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Results of the electronic consultation on the report on measuring different emerging forms of households and families

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present note summarizes the comments by countries and international organizations on the draft report *Measurement of different emerging forms of households and families*, resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in April and May 2010.

A total of 30 replies were received in response to the request for comments on the report: from 28 countries, Eurostat and the European Central Bank. There was general support for the endorsement of the report by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES). A number of substantive comments were submitted on specific parts of the report. The Task Force reviewed these comments, provided answers and proposed some amendments to the draft report, which are presented in the annex to the present note.

In view of the support by countries and organizations, it is proposed that the Conference endorses the report on *Measurement of different emerging forms of households and families*, subject to the inclusion of the amendments presented in the annex.

I. Introduction

1. The present note summarizes the comments by countries and international organizations on the draft report Measurement of different emerging forms of households and families (doc. ECE/CES/2010/8), resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in April and May 2010.

II. Summary of feedback

2. A total of 30 replies were received in response to the request for comments on the report: from 28 countries, Eurostat and the European Central Bank. The following countries replied: Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States.

3. Most replies evaluated positively the content of the report and explicitly supported its endorsement by the CES. No country or international organization objected to the endorsement. Seven countries (Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Romania and Switzerland) submitted substantive comments that require amendments to the text of the report. The substantive comments received, together with the responses of the Task Force and the proposed amendments to the report are presented in the Annex.

III. General comments

4. There were many favourable comments about the potential usefulness of the report to improve the measurement of new forms of families and households, and many countries congratulated the Task Force on the quality and usefulness of their work.

5. **Australia** observed that the report provides a useful exposition both of the changing information requirements about families and households in an evolving society, and of the options for precision in their measurement in censuses and surveys.

6. **Brazil** found the document very important and useful for the forthcoming revision of their household surveys system.

7. **Denmark** found many of the ideas on measuring emerging forms of households of great value, although data on these new forms of families are not easily available in registers.

8. **Germany** commented that the report deals with a very important issue and strongly supported the initiative to develop and to advance internationally comparable and reliable concepts and indicators of living arrangements. Germany commended the structuring of the report, its value for developing surveys and the stimulus it provides to the discussion on the ways of incorporating the measurement of different forms of living arrangements into official statistics.

9. **Mexico** defined the document as an important conceptual tool for capturing the diversity of patterns of households and families.

10. **Poland** characterized the report as a great basis for work at both the national and international level to improve and harmonize methods for the measurement of different forms of households, families and social relations.

11. **Portugal** commended UNECE for this important initiative and for proposing a set of feasible criteria for measuring new phenomena, taking into account the well established concepts as much as possible.
12. **Slovakia** appreciated the document, which reflects the current changes in lifestyle of modern society and in the structure of current households and families.
13. **Slovenia** appreciated the concrete methodological solutions and good practices of countries where these phenomena are relevant, but reminded that the actual implementation of the new concepts and their measurement depend on priorities may differ from one country to another.
14. **Sweden** expressed support for the work carried through by the Task Force and found the definitions and concepts in the report to be relevant.
15. **Switzerland** mentioned that the draft report is useful in that it seeks to identify and conceptualise new forms of family and household arrangements, and provides questionnaires and guidelines for measuring them.
16. **Ukraine** expressed general support to the methodological concepts and recommendations regarding the measurement of emerging forms of households and families.
17. The **United Kingdom** supported the report as an example of work to present a more accurate picture of emerging family forms, and noted that recommendations should be flexible given that they must apply across countries with varying social contexts.
18. The **United States** defined the report as an excellent summary of a major project, and noted that these recommendations will provide an important starting place for future cooperative research.
19. **Eurostat** welcomed the report, which will help bringing consensus towards better description of these new forms of households and families. Eurostat also noted that the report will influence the evolution of the existing or future instruments, such as the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) or the future revision of the core social variables definition.

IV. Proposal

20. In view of the support by countries and organizations, **it is proposed that the Conference of European Statisticians endorses the report on *Measuring new forms of family and household arrangements*, subject to the inclusion of the amendments presented in the Annex to this note.**

Annex

List of substantive comments, responses of the Task Force on Families and Households and proposed amendments to the report

Overall comments

1. **Lithuania** commented that a definition of trans-national families and an analysis of the module of such a family are missing. In the times of an increased mobility of persons and large-scale migration, a certain part of households (families) live in different countries (e.g. one of the spouses lives or works in one country for a year or longer, while the other spouse and a child (children) still live in another country, although they, as a household (family), do share household income and expenditure). It is important for statisticians to count such households (families), and the 2010 population censuses round is a very convenient moment for this purpose.

Response by the Task Force:

2. The work of the Task Force covered selected forms of family and living arrangements that had been identified as emerging and relevant in the CES region: reconstituted families, commuters between households, living apart together, same-sex couples, and persons living apart but within a network. Nevertheless, it is recognized that these are not the only new forms of families, households and living arrangements worth of interest. For example, trans-national families are particularly interesting for policy makers of both immigration and emigration countries. In fact, some surveys all over the world are devoted to collect information on migrants and their families (in the country of origin also). We agree that to define concepts and definitions for trans-national families would be important within the overall objective of improving the relevance and household statistics, but the topic was not included in the mission of this Task Force.

3. New Zealand commented that the report might benefit from separating references to censuses, administrative sources and social surveys as they are operationally different, collect different levels and volumes of data, and cater for different levels of detail. Also, many of the proposals would not be suited to a census-format but may also not be suited to a social survey format due to lack of numbers and viable output.

4. Respondent burden was a key concern for New Zealand. It is suggested that the uses of the data would need to be clearly outlined to justify the amount of resources and respondent burden that would be required to accommodate some of the suggestions in the report. The potential issue of respondent sensitivity is also cited as an issue that deserves further consideration.

5. New Zealand also raised concern that basic levels of data may be compromised if questionnaires and data collection methods are made more complex or too detailed to capture emerging situations. This was particularly the case for census data which may actually suffer a loss of family information should future collection and output approaches become too complicated. The collection of proxy information is also of concern as this approach may reduce the quality of the data collected.

Response by the Task Force:

6. The Task Force agrees that (i) respondent burden, (ii) respondent sensitivity, (iii) preservation of standard information's quality, and (iv) the use of proxy information are relevant issues to be considered when deciding whether surveying the emerging forms of households, families, and living arrangements.

7. The Task Force does not claim that these forms of living arrangements have to be considered in all social surveys or censuses, but rather would like to provide countries with support when they decide (i) to carry out a new surveys devoted to the specific topics of interest, or (ii) to add "ad hoc" modules to existing and consolidated surveys in order to cover some of living arrangements the Task Force dealt with.

8. The Task Force leaves to each country the evaluation of the opportunity-costs implied by the survey of any new type of household, family, or living arrangement, being aware that these opportunity-costs may vary considerably across countries, depending on the diffusion of the different types of arrangements, and their legal recognition.

Topic: Relationship between "Commuters between households" (CBH) and persons "Living apart together" (LAT)

9. Some countries commented on the relationship between the two arrangements "Commuters between households" (CBH) and persons "Living apart together" (LAT), covered respectively in chapters 2 and 3 of the report. The relation between the two arrangements was discussed in the introductory chapter of the draft report, in section "Commuters between households and living apart together: possibly overlapping arrangements" (see paragraphs 49-51). The text warned that it may be difficult to differentiate between CBH and LAT. Several countries requested that the text be made clearer in this regard.

10. **Latvia** noted that the relation between these two arrangements could be controversial.

11. **New Zealand** observed that the two categories need to be clearly defined, also in relation to the age of the persons: CBH could include people of any age, while LAT should include only couples. New Zealand also noted: "*...it is of great importance to get these definitions correct as incorrect counts (by as much as 20 percent as reported) would significantly alter our understanding of key policy and social issues. For instance, analysis of one-parent family characteristics may produce inaccurate results if such high proportions of commuting families (or LAT for that matter) are described as one-parent rather than couple families.*"

12. **Switzerland** noted that the report does not sufficiently highlight the fact that in most cases LAT is a subcategory of CBH, and that the categories are not mutually exclusive: "...Individuals in LAT must meet in one's or the other's household in order to engage in intimate relationships, which is part of the definition. The difference is that the focus is not the same: the notion of CBH focuses on the fact that individuals may have a secondary dwelling, whereas LAT focuses on the nature of the relationship between partners."

Response by the Task Force:

13. The overlapping between Commuters between households (CBH) and Living apart together (LAT) depends on the subjective interpretation on the part of respondents whether or not they maintain separate households (independently on if and how much they live together or if they consider the partner's home as an usual residence). This means that in some cases LAT partners represent a subcategory of CBH.

14. The possible overlapping between the two arrangements derives also from the fact that CBH can be considered as an individual feature, while LAT is a variable related to couple relations, as correctly noted by Switzerland.

15. It is proposed to amend the text in section "Commuters between households and living apart together: possibly overlapping arrangements" (paragraphs 49-51) to better clarify the relation between CBH and LAT, and reflect the comments above (see proposed amendments in the annex).

Proposed amendment in the report:

16. In paragraph 50 after the second sentence add the following text: "*In this case, LAT partners represent a subcategory of CBH*".

17. Replace the current text in paragraph 51 with the following text: "*A solution to properly deal with potential overlapping is to survey at the same time both LAT and CBH. By combining information on both LAT, which focuses on the nature of the relationship between the partners, and CBH, which focuses on the existence of a secondary residence, a more precise understanding and description of these situations is achieved, and consequently a more accurate classification of individuals either as living a LAT relationship and/or CBH.*"

Chapter 1: Collection of information on reconstituted families

18. **New Zealand** commented that the issue of how adopted children are considered when defining reconstituted families needs to be clarified, particularly where a child is the adopted child of one parent but not the other and the partners are in a de facto relationship. The suggested approach for collecting information on reconstituted families (the relationship matrix) is supported by Statistics New Zealand. As reconstituted families comprise approximately 10-12 percent of all families in New Zealand (and would therefore provide relatively small numbers) such a matrix needs to be trialed in a census-type format to assess the quality of potential analytical outputs.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

19. Modify the first part of paragraph 29 of the report, to read as follows: "*This definition implies that if the other partner adopts the child of one partner later, the resulting family is no longer a reconstituted family. On the other hand, when the child (or all children in the household) is (are) the adopted child(ren) of one adult but not of the other, the family is to be considered as a reconstituted family. Considering adoptive children...*"

20. There is a concern about the use of the terms 'reconstituted' and 'intact' to describe these families. When discussing terminology to describe these emerging family types, the Statistics **New Zealand** preference has been to use the terms 'step' and 'blended'. These terms are more descriptive of current situations rather than the terms used in the report, which tend to imply an ideal family type as a basis of comparison.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

21. A new paragraph should be added between paragraphs 29 and 30, to read as follows: *“The Task Force prefers to use the term “reconstituted family” rather than “stepfamily”. The latter term may give some respondents negative associations, based on historical contexts. Countries in which such negative associations are thought not to be relevant may use the terms “stepfamily” and “reconstituted family” as equivalents”.*

Response by the Task Force:

22. We prefer to distinguish between reconstituted families and blended families as indicated in paragraph 30. Countries that prefer to use the term “blended family” as an equivalent term for “reconstituted family” (and hence find the current paragraph 30 less useful) may do so, provided this is clearly stated in the definitions.

Chapter 2: Commuters between households

23. **Germany** suggested to discuss how to avoid misunderstandings of the term “place of usual residence” by respondents. “... in some cases it could be helpful to follow up with the concept ‘centre of living’ to describe this issue. Another possibility could be to let the commuter define himself/herself what and where the usual place of residence is.”

Response by the Task Force:

24. As stated in paragraph 100 of the report, the rules on usual residence included in the CES Census Recommendations for the 2010 censuses are based on the number of nights spent in each dwelling: “a person’s place of usual residence is that at which he/she spends most of his/her daily night-rest”, apart from a number of special cases. The Task Force decided to be as consistent as possible with the general concepts and definitions of the CES Census Recommendations, including the important concept of usual residence. Moreover, the concept of “centre of living” appears ambiguous and could be interpreted in different ways in different countries.

25. In paragraph 103, **Germany** suggested to consider that commuters not only travel between households but also between household and place of work and vice versa.

Response by the Task Force:

26. As mentioned in paragraph 103 of the report, the chapter on commuters between households does not cover commuting between place of residence and place of work or study (this is normally covered in the census). The chapter focuses on commuters between households, which is a different group of people who usually sleep in two different dwellings.

27. In paragraph 104, **Germany** suggested including holiday homes and vacant dwelling, because respondents could have problems to distinguish between those forms of housing and “regular” home.

28. **Latvia** commented that the sentence in paragraph 105 on page 26: “Secondary homes are of interest, while holiday homes and vacant dwellings are not considered in the census data collection process” is not correct because the Census Recommendations for the 2010 censuses (paragraph 627 - 631) prescribe to enumerate also holiday homes and vacant dwellings.

Response by the Task Force:

29. Holiday homes and vacant dwellings can be included in the text (they are already included in paragraphs 157-160). Holiday homes and vacant dwellings, like secondary dwellings, are to be enumerated in the housing census.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

30. Add the following text to paragraph 105: “*Secondary homes are of interest, as well as holiday homes and vacant dwellings. In the new Census Recommendations for the 2010 censuses (UNECE-Eurostat 2006), a new non-core topic was added on secondary, seasonal and vacant dwelling available to the household (see paragraphs 632-637).*”

31. In footnote 14, page 55, **Germany** requested correction of the affiliation of Robert Naderi and Kerstin Ruckdeschel to “Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung”. This will be done which will be implemented.

32. **New Zealand** noted that it is of great importance to get the definition of commuters between households correct as incorrect counts (by as much as 20 percent as reported) would significantly alter our understanding of key policy and social issues. For instance, analysis of one-parent family characteristics may produce inaccurate results if such high proportions of commuting families (or LAT for that matter) are described as one-parent rather than couple families. These inconsistencies can significantly affect our understanding of issues such as child poverty and the resources that children have access to. For example, the resources that are available to children who belong to one-parent families in single households are very different (and potentially more critical) than resources available to children who have access to resources in more than one household.

Response by the Task Force:

33. In order to avoid incorrect counts it is very important to avoid double counting of people who commute between households, as correctly noted. Unfortunately this may increase the burden on respondents.

34. **New Zealand** mentioned that the recommended approach of asking five core questions followed by two ‘family tie’ questions is not feasible in terms of additional questions in the census. Sample surveys would probably not provide the numbers to provide accurate data for detailed analysis.

Response by the Task Force:

35. One solution could be to include only one screening question in the census (question 1 in paragraph 150) and to survey a sub-sample of these individuals in a specific post-census survey.

36. **New Zealand** further pointed out that proxy reporting may be particularly problematic as the respondent may not be able to provide details of the other residence or who usually lives at the other residence.

Response by the Task Force:

37. It is preferable that people answer for themselves as far as possible.

38. With regard to the definition of “place of usual residence”, **Romania** proposed to refer to the definitions and practices presented in the CES Recommendations for the 2010 censuses.

Response by the Task Force:

39. The report is based on the same definition of usual residence as the one presented in the CES Census Recommendations. Identifying commuters between households may be useful to count once and only once people who consider that they have two or more usual residences at the same time.

Chapter 3: Living apart together

40. Latvia suggested that an additional explanation might be useful for the category “persons who live in the other dwelling” in paragraph 40d and “number of / percent of all people living in households where at least a person in LAT relationship lives” in paragraph 47f.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

41. Modify the text in paragraph 40d to read: “*Persons who live in the other dwelling (partner, parents, partner’s parents, children, partner’s children, others)*”

42. In paragraph 47. (f) delete “People living in”, so that the text reads: “*(f) Number of/percent of all households where at least a person in LAT (living apart together) relationship lives*”

43. **The Netherlands** suggested to add a paragraph and questions from the Netherlands Family and Fertility Survey 2008.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

44. Add the text in a new paragraph after paragraph 194 on page 49: *Statistics Netherlands frequently conducts the Netherlands Family and Fertility Survey (NFFS) to publish socio-demographic figures on, among other things, relationships, family structure, child birth, birth control and work and children. The NFFS’s were based on a representative sample of men and women living in the Netherlands and for the year 2008 born in the period 1945-1989 (i.e. around 18-62 years of age at interview) regardless of their marital status, country of birth or nationality. The interviews of the latest NFFS’s were held face-to-face by experienced interviewers of Statistic Netherlands in the period March-August 2008.*”

45. Add the following to the Summary table on page 53 after the information for the Netherlands Kinship Panel Survey (2005 and 2007):

Netherlands Family and Fertility Survey (2008)

- *Do you have/want a partner without cohabiting?*

- *What is the reason why you choose to live without your partner?*

- *How many days of the week do you live with your partner?*

Target population: men and women born 1945 to 1989”.

Chapter 4: Same-sex couples

46. **Germany** suggested to discuss and test if discreet methods could be helpful to reduce underreporting, for example, in the self-administered part of the survey.

Response by the Task Force:

47. The effect of survey modes is already covered in paragraph 230 of the report (“The mode of collection may also be a factor in deciding how to design a question that collects information on same-sex couples. For example, space and/or question complexity may be an issue in a self completion questionnaire or census; conversely there may be an embarrassment factor in an interview situation”). However, some text could be added referring in particular to underreporting.

Proposal for amendment in the report:

48. Add the following text to paragraph 230: “*Given that mode of collection may affect levels of reporting (for example, respondents may not want to verbally tell of their same-sex relationship) consideration should be given to testing the collection of such information in the most discreet way available. For example, if the survey has a self-administered section then the question could be placed there. Ideally question testing should determine whether the mode of collection is an issue, however, it is recognized that this is difficult as the population being measured is proportionally small*”.

49. **New Zealand** commented that the paper proposes that LAT information is collected using essentially Core questions (i.e. whether they are in an intimate relationship and how long they have been in that relationship for) in combination with questions about the characteristics of their partner and the reasons for the LAT arrangement. This approach has raised three concerns. First, such questions are deemed to be very sensitive and may be considered by respondents to be an unwelcome intrusion into their personal relationships. Second, collecting this information may raise privacy issues. For this reason, Statistics New Zealand has chosen not to collect this type of data. Third, there probably isn’t much value in collecting information about individuals’ relationship ‘intentions’ (i.e. “Do you intend to start living with your current LAT partner”), as studies have shown that intentions do not usually result in a corresponding behaviour. These questions may also be extremely difficult for a respondent to accurately answer.

Response by the Task Force:

50. The core questions recommended for LAT are very similar to those found in the Generations and Gender Survey which have already been tested by a number of countries. It is also indicated in paragraphs 6 and 7 (page 5) that this report provides recommendations regarding the emerging families and households but also recognizes that any given country may have different priorities for which specific forms to measure.

Chapter 5: Living apart but within a network

51. **Germany** had a remark on footnote 34 on page 81, “The term ‘most important help’ still could lead to very subjective interpretation by the respondent. We suggest discussing if an additional explanation how the term ‘important’ is defined together with the question could help to avoid this problem.”

Proposal for amendment in the report:

52. Replace the text of footnote 34 with the following text: “*With this question we are trying to assess the subjective evaluation of what respondents perceive as the most important support they give or receive. Understanding individual citizens’ perceptions and assessments is crucial not only for understanding their behaviours, but also for designing*”

and implementing policies, thus it is necessary to collect and develop subjective indicators (Veenhoven, 2002). Using “important” allows the giver to declare under a subjective perspective which is the help he/she provides which she/he considers as more valuable for who receives support. On the other hand, it allows the receiver to declare which is the help which she/he considers as more valuable for him/herself. Individuals living in different countries may provide a different interpretation of what is “important” for cultural reasons or specific characteristics of the policy environment. But these differences are particularly important both to detect specific tensions and gaps in policies, as well as resources and tensions in the individual and family arrangements.”

53. **New Zealand** wrote, “The presence of this topic is deemed slightly out of place when discussing emerging family and household forms. This topic may be more accurately discussed within a family function / wellbeing framework... The suggested approach involves an extensive suite of questions to identify the many aspects involved in this topic, but such a volume of questions would necessitate at least one additional module in a sample survey (such as the General Social Survey)....”

54. **Switzerland** similarly noted that “Living apart but within a network” is neither a particular form of alternative household, nor new at all. It added that among the five types surveyed in the report, this may be the most complex and resource-intensive to investigate, and that despite the interest of the topic, the final chapter may be considered as peripheral to the central goal of the report, which is to define and measure new forms of family and household arrangements.

Response by the Task Force:

55. Although the Task Force is aware that “Living apart, but within a network” is not a particular form of household alternative (as explicitly pointed out in page 76, par 259), the analyses of inter-household dynamics and network functioning are of central interest. Although some countries have already widely considered and included these topics in their surveys, this may not be the case for some other countries possibly interested in the topic. Likely for this reason, the formulation of a structured approach to survey the networking interactions among households, based on the consolidated experience of some countries, was requested from the Task Force and included in its mission.

56. **New Zealand** commented, “One omission is including data about extended families – both within and outside the household. Collecting data about both situations is very important, particularly in the New Zealand context. In this country, many Māori or Pacific people reside with members of their extended family and have extensive extended family support from outside their household. On the other hand it has been suggested that some European New Zealanders are more likely to find support among extended family that live in close proximity to their household. While this may be the case, extended family networks exist across cultures in New Zealand and provide many different types of financial, in-kind, emotional, and other types of support.”

Response by the Task Force:

57. The task force agrees with the comment of New Zealand. Nevertheless, whereas most traditional societies are characterized by multifamily households and extended families, in modern societies most household families consist of just one family. So, to look at the “modified extended families” means to consider a more diffuse situation and to balance the informative needs with the response burden.