



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

FERTILITY AND FAMILY SURVEYS



About the Programme

Introduction

FFS is the acronym for the Fertility and Family Surveys which have been conducted in the 1990s in selected Member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and were co-ordinated by the PAU. The FFS project has been largely financed by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The objectives of the programme were to:

- Conduct comparable Fertility and Family Surveys in about 20 ECE member countries;
- Create FFS standard national files and archive them at the PAU;
- Prepare national FFS Standard Country Reports; and
- Carry out a programme of cross-country comparative studies.

National FFS activities co-ordinated by the FFS project include, among other things: questionnaire design, data entry, standard national files preparation, standard country report production and cross-country comparative analysis. National FFS activities not co-ordinated by the FFS project include, among other things, sample design, fieldwork and report writing in national languages.

Several bodies supported the FFS project. The programme's participants were national population centres and national statistical offices, whose representatives comprised the FFS Informal Working Group. The FFS Advisory Group monitored and continues to monitor the FFS comparative research programme. The FFS Archiving Group is responsible for updating the documentation of the FFS project.

Research with the FFS data resulted in a wealth of publications, both at the national level and of a comparative nature. To inform researchers involved in the FFS project and other interested persons of FFS project developments an FFS Newsletter was published. As a kind of end of project event an FFS Flagship Conference was organized in Brussels from 29 to 31 May 2000.

For the period 2000-03, the PAU launched a project called "Generations and Gender: Research into their behaviour and quality of life". Some activities related to the FFS project continue under this new project.

Historical Background

The UNECE Regional Meeting on Population and Development, held in Budapest in February 1987, gave an impetus and political underpinning to an all-European project. During this intergovernmental meeting a number of scientific advisors to the national delegations promoted the recommendation on the feasibility of a new round of fertility and family

surveys in the UNECE region as a follow-up to the World Fertility Surveys. The meeting emphasized the need for policy-oriented research in the fields of family and fertility. In the recommendations it identified the study of determinants of family formation, family planning and fertility a priority activity for UNECE. It endorsed a new round of comparative fertility surveys to address these issues in an innovative manner. The recommendations were implemented in the programme of the PAU of the UNECE.

The FFS project was part of the UNECE population programme. Population analysis complements the economic research and analysis of the Economic Analysis Division of the UNECE. It includes data collection and research projects that are carried out under the supervision of the Conference of European Statisticians.

Partnership and reproductive behaviour patterns have undergone major shifts over much of Europe and North America during the past three decades, leading to the coexistence of various family forms, some of which are quite novel. As far as Europe is concerned, the shifts in behaviour, a multifaceted development par excellence, can be described, in the simplest of terms, as a trend that began in northern and western countries in the middle of the 1960s, subsequently spread to the south, and then more recently to central and several eastern European countries.

The numerous facets of these changes include, inter alia, the postponement of, and decline in, first marriage along with the increase in divorce and non-marital cohabitation and the postponement of parenthood as well as the increase in extra-marital childbearing and childlessness. The net result was the decline, sometimes of unprecedented magnitude, in period fertility and first marriage rates. One other important outcome was the emergence of a plurality of living arrangements and family forms, as manifest, inter alia, in the increasing numbers of young adults living alone and of one-parent and reconstituted families.

Changes in partnership and reproductive behaviour have mostly been documented using data from population census, vital registration and/or population registers. As the depth and breadth of these data vary a great deal across countries, the composite picture they can provide is at best patchy. Moreover, these data are often incapable of shedding light on the more subtle aspects of partnership behaviour, such as the onset of sexual relationship, the use of modern contraception, and living apart together, to mention just a few. Also, these data often preclude an in-depth analysis of interactions, such as those between school attendance and work on the one hand, and union formation and childbearing, on the other.

Well-focused sample surveys can greatly enhance demographers' ability to document and understand various aspects of partnership and reproductive behaviour. It is for this reason that in the late 1980s the PAU initiated a long-term sample survey research programme focusing on fertility and family change.

UNECE could not provide all the necessary financial resources to implement the FFS project. The FFS project has been largely financed by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The title of the UNFPA project during 1992-95, when most of the data collection took place, was "Fertility

and Family Surveys in Countries of the ECE Region". For the period 1996-99, the UNFPA project title changed to "Sexual Behaviour, Reproductive Health and Fertility Regulation in Countries with Economies in Transition". For reasons of continuity, the project's acronym FFS remained. These projects were implemented with the financial input from the participating national institutes and/or organizations. To enable the countries with economies in transition to conduct an FFS, the project also provided fund raising assistance when requested. Being an UNFPA-assisted project of the PAU, the FFS project has been evaluated in 1996 and 1998. The comparative research part of the FFS project has been evaluated in 2000.

More information on 'Origin and history of the FFS project: achievements and limitations' can be read in a paper of R. Cliquet that was solicited for the FFS Flagship Conference.

Support Groups

The list of persons, institutions and groups who have contributed to the FFS project is lengthy. In 1991 an FFS Informal Working Group has been established. In 1996 an FFS Advisory Group was created to co-ordinate the FFS comparative research programme. In order to prepare the end-of-project FFS Flagship Conference, the FFS Advisory Group was expanded in 1998 and became temporarily the Organising Committee of this Conference. In order to update and complete the Archives on the FFS project, a small FFS Archiving Group was established in May 2000.

The FFS project was initiated by the PAU in close collaboration with the Center for Population and Family Studies (CBGS) in Brussels (Belgium). Mr. R. Cliquet, former Director of the CBGS, and his staff contributed, among other things, to a theoretical framework for the programme and initial drafts of the model questionnaires. At a later stage, Mr. G. Beets of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI, The Hague) and Mr. L. Østby of Statistics Norway contributed to the development of a common outline for the preparation of national FFS Standard Country Reports.

FFS Informal Working Group

The FFS Informal Working Group (IWG) consisted of all individuals who have, in one way or another, been responsible for one or more aspects of the FFS in their respective countries. Over the years, IWG membership has grown considerably. At the end of the FFS project the IWG consisted of about 50 individuals; some countries are represented in the group by more than one person.

Between 1988 and 1997 IWG members met several times to exchange information, discuss problems and propose future activities. The IWG had meetings in Geneva in December 1988, January 1991, June 1991, May 1993, March 1996, November 1997.

FFS Advisory Group

The Advisory Group (AG) on the FFS programme of comparative research consists of the following members:

- Mr. Gijs Beets (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute, The Hague)
- Ms. Martine Corijn (Population Activities Unit, ex-officio since September 1999)
- Mr. Jerzy Holzer (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw) till his death in October 2001)
- Ms. Kathleen Kiernan (Department of Population Studies, London)
- Mr. Erik Klijzing (Population Activities Unit, ex-officio till August 1999)
- Mr. Andras Klinger (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Budapest)
- Mr. Miroslav Macura (Population Activities Unit, ex-officio)
- Ms. Antonella Pinnelli (University "La Sapienza", Rome)
- Mr. Lars Østby (Statistics Norway, Oslo)
- Mr. Laurent Toulemon (National Institute of Demographic Studies, Paris)

The primary functions of the AG are to:

- provide advice to the PAU and IWG concerning the programme of comparative research;
- invite and evaluate comparative research proposals; identify issues not receiving proper attention and stimulate research pertaining to them;
- provide advice, where necessary, to data supplying organizations;
- undertake coordination of research carried out by different groups and networks in order to avoid duplication;
- ensure that information on on-going research is widely and timely circulated; promote dissemination of research findings through, for example, professional publications and conferences.

The FFS AG had regularly meetings to monitor and steer the programme of FFS comparative research.

- 7- 8 October 1996 in Budapest (Hungary)
- 7 - 8 April 1997 in Rome (Italy)
- 5 November 1997 in Geneva (Switzerland)
- 18 - 19 May 1998 in Oslo (Norway)
- 30 August 1999 in the Hague (The Netherlands)
- 17-18 December 1999 in Geneva (Switzerland)
- 25 September 2000 in Brussels (Belgium).

Increasingly, AG members are relying on e-mail and other informal communication channels to consult each other on the FFS programme of comparative research. As the FFS comparative research programme continues, the FFS Advisory Group remains active.

Flagship Conference Organising Committee

- G. Beets, NIDI, the Netherlands,
- J. Holzer, Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland,
- L. Østby, Central Bureau of Statistics, Norway,
- Pinnelli, University 'La Sapienza', Italy,
- K. Kiernan, London School of Economics, United Kingdom,
- Klinger, Central Statistical Office, Hungary,
- R. Schoenmaeckers, CBGS, Belgium,
- L. Toulemon, INSEE, France,
- P. Turcotte, Statistics Canada, Canada,
- M. Macura, PAU/ECE, Switzerland,
- M. Corijn, PAU/ECE, Switzerland.

Archiving Group

In May 2000, Mr. J. Hoem (MPIDR, Rostock) convened a group on the archiving and documentation of the FFS data files. Mr. Botev, Ms. Corijn, Mr. Festy, Mr. Hoem, Mr. Leridon, Mr. Macura, Mr. Philipov attended the

meeting. The group agreed that it is essential to archive centrally technical documentation on the FFS project. In order to co-ordinate the work on these archives, an FFS Archiving Group was formed consisting of

- Ms. Martine Corijn (Population Activities Unit, PAU, Geneva, ex-officio)
- Mr. Patrick Festy (National Institute of Demographic Studies, INED, Paris)
- Mr. Dimiter Philipov (Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, MPIDR, Rostock)

The Archiving Group had its first meeting on 5 and 6 October 2000 in Geneva. The restructuring and continuous updating of the FFS web-site is the output of the work of this Archiving Group.