

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

For discussion and
recommendations

First Meeting of the 2010/2011 Bureau
Geneva, 3-4 November 2010

Item 2(a) of the Provisional
Agenda

UNECE COMMENTS ON IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF TIME-USE SURVEYS

Note prepared by the secretariat

1. The comments below summarise the points raised at a discussion within the UNECE Statistical Division on the paper ECE/CES/BUR/2010/NOV/2.

I. OPPORTUNITIES

2. Time-use surveys provide important information for a better understanding of the functioning of societies. They cast light on key aspects of quality of life and behavioural change. Many aspects of time-use statistics have direct policy-relevance. For example, since many countries are increasingly shifting towards market-based organization of care services, the potential needs for such services can be better understood through the amount of time currently devoted to care tasks in the household.

3. Time-use surveys are well known for their contribution to the measurement of gender equality. For example, time-use surveys are the main source of information for a total of 24 variables from 28 countries in the UNECE Gender Database. In many other areas, the potential of time-use surveys may not yet have been sufficiently utilized, for example, to understand the patterns of leisure time, relationships dynamics, sleeping habits, consumer needs and preferences. It is therefore likely that the demand for time-use data from policymakers and other users will remain high.

II. CHALLENGES

4. The following challenges in the implementation of time-use surveys were identified:

- (a) Limited knowledge of the policy relevance of time-use surveys;
- (b) Unclear evaluation of the demand for time-use statistics;
- (c) The cost and response burden of time-use surveys make it difficult or prohibitive to their being conducted;
- (d) The insufficient harmonization of guidelines and classifications may be a reason why some countries refrain from conducting a time-use survey;
- (e) Low frequency of time-use surveys reduces their comparability among countries and their utility in addressing policy concerns and the recommendations of the Stiglitz-Sen report;

(f) Regarding international coordination, there are guidelines from the United Nations Statistics Division geared towards developing countries, and the EU harmonised framework (HETUS), which may be too flexible for cross-country comparisons.

III. INTERNATIONAL WORK

5. The following actions were found to bring benefit at the international level:

(a) Investigating the value added of time-use statistics over other regular national statistical programmes for measuring quality of life;

(b) Demonstrating the benefits of time-use statistics for policymaking;

(c) Reviewing, streamlining and strengthening existing guidelines for time-use surveys and related classifications;

(d) Exploring ways to produce time-use statistics at a lower cost and with less respondent burden.

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