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COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
(OECD)**

Fifty-fourth plenary session
(Paris, 12-16 June 2006)

**REPORT OF THE SEPTEMBER 2005 JOINT UNECE/EUROSTAT/OECD MEETING OF
DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL STATISTICS**

Prepared by the UNECE secretariat

INTRODUCTION

1. The Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting of Directors of Social Statistics was held on 29-30 September 2005 in Luxembourg. It was attended by participants from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were also present.
2. Mr. Hermann Habermann from the United States was elected as Chairperson of the meeting.

3. The following substantive topics were discussed during the meeting sessions based on the 4 invited and 1 supporting papers:

Session 1: Overview of the problems related to the measurement of new forms of households and family formations and identification of key areas of work for a common approach.

Presentations by Italy and Canada.

Supporting paper by Eurostat and UNECE.

Discussant: Ms. Barbara Dunlop, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Session 2: Development of common survey modules to measure new forms of households and development of a plan to draft such modules.

Presentation by United Kingdom.

Discussant: Mr. Martin T. O'Connell, US Census Bureau.

Session 3: The programme and the structure for the future work of the UNECE directors of social statistics.

Presentation by Organizing Committee.

4. All papers and presentations from the meeting are available on the UNECE website:

<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2005.09.social.htm>

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE MEETING

Session 1: Overview of the problems related to the measurement of new forms of households and family formations and identification of key areas of work for a common approach

5. During the session, participants discussed the emerging needs in the field of families and households statistics. Different forms of living arrangements such as same-sex couples, living apart together, commuters between households (people with multiple residences), persons living apart but within a network were discussed as family and household types that are becoming more and more relevant in modern societies and that need to be defined at international/regional levels. These areas were also identified as a field where common survey modules could be designed. During the discussion, it was also pointed out that understanding of family background and history is of increasing policy concern as it affects social outputs of individuals, such as education and employment.

6. The meeting discussed whether the definitions and classifications given in the draft Conference of European Statisticians Census Recommendations on families and households can be used as a framework for future work. The meeting welcomed those recommendations.

7. The meeting urged that future work follow a process of:

- defining the concepts related to policy concerns that could vary from the new forms of families and households described above¹ to the issues related to family background;
- designing common survey prototypes to test in selected countries;
- assessing the feasibility of establishing common survey modules after taking into account the results of the testing.

Session 2: Development of common survey modules to measure new forms of households and development of a plan to draft such modules.

8. The objective of this session was to evaluate the possibilities of developing common survey modules to measure complex household compositions and to draft such modules.

9. The presentation made by the United Kingdom outlined the increasing complexity of households due to:

- i. changing patterns of partnerships and family formation,
- ii. increasing flexibility and mobility that result from personal and work-related causes.

10. Social statistics have to reflect this increasing complexity correctly so that the statistical output does not distort the patterns of everyday life and thus lead to flawed conclusions.

11. The United Kingdom underlined the importance of the work that the UNECE/Eurostat Task Force on Families and Households has done so far in achieving the active participation of many countries in this field. However, more needs to be done to further develop recommendations for large-

scale household surveys and/or administrative sources. Existing guidelines on families and households need to be reviewed and, ideally, harmonized. The relation between the recommendations for population censuses and those for household surveys has to be clarified.

12. Key concepts like `household`, `family`, `child`, `usual residence` should be clarified further and, ideally, harmonized.

13. The household relationship matrix (HRM) was discussed as a tool to identify in detail the complex family relationships of all persons living in the household. The HRM allows for flexible tabulations of different types of households/families according to different points of view (household, parent, child, etc.). The majority of countries have adopted this tool using interviewer techniques; the United Kingdom, however, used it in a self-administrated mode in the census. It was noted that the flexibility and accuracy of the HRM has to be balanced against the costs involved. The majority of the countries using registers reported that they are able to produce the same kind of information as collected in other countries through the HRM.

Session 3: The programme and the structure for the future work of the UNECE directors of social statistics.

14. The meeting agreed with the objective of developing common modules and concluded that while significant steps have been taken and a process has been identified, there is as yet insufficient convergence to allow for implementation of common modules.

15. The meeting recognized the tangible achievements of the Eurostat/UNECE Task Force on Households and Families in the context of censuses, and recommended that its mandate with regard to social surveys be reaffirmed and expanded as appropriate.

16. The meeting felt strongly that the Social Statistics Forum's functions should be expanded to include the monitoring of all existing CES groups on social statistics.

17. The meeting proposed to establish a Task Force initially consisting of Canada (chair), Australia, representatives of the Eurostat strategic development group, Italy, UNECE and the United States to:

- identify and develop concrete proposals to examine emerging issues in social statistics, including measurement concepts, common questions / modules, and modalities to achieve them (including prototyping and/or testing strategies);
- organize the discussion on the above issues at the next meeting;
- develop the proposed new Terms of Reference for the Task Force on Families and Households;
- propose date, organization and frequency of the meetings.

18. The meeting recommended that Eurostat explore the possibility of extending the Eurostat project on harmonization of core variables to countries outside the EU and make recommendations to

the Forum.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

18. The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

Notes

¹ same-sex couples, living apart together, people with multiple residences, persons living within a family or social network.