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Session 2- Invited paper

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON SURVEY MODULE TO MEASURE ALL FORMS
OF FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS**

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I INTRODUCTION

1. Significant socio-demographic changes have taken place across Europe in the last 30 years or so. These changes in society, brought about by shifting social attitudes and norms and a new emphasis on personal freedom of choice, are sometimes considered to represent a 'second demographic transition'¹. They are marked by a number of changes in partnership and family formation, such as a decrease in the number of marriages taking place, first marriage occurring at older ages than in the past, an increasing prevalence of cohabitation (consensual unions), an increasing prevalence of divorce, higher rates of remarriage and a large increase in the proportion of births taking place outside marriage. Even though traditional families of parents living with their children still represent the dominant household type across Europe, there is increasing interest in the other family and household types. Thus it is important that data collection instruments such as surveys and censuses are able to reflect these social changes.

2. This short paper starts by presenting some socio-demographic contextual information about the drivers for the development of a common survey module. It then goes on to consider what expertise is available to us to address the issues around the development of a common survey module. Following on from these demographic considerations, the paper briefly considers the issues

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from a survey perspective, raising the question as to which large-scale EU household surveys would be under consideration and what issues might arise in developing a common module. Finally some recommendations are made for taking this work forward, possibly through the UNECE-Eurostat Task Force on Families and Households.

II. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

3. Looking at the 25 countries of Europe as a whole (EU25), the number of marriages taking place each year has declined from 3.3million in 1972 to 2.2 million in 2002. The age at first marriage has risen (for men from 26 in 1980 to 30 in 2002, for women from 23 to 27). In 1960 one in 20 live births took place outside marriage, by 2003 this had risen to nearly one in three. These trends, together with other changes such as the rise in the prevalence of divorce and remarriage, have given rise to changes in the prevalence of different types of families and households. For instance, changes that have been noted in many European countries include more single person households, more reconstituted families - where one or more children are not the natural offspring of each parent - more extended families of more than two generations, more lone-parent families. Data collection instruments have to reflect the emergence of these household types.

4. The changes in partnership and family formation have taken place against a backdrop of wider social change including population ageing and increased population mobility, both within countries and across country borders. Population ageing is often measured by the change in the percentage of the population who are children aged under 16 and the percentage who are older people aged 65 or over^{2,3}. For the EU25, the changes between 1985 and 2004 show that, in 2004, older people are accounting for a higher share of the population and children a lower share. In 1985, 22 per cent of the EU25 population were children under 16, by 2004 this had fallen to 17.6 per cent. In 1985, 13 per cent of the EU25 population were older people aged 65 or over, by 2004 this had risen to 16.5 per cent.

5. Population ageing increases interest in information about older people, in their living arrangements, their use or provision of care and their health and socio-economic status. Higher survival rates of people to old age may increase the size of the population living in institutional accommodation (see paragraph 11 for further discussion of this point). Demographic data are also required to contextualise this essential information. For instance, what proportion of older men and women live alone, does kin availability affect the propensity of older people to live alone, what proportion live in institutional establishments, how does marital status interact with living arrangements and care provision? Survey and census data are needed to help answer such questions and, to provide answers for the EU as a whole, using harmonised approaches so that data from individual countries can be compared, or combined to form the total EU picture.

6. Increased population mobility gives rise to a more culturally diverse society within Europe. In 2002, 1.7 million more people moved into one of the EU15 countries (prior to EU enlargement) than moved out. Spain, Italy, Germany and the UK together received 71 per cent of this net flow⁴. Combined with this high level of international movement, flows within the EU have also been high.

Survey data need to reflect the resulting increased diversity that such population moves will engender. This might involve the collection of data such as country of birth, or previous country of residence, or ethnicity. Country of birth data identify the foreign-born but do not equate to the migrant population of all people who move residence for a period of at least a year. For instance, nationals who work abroad on contracts of a year or more and subsequently return home are included in the migrant population.

7. Which data should be collected depends on the use to which they will be put. Thus, more work is needed before a recommendation could be drafted. As well as deciding which data to collect, the issue of whether or not these data should be collected for all members of a household/family or only for a household reference person would require thought. The survey mode of interview, whether by face-to-face interview, by telephone or by post, may be an important factor in the decision about which data to collect and who to collect it from. The survey methodology, including sampling strategies and survey design, would also affect the quality of outputs but that is not an immediate issue and it has not been considered further in this paper.

III. EXISTING EXPERTISE WITHIN EUROPE ON FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS

8. At the October 2003 Meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians, approval was given to start a joint ECE-Eurostat project on families and households. It was proposed that the project would cover four tasks:

- ◆ Evaluate family and household issues encountered by ECE member states in the 2000 round of censuses
- ◆ Develop and propose improved recommendations on families and households for inclusion in the new set of ECE-Eurostat recommendations for the 2010 round of population censuses in the ECE region.
- ◆ Evaluate family and household issues encountered by ECE member states in major European surveys such as EU-SILC and LFSs.
- ◆ Develop recommendations on families and households for large -scale household surveys.

9. A Task Force on Families and Households was established in January 2004. Since its beginnings when eight countries were represented (Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Hungary, Norway, United Kingdom and the United States), the group has grown so that now many of the EU25 member states are represented. The group also has ECE and Eurostat representatives. Thus this Task Force has call upon considerable expertise across Europe and it is a very participative and engaged group. Through its efforts so far it has been successful in addressing the first two of the four tasks listed above which are in relation to the census. However, the Task Force has reported that adequate resources and appropriate funding have not been available so far to pursue the other objectives⁵, which are the ones that are particularly relevant to the subject of this paper.

IV. EXISTING LARGE SCALE HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS IN THE EU

10. Survey data need to reflect the rapid transformations that have taken place in living arrangements and the emergence of new household types. Further, considerable efforts are required to establish principles and practices on family and household statistics, which will aid comparability and coherence by enabling outputs to be produced on a consistent basis for all countries of the EU. The large-scale household surveys which are important across Europe for these purposes are mainly the EU-Labour Force Surveys (LFS) and the EU-Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). In addition, many countries also run household budget surveys, such as expenditure and income surveys, where definitions of households and families are likely to be welcomed. All these surveys already recognise the need for coherence and compatibility and will have guidelines in existence. There are also guidelines for the censuses which would ideally be harmonised with survey guidelines, though it may not always be possible to use guidelines that have been developed for self-completion census questionnaires in the situation of surveys that are conducted by interview. More information is needed about which surveys would benefit from a set of recommendations on families and households and an inventory of surveys would provide up to date information.

V. TOWARDS A COMMON SURVEY MODULE

11. Experience of the UNECE-Eurostat Task Force on Families and Households, in reviewing census recommendations, indicates what the main issues are likely to be in developing a common family and household module for large scale EU surveys. These issues include the provision of clear definitions for fundamental concepts such as what is a household, a family, a child, and how to determine who should be the reference person for outputs on a household/family basis. Recommendations, for determining usual residence, are likely to be required. Further, whether or not surveys are to include some institutional populations is an issue that may need to be addressed. As more couples survive to old age, the proportion who live in institutions, or purpose built/sheltered accommodation, is likely to increase, making it more of a possibility that surveys should include such living units in the future if they do not already do so.

12. A major issue is the need for surveys to collect full information on relationships within a household and a family. It would be of benefit to evaluate the use of methods that would capture the relationship between all household members (e.g. matrices versus a simpler grid that captures the less information about relationships, such as only those that exist between a reference person and other household members). There is a question as to whether or not there may be a need to capture relationships that exist beyond a household, particularly where people have more than one address. It might be necessary to ask a question of each person in family/household, about whether they regularly spend time at another address. It is important that information about family units is not lost where a key family member lives away from home for part of the time. For example, if someone works away from home during the week, they would be identified as a single person household if interviewed at that address rather than at their weekend address, and family information would be lost if they have a family they return to at weekends. Further, in the case of children whose parents have separated and

the child splits their time between both parents, then either the child or one of parents may be missed in a survey, depending on which of the homes are sampled and when.

13. In addition, the growing existence of partnerships where couples choose to maintain separate residences has been noted in some countries⁶. A growing number of people maintain a second home. This may be an issue for survey takers if the home is sampled when one partner or part of the family is in it and the others are in the other home, either in the same country or in different country. Survey rules are that everyone should be included at their main/usual residence but it may not always be clear what the usual address is. In the past this was less of an issue as there were small numbers of people who might be affected by this problem but this is becoming more of an issue now.

14. This short paper has already noted the changes that are taking place in the balance between traditional and other household and family types. A current evaluation of existing guidelines might provide greater clarity about the less common family types such as lone -parent families and the more complex family and household types, such as extended and reconstituted families. These have been defined in census recommendations and ensuring consistency between censuses and surveys would aid statistical descriptions and analyses.

15. Recognition by surveys of social change is also essential. For example, the implementation of civil partnerships (same-sex partnerships) which has taken place, or is due to take place, in some EU countries and which will give rise to new household and family types. Recommendations need to be drafted so that they aid coherence and comparability whilst taking account of differing conditions that exist in different countries across the EU.

VI. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

16. This summary paper has noted the drivers for a common survey module on families and households across large-scale household surveys in the EU. Recommendations for such a module would aid comparability and coherence. Two activities would be required to inform the drafting of recommendations that would also address emerging issues and reflect the most recent of social changes. First an inventory of existing surveys and guidelines would be useful in ensuring effective use is made of existing knowledge. Second an evaluation of family and household issues in major European household surveys is required, and specific objectives are needed for the issues that have to be solved, e.g ensure collection of information about family members living away from 'home' for part of time.

17. The recommended option for achieving these activities would be to provide the existing family and household Task Force with the resources it needs to complete these tasks. This group has already shown that it has sufficient representation of interested parties as well as the expertise and energy to achieve such aims. A researcher would need to be commissioned to conduct an inventory of surveys. The Task Force could then use this information in completing their outstanding tasks of evaluation of

the family/household issues for surveys and drafting of recommendations. This is the course of action that is recommended to the Directors of Social Statistics.

References

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