness, by enabling it to respond more readily to changes in priorities and methods and to produce and disseminate more timely, relevant and up-to-date work. Those stakeholders who rely on Divisional estimates, projections and analysis as inputs to their own work would benefit in turn.

71. Third, the sustained credibility of the Division also relies on its ability to learn lessons from the past and incorporate them into future programme plans. Succession planning is also vital at a time when the Division faces the imminent loss through retirement of a number of its senior leaders.

72. Finally, decision-making is widely perceived by staff as non-transparent and centralised, and career planning within the Division appears limited, particularly for lower-level staff, who believe they lack opportunities to interact with their peers in the demographic community and to advance their skills. While financial constraints are noted, the lack of transparency and communication has created inefficiencies and affects the productivity and motivation of staff.

73. The Population Division has a committed staff and stakeholders who almost universally support and endorse the quality and utility of its work. It should be nurtured by its Department and supported by its partner entities and the United Nations system as a whole. However it must also ensure that its internal processes are directed to continual improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness with which it operates, so that it can acquit its role with true excellence.

## VI. Recommendations

**The following recommendations are made to the Population Division:**

**Recommendation 1: Establish mechanisms to promote greater coordination and collaboration with partners, particularly within the United Nations system.**

74. Possible actions could include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Make systematic efforts to plan jointly with UNFPA, for example, at the strategic level and at the technical level where complementarities exist,
  - Strengthen processes to ensure heightened participation in CPD by stakeholders from other UN entities, including the opportunity for them to contribute to CPD reports and discussion,
  - Establish channels of communication with DESA, relevant entities within the UN System and other stakeholders to identify opportunities for coordinated planning, action and reporting.

**Recommendation 2: Develop a strategy to expand the capabilities of the Division's IT infrastructure.**

75. As the Division's ability to improve its IT infrastructure is partly dependent on systemic factors including OHRM and OICT policies and practices, in addition to requesting one or more new professional posts the division should explore alternative strategies for improving the infrastructure, including raising XB funds or establishing a partnership with another UN entity.

**Recommendation 3: Establish an internal division wide working group(s) to develop an action plan for improving internal work processes, including strengthening communication within the Division, career development and knowledge management, and ensuring that the technical knowledge of Division staff is aligned with the latest developments in the field.**

76. The action plan should include specific objectives, actions and measurable, time-bound indicators.
- In particular, successor planning within the Division should be prioritized. In this regard critical work processes should be documented and self-evaluation processes for monitoring progress against performance measures should be established. The Division could also consider scheduling regular sessions at the conclusion of major projects and meetings to identify, share and record lessons learned and better practices.
  - Innovation in methodologies may require additional resources, thus, a plan outlining efforts the Division will take to facilitate innovation and ensure methods have taken into adequate consideration the latest developments in the field is recommended. Additionally, the Division should enhance its efforts to communicate to stakeholders steps taken to review and update methodologies,

including on its website, to enhance understanding and awareness of the Division's efforts in this regard.

- Systematic joint work planning and joint outputs both within the Division and within DESA could be explored as a potential means for improving internal collaboration.

## ANNEX A

In this Annex, OIOS presents the full text of comments received from the Population Division of DESA on the draft evaluation report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Evaluation of the Population Division. This practice has been instituted as per General Assembly [resolution 64/263](#) following the recommendation of the [Independent Audit Advisory Committee \(IAAC\)](#). Overall, the Population Division concurred with our results and conclusions. The comments from the Population Division on the draft OIOS report have been incorporated as appropriate into this final report.

### **Comments from the Population Division on the draft report**

United Nations  Nations Unies  
INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

TO: Mr. Yee Woo Guo  
A: Acting Director  
Inspection and Evaluation Division  
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 13 May 2011

REFERENCE: DESA-11/00796

THROUGH:

S/C DE:

FROM: Juwang Zhu 

DE: Chief  
Office of the Under-Secretary-General  
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

SUBJECT: Draft report of OIOS on the Population Division

OBJET:

1. I refer to your memo of 3 May 2011 addressed to Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, transmitting the final draft report of OIOS on the Population Division (PD) and inviting comments on the final draft.
2. PD expresses its appreciation for the evaluation and has requested the Office of Under-Secretary-General to transmit its comments (attached herewith) on the final draft.
3. On behalf of Mr. Sha Zukang, I would like to take this opportunity to thank IED/OIOS colleagues for your evaluation of PD/DESA.
4. We will follow up on the results of the evaluation and the recommendations.

Thank you.

cc: Ms. Carman L. Lapointe  
Mr. Byung-Kun Min  
Ms. Janice Muir  
Ms. Hania Zlotnik  
Mr. Armindo Miranda  
Ms. Ursula Germann

The Population Division appreciates the evaluation report prepared by OIOS. Management finds that it reflects well the strengths of the Division and of its work. It also points out areas of weakness, some of which were not previously viewed as such by management and where improvements can be made. The report's recommendations are clear and useful in guiding future action.

We wish to point, however, that the root causes of some of the weaknesses reported are systemic and cannot be addressed by management either at the Division or the Department level. Although the report is generally clear in indicating when the Division has to operate under constraints that management cannot change, we wish to expand here on some of those constraints.

Recruiting of IT staff: The report rightly points out that in the Population Division IT staff are employed at the general service level (para. 47). Recruitment for general service staff requires that candidates pass a clerical exam meant to test secretarial skills. One of the G-6 posts in the Division has been vacant for at least 2 years because the candidates identified after a thorough recruitment process did not succeed in passing that exam, which tests skills that are not relevant for a computer programmer. Such requirements have proven to be a major constraint in meeting the basic IT needs of the Population Division. Yet modifying them is not within the purview of DESA.

Problems in retaining well-qualified IT staff: Because IT staff are recruited at the G-6 or G-7 levels and the Division has only two G-7 posts, qualified IT staff have virtually no possibility of advancement in the Population Division. Given that the Division has to keep abreast of both, developments in demographic methodology and innovations in IT technology, it has to develop and maintain its own customized software. Therefore, IT staff need time to train and become familiar with Population Division applications. Rapid turnover of IT staff, as has been the case in recent years, severely constrains the capacity of the Division to maintain much less develop new applications. The Population Division appreciates the recommendation that suggests requesting "one or more new professional posts" (para. 75) but notes that, for 2012-2013, budget cuts make that impossible.

Budget constraints: In the past, the Population Division has implemented IT innovations by hiring consultants. Because of the expected budget cuts for 2012-2013, that possibility will cease to exist. The report recommends that the Division secure extra-budgetary funding to reinforce its IT capabilities. While management will explore that option further, it has been the experience of the Division that funding agencies cannot provide funding for such "operating costs" as the development of the IT infrastructure that the Division needs in order to carry out its core work. Securing funding requires that the Division commit itself to producing output or activities additional to those already included in its work programme and may just put additional strain on its staff without actually providing the funding needed to truly reinforce IT. For those reasons, the management of the Division believes that the issue of strengthening IT support and infrastructure for specialized and small units such as the Division needs to be considered and addressed at a higher level in the Organization.

Maintaining the technical expertise of the Population Division's staff: The report rightly underscores that a major strength of the Division is the technical expertise of its staff, which has been maintained by recruiting staff that meet high standards in terms of professional qualifications and by extensive on-the-job training of junior staff. Because nearly every professional in the Division has to work on a highly technical issue (fertility, mortality, migration, population estimates, population projections, population policies) and cover a large number of countries, it takes time for staff to become expert on each topic. Virtually no other work environment for demographers is so demanding. Therefore, the staff of the Division need to be well-trained demographers to start with and then have time to specialize within the Division. The management of the Division has therefore been concerned for some time about the trend in the United Nations towards the recruitment of generalists and the mobility requirements for staff promotion. In the United Nations, most of the regional commissions have eliminated their Population Units, with the result that posts for population officers outside Headquarters are few and vacancies in the population area are rare. Therefore, to be mobile, staff of the Population Division need to move to units that do not work on population issues, with the consequence that those moves result in deskilling. Those developments risk weakening the technical expertise of the Population Division's staff. For that reason, the management of the Division stresses the need to require graduate training in demography or population studies for the recruitment of staff (demography is a specialty that is taught at the masters or PhD levels) and suggests that the Organization consider, as other organizations in the system have done, devising special measures for the career development of highly specialized staff whose mobility, by the very nature of their work, would be detrimental to the work of the Organization.