

## Public Assistance Personnel, Jan.-June 1943

By Jack Charnow and Saul Kaplan\*

FACED WITH THE LOSS of trained and experienced personnel to other governmental agencies, private industry, wartime welfare services, and the armed forces, public assistance agencies are intensively examining their personnel practices—the salary schedules and working conditions, promotion policies and methods of staff utilization and development, as well as recruitment and selection. Acute shortages of experienced personnel and high rates of turn-over are jeopardizing the quality of public assistance administration in many areas and constitute one of the most serious current problems of assistance administrators.

To meet the need for comparable Nation-wide information, the Social Security Board, in cooperation with State public assistance agencies, began in the latter half of 1942 to gather semiannual statistics on public assistance personnel. It is planned to include interpretive information in future reports as an aid in indicating the reasons for variations among States and significant changes within States. This article is based on reports from 39 agencies in 35 States<sup>1</sup> for the half year ended June 30, 1943, and includes national estimates derived from these reports and other information available to the Board.

### Number of Employees and Distribution by Type of Position

State and local public assistance agencies employed an estimated 45,000 persons in June 1943. These agencies gave financial assistance to about 4 million persons. The number of employees was about equal to the

combined number administering the U. S. Employment Service and the unemployment compensation and old-age and survivors insurance programs. The great majority—38,500 or 86 percent—worked in offices established in county, city, or other local governmental units, while the remaining 14 percent worked in the central and district supervisory offices of the State public assistance agencies (table 1).

In most States the number of employees was not large. Almost three-fourths of the States had less than 1,000 employees each, and almost one-half had less than 500. Five States, on the other hand, with about one-third of all public assistance cases, had about 40 percent of all employees. The distribution of States by number of staff in State and local offices was as follows:

Number of employees	Number of States
Total.....	49
Less than 100.....	4
100-499.....	10
500-999.....	12
1,000-1,499.....	9
1,500-1,999.....	0
2,000 or more.....	6

Employees are classified into two broad groups—executives and social workers, and clerical and other employees. The executive and social work group is made up of directors, director-workers, social workers who carry case loads or are engaged in intake and special investigation, and all other social workers. The director class includes administrators, their deputies, and other employees in executive positions of an administrative character. The director-worker class is confined to local office directors who, in addition to being the admin-

istrative heads of local offices, also carry case loads. Social workers who carry case loads or are engaged in intake and special investigation include supervisors whose major work is directly with applicants or recipients. Case work supervisors whose primary work is supervision, medical social workers, child welfare and other consultants, are classified with "all other social workers." Under the heading "clerical and other employees" are grouped the stenographers, typists, and clerks as well as messengers, janitors, custodial workers, and the like.

The executive-social worker group of 25,600 comprised more than half—56 percent—of all employees. The group represented about one-third of the total number of social and welfare workers in public and private agencies in the country, as reported in the 1940 census.

States did not vary greatly in the proportion of executive and social workers among all employees. In nearly half the reporting States the proportion was between 50 and 60 percent; it was more than 65 percent in only four States, and less than 45 percent in only one. These proportions were about the same as 6 months earlier.

Because local offices work directly with applicants and recipients, the proportion of executives and social workers in local offices (6 out of every 10 employees) was more than double that in State offices. Visitors—that is, social workers carrying case loads, and director-workers—constituted 84 percent of the executive and social work group in local offices. Director-workers, employed only in small offices, outnumbered local office directors, indicating that the majority of local offices in the country are small.

Table 1.—Estimated distribution of staff by type of position, 49 States, June 1943

Position	Total		State offices		Local offices	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total.....	45,000	100	6,500	100	38,500	100
Executives and social workers.....	25,600	56	1,800	28	23,800	62
Directors.....	2,250	5	300	5	1,950	5
Director-workers.....	2,400	5	—	—	2,400	6
Social workers carrying case loads <sup>1</sup> .....	17,800	39	300	5	17,500	46
All other social workers.....	3,150	7	1,200	18	1,950	5
Clerical and other employees.....	19,400	44	4,700	72	14,700	38

<sup>1</sup> Includes social workers engaged in intake and special investigation.

\*Bureau of Public Assistance, Statistics and Analysis Division.

<sup>1</sup>The summary is based upon a lesser number of States for certain items because of incomplete reporting. About 10 percent of the time of these agencies was devoted to welfare programs other than public assistance, such as child welfare services, probation and parole, mental hygiene, etc. For a more detailed discussion of data presented in this summary, see release of Bureau of Public Assistance, Statistics and Analysis Division, April 25, 1944, *Staff of State and Local Public Assistance Agencies, July 1942-June 1943*.

The relation between the number of clerical workers and the number of executives and social workers in local offices is of considerable administrative interest. The job of the social work staff is, of course, facilitated by adequate clerical service. In considering effective use of personnel, the

relation between clerical, and executive and social work staff is significant but many additional factors must also be considered. A relatively high ratio of clerical workers in an agency may, for example, indicate either an insufficient number of visitors, with the assumption of visitors' functions by

clerical workers, or an effort to free visitors from the burden of clerical routine. The number of local units staffed only by a director-worker and a stenographer and the extent to which agency procedures require local disbursement of assistance payments and pay rolls are factors which may

Table 2.—Employees and vacancies, June 1943, and separations and accessions, January-June 1943

State	Agency	Pro-grams <sup>1</sup>	June 1943						January-June 1943				
			Total	Employees <sup>2</sup>		Type of position		Vacancies <sup>2</sup>		Separations		Accessions <sup>3</sup>	
				State	Local	Execu-tive and social work-er	Cleri-cal and other	Num-ber	Rate per 100 positions	Num-ber	Rate per 100 employ-ees <sup>4</sup>	Num-ber	Rate per 100 employ-ees <sup>4</sup>
<b>Total<sup>6</sup></b>			27, 974	4, 607	23, 367	15, 753	12, 221		7 0.8		7 19.3		7 15.3
Alabama	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	441	85	356	200	181	30	6.4	05	21.3	83	18.6
Connecticut	Office of Commissioner of Welfare: Division of Public Assistance	ABC O	154	37	117	85	69	29	15.8	25	16.4	28	18.4
District of Columbia	Board of Public Welfare: Division of Public Assistance	ABCG O	132	132		66	66	12	8.3	27	18.0	5	3.5
Florida	Welfare Board	ABC O	518	51	467	344	174	60	10.4	201	37.4	162	30.1
Georgia	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	758	115	643	433	325	113	13.0	148	19.5	145	19.1
Illinois	Department of Public Welfare: Division of Public Assistance	AC	1, 781	141	1, 640	1, 093	638	65	5.1	211	11.8	(9)	(9)
Indiana	Department of Public Welfare	ABC O	1, 388	280	1, 108	854	531	137	9.0	251	18.3	(9)	(9)
Iowa	Department of Social Welfare	ABCG O	720	246	474	355	305	34	4.5	193	26.1	118	15.5
Kentucky	Department of Public Welfare: Division of Public Assistance	ABC O	362	102	260	283	70	48	11.7	60	16.6	(9)	(9)
Louisiana	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	1, 317	216	1, 101	661	656	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)
Maine	Department of Health and Welfare	ABCG O	302	98	204	148	154	23	7.1	69	22.8	68	22.5
Massachusetts	Department of Public Welfare	ACG O	2, 307	316	1, 991	1, 307	1, 000	61	2.7	177	7.6	109	4.7
	Department of Education: Division of the Blind	B O	26	26		12	14	0	0	1	(9)	1	(9)
Michigan	Social Welfare Commission	ABCG O	1, 008	87	921	602	316	43	4.1	179	17.8	(9)	(9)
Minnesota	Department of Social Security: Division of Social Welfare	ABCG O	1, 262	210	1, 052	613	640	111	8.1	274	20.8	168	12.8
Missouri	Social Security Commission	ACG O	1, 385	110	1, 245	799	586	(9)	(9)	201	20.0	141	9.9
Montana	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	240	99	170	119	141	14	5.1	62	24.0	65	25.1
Nebraska	Department of Assistance and Child Welfare	ABCG O	454	57	397	282	172	26	5.4	146	31.4	121	20.7
Nevada	Welfare Department: Division of Old-Age Assistance	A	20	7	13	15	5	0	0	6	(9)	7	(9)
New Hampshire	Department of Public Welfare	ABC O	148	49	99	77	71	17	10.3	28	18.3	18	11.8
New Mexico	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	248	51	194	133	115	39	13.0	80	32.3	(9)	(9)
North Carolina	Board of Charities and Public Welfare, and Commission for the Blind <sup>11</sup>	ABCG O	772	118	654	425	347	113	12.8	101	12.7	70	7.0
North Dakota	Public Welfare Board	ABCG O	265	73	192	110	149	14	5.0	80	30.1	50	29.8
Ohio	Department of Public Welfare: Division of Aid for the Aged	A	1, 041	182	859	677	364	30	2.8	120	12.3	214	24.0
	Division of Social Administration	BCG O	1, 300	73	1, 230	614	695	9	7	518	39.6	(9)	(9)
Oklahoma	Department of Public Welfare	ABC O	850	108	751	592	267	71	7.6	178	20.7	(9)	(9)
Oregon	Public Welfare Commission	ABCG O	471	99	372	230	241	143	23.3	122	25.9	(9)	(9)
Pennsylvania	Department of Public Assistance	ABCG O	3, 411	688	2, 823	1, 655	1, 766	191	5.4	650	18.1	(9)	(9)
South Carolina	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	408	76	332	257	151	24	5.0	60	12.3	52	12.8
South Dakota	Department of Social Security	ABCG O	214	37	177	127	87	25	10.5	41	19.2	(9)	(9)
Tennessee	Department of Public Welfare	ABC O	628	101	427	320	208	68	11.4	114	23.1	185	37.0
Texas	Department of Public Welfare	ABC O	1, 073	135	938	668	465	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)	(9)
Utah	Department of Public Welfare	ABCG O	307	40	268	171	139	2	0	61	19.9	80	28.2
Vermont	Old-Age Assistance Department	A	24	24		10	8	0	0	4	(9)	4	(9)
	Department of Public Welfare	BC O	60	23	37	21	39	3	(9)	13	(9)	11	(9)
Virginia	Department of Public Welfare, and Commission for the Blind <sup>11</sup>	ABCG O	673	111	562	370	291	85	11.2	122	18.1	110	17.0
West Virginia	Department of Public Assistance	ABCG O	780	160	620	463	327	(9)	(9)	207	24.8	99	11.9
Wisconsin	Department of Public Welfare: Division of Public Assistance	ABCG O	788	81	707	401	387	32	3.9	100	22.6	87	10.4

<sup>1</sup> A signifies old-age assistance; B, aid to the blind; C, aid to dependent children; G, general assistance (includes all general assistance employees supervised by public assistance agencies; excludes general assistance employees not supervised by public assistance agencies as follows: Maine, Michigan, South Dakota, majority of local employees; Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Wisconsin, some local employees. Includes, for Iowa, a few employees not engaged in general assistance); O, other welfare programs excluding institutions.

<sup>2</sup> As of last pay-roll period.  
<sup>3</sup> State office represents central office and regional or district supervisory offices; local offices represent offices of county, city, or other local governmental units or branch offices of State agency administering public assistance. Employees of agencies administering programs entirely through central offices—District of Columbia Division of Public Assistance, Massachusetts Division of the Blind, and Vermont Old Age Assistance Department—are counted as State office employees.

<sup>4</sup> Average of number in December 1942 and June 1943 (including permanent, temporary, and provisional employees). For States not reporting for December 1942, separation rate based on number of employees in June 1943; these rates would differ only slightly from those based upon the average number of employees unless there had been a relatively large change in the total number of employees during the 6-month period.  
<sup>5</sup> Represents number of employees in June 1943 plus number of separations January-June 1943 minus number of employees at end of December 1942.  
<sup>6</sup> 39 agencies in 35 States.  
<sup>7</sup> For vacancies, 35 agencies in 31 States; for separations, 37 agencies in 33 States; for accessions, 28 agencies in 24 States.  
<sup>8</sup> See footnote 1.  
<sup>9</sup> Not available.  
<sup>10</sup> Not computed; base too small.  
<sup>11</sup> Data for 2 agencies combined.

influence the ratio significantly. Differences in the ease with which vacancies in the two groups can be filled are also reflected in the ratio.

For every 100 executive and social work employees, local offices employed 54 clerks.<sup>2</sup> Although the range among the reporting agencies was from no clerical workers to 93 for every 100 of the executive-social work group, in almost half the agencies the ratio was between 40 and 60. The distribution of agencies on the basis of the ratio of clerical to executive and social workers was:

Number of clerical workers for every 100 executives <sup>2</sup> and social workers in local offices	Number of agencies
Total	31
Less than 30	3
30-39	4
40-49	7
50-59	8
60-69	5
70-79	6
80 or more	1

### Turn-Over

Although some staff turn-over is desirable as a means of introducing new blood into an agency, a constantly shifting staff produces serious administrative problems. Extra effort must be spent in recruiting, examining, placing, and orienting new employees, while staff morale and efficiency are lowered, and administrative direction suffers; case loads must be reassigned constantly and adequate coverage is made difficult. These problems are intensified when the newly hired workers have relatively little experience and training. Serious dislocation of agency operations can occur even though the net loss in number of employees is negligible.

During the first 6 months in 1943, about one-third of the employees either left the public assistance agencies or were newly hired. Out of every 100 employees, 19 left and 15 were added; the net loss was thus 4 per 100 employees.<sup>3</sup> The total decline in staff is estimated at 1,700, since 8,700 employees left and only 7,000 were hired.

Most of the net loss was in the

<sup>2</sup>Includes in this instance stenographers, typists, and all other clerks except statistical and accounting clerks.

<sup>3</sup>Includes permanent, temporary, and provisional employees. If temporary and provisional employees were excluded, the separation rate would be somewhat lower and the accession rate considerably lower. Future reports will permit computation of rates both including and excluding these employees.

group of clerical and other employees, which lost an estimated 1,100 or about 65 percent of the total net loss; as noted above, however, this group comprised only 44 percent of all employees. The separation rate for clerical and other employees was 26 per 100 employees; for the executive-social worker group, 15 per 100.

Not all separations are, of course, voluntary quits on the part of employees. Reorganization and mass lay-offs may in some instances account for a relatively high number of separations.

The separation rate was higher for the clerical and other employees group in all but 1 of the reporting States. In nearly half the States it was higher by more than 10 per 100 employees. The following tabulation shows the number of agencies with specified separation rates for each of these 2 groups:

Separations per 100 employees	Number of agencies		
	All employees	Executive and social workers	Clerical and other workers
Total	32	32	32
Less than 10	1	4	0
10-19	15	21	7
20-29	11	7	14
30-39	5	0	6
40-49	0	0	2
50-59	0	0	3

In the same period, accession rates in 22 agencies for which information is available ranged from 4 to 38 per 100 employees. While in most agencies accession rates were lower than separation rates, resulting in a net loss in the total number of employees, in 3 they were substantially higher. The difference between the two rates was small in more than one-third of the agencies, each of which had a net loss or gain of less than 10 employees. In only 1 agency was the net change as much as 16 per 100. Accession rates were not available by type of position. For all employees, however, the rate of accessions, as of separations, was between 10 and 20 in almost half the agencies:

Accessions per 100 employees	Number of agencies
Total	22
Less than 10	4
10-19	10
20-29	6
30-39	2

### Vacancies

An additional measure of the acuteness of the staffing problem is the number of vacancies. If a State already has a large work load per employee, a considerable number of vacancies is particularly serious. In this report, vacancies are defined as unfilled positions which the agencies intend to fill and for which they have funds.

Use of this measure is subject to certain limitations, however. Intention to fill a vacancy is not readily susceptible of objective test. The attitude of agency administrators is subject to change as a result of such factors as ability to recruit qualified replacements, budgetary considerations, and uncertainty about the desirability of assigning work on a permanent basis to employees in other positions. Moreover, since the vacancy count is restricted to unfilled positions for which funds are available, it does not necessarily reflect the agency's concept of its need for additional staff.

About 7 out of every 100 positions were vacant in June 1943—a rate slightly lower than that 6 months earlier. Of the estimated 3,300 vacant positions, about 86 percent or 2,850 were in local offices; the other 14 percent were in State offices. The distribution of vacancies between State and local offices was rather the same as that of employees.

The number of vacancies per 100 positions in the reporting States ranged from less than 1 to 23. About two-fifths of the States had 10 or more vacancies per 100 positions:

Vacancies per 100 positions	Number of States
Total	29
Less than 5	6
5-9	12
10-14	9
15 or more	2

There were relatively more vacancies in executive-social worker positions than in clerical and other positions, although the net loss during the period was greater for the latter. One possible explanation is that unfilled positions for executives and social workers are considered vacant for longer periods of time than are those for clerical and other workers. Eight out of every 100 executive and social work positions were vacant as compared with about 5.5 of every 100

clerical and other positions. Of the 3,300 vacancies, two-thirds were for executive and social work positions.

In about half the reporting States the difference in vacancy rates between the executive-social work group and the clerical and other group exceeded 5 per 100 employees, and in all but two of these States the vacancy rate was higher for executive and social work positions.

**Case Loads per Visitor**

Visitors, who constitute more than half of all local office employees, have the basic job of determining original and continuing eligibility for public assistance. They include director-workers as well as social workers carrying case loads and working on intake and special investigation. Because all public assistance agencies employ visitors and because the es-

entials of their jobs are the same, rough quantitative measures of their work can be used in State comparisons. One such comparison is the number of cases per visitor.

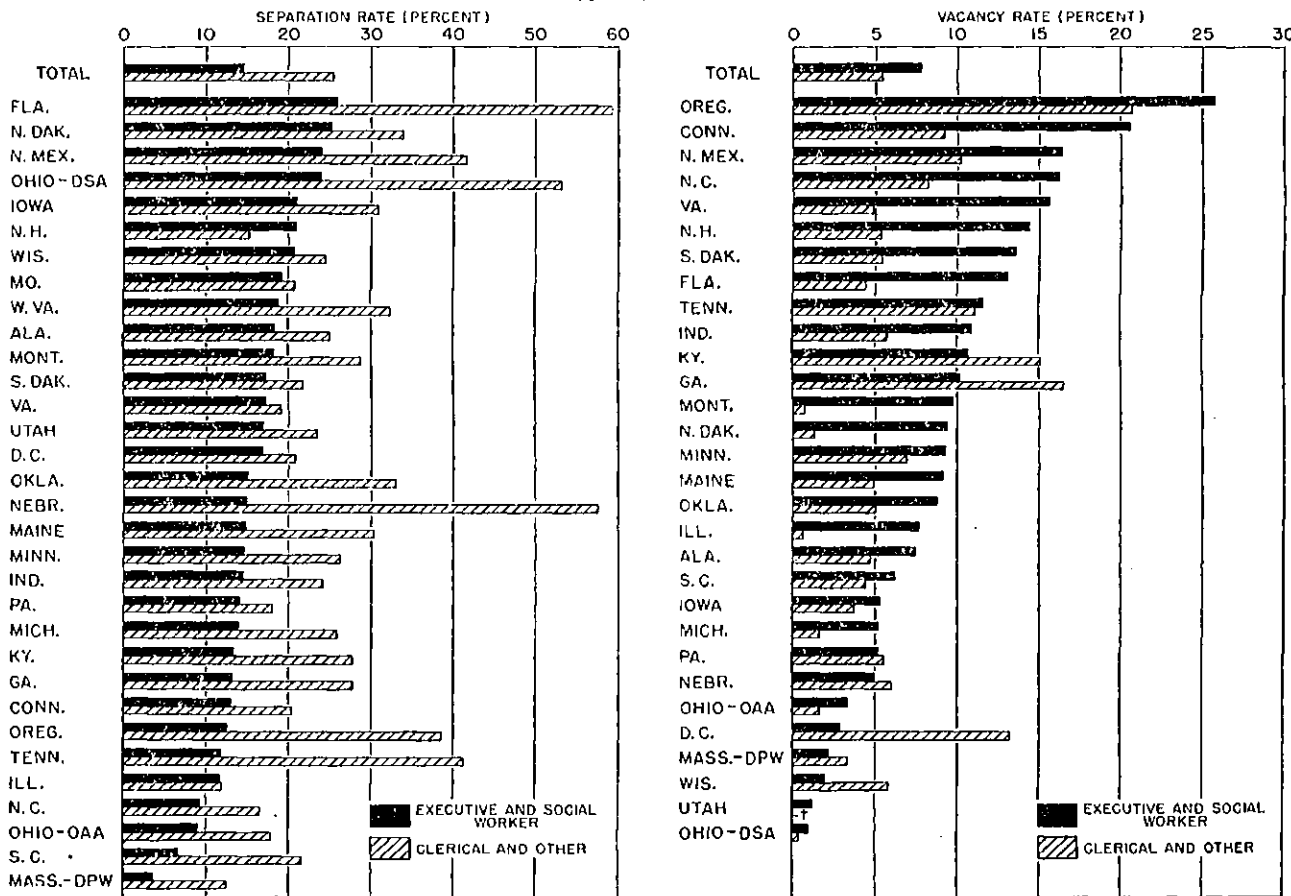
On the average, a visitor carried 192 cases in June 1943. The number of assistance cases per visitor was between 150 and 200 in 12 of the 38 reporting agencies, and 200 to 250 in 15 agencies. The range was from 59 to 388. Variations among State agencies in the number of cases per visitor were:

Number of assistance cases per visitor	Number of agencies
Total.....	38
Less than 100.....	1
100-149.....	7
150-199.....	12
200-249.....	15
250-299.....	1
300 or more.....	2

In interpreting these data, various qualifying factors must be kept in

mind. Since visitors work on both applications and cases, they can carry a relatively high number of assistance cases in States in which an unusually low proportion of their time is spent on applications. Usually, too, the amount of time spent per case varies according to the type of assistance. For this reason the kind of programs administered by an agency may also influence the number of cases per visitor. In the 15 agencies which are administering the 3 special types of public assistance and general assistance, the number of cases per visitor ranged from 105 to 230, with a median of 163; in the 13 agencies administering the 3 special types of public assistance only, the range was from 158 to 378, with a median of 215. Old-age assistance cases, on which visitors usually spend less time than on other

Chart 1.—Separation rates in 32 State public assistance agencies, January-June 1943, and vacancy rates in 30 agencies in June 1943, by type of position



†No vacancies.

types, constituted a lower proportion of total cases in the first group of agencies than in the second group. The frequency of reinvestigations required by an agency may also affect the size of visitors' loads; for example, semiannual reinvestigations will necessitate lower case loads than annual reinvestigations.

The scope, content, and objectives of a public assistance agency's program are basic factors underlying variations in visitors' loads. All agencies are bound by laws and regulations for determining eligibility for assistance, but agencies vary in the extent to which they recognize areas requiring the exercise of administrative discretion and in the degree to which they individualize the process of determining eligibility. Agencies which emphasize individualization in the process of establishing eligibility and determining amounts of assistance are likely to have comparatively low visitors' case loads.

Other factors which may influence the size of visitors' loads in public assistance agencies are the extent of staff turn-over, the degree of administrative efficiency, the proportion of visitors' time spent in travel, and

the amount and kind of clerical services available for routine tasks.

An agency whose visitors carry very high case loads may appear to save money in visitors' salaries, but the resulting economy may be deceptive, because it tends to weaken the agency's effectiveness in discharging its responsibility to the community, i. e., to grant assistance to needy individuals in accordance with their need. Visitors with unduly high case loads are forced to limit the frequency of their interviews and delay adjustments in assistance payments to meet changing circumstances, thus causing underpayments or overpayments to assistance recipients. They cannot spend the time required to learn the factors relevant to the need of recipients and may thus neglect certain special needs. Utilization of community resources through referral to other social agencies may be neglected. Serious need for medical care, for example, may escape unnoticed or remain unmet because of a visitor's heavy work load. Small visitors' loads, however, do not in themselves produce quality of public assistance service; other factors are equally important.

The average case load per visitor in June 1943 was lower than it had been 6 months earlier, because, in general, cases declined more than the number of visitors. The declines, occurring in more than two-thirds of the reporting agencies, were for the most part moderate and did not exceed 25 cases per visitor; in the median agency the decline was 9 cases.

Visitors usually work on a combination of assistance programs. When their time is converted into full-time equivalents for individual programs, however, the case load per visitor (full time) in June 1943, in the median agency for each program was: old-age assistance, 235; aid to the blind, 152; aid to dependent children, 115; and general assistance, 91.

In addition to assistance cases, visitors also worked on applications. The average number of applications per visitor in June 1943 was 10 in the median agency, and between 5 and 15 in almost three-fourths of the reporting agencies. In most State agencies the number of applications per visitor declined moderately from the level 6 months earlier.