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**STATISTICS ON HOUSEHOLDS AND FAMILIES IN MEMBER COUNTRIES OF THE
CES**

Paper submitted by Statistics Norway¹

The purpose of this brief paper is to inform members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) about issues related to the quality and the comparability of statistics on households and families in the member countries of the CES, and to propose a study of these concepts in European censuses and other types of statistics.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Households and families are of basic importance for characterizing the life of most persons, and they are important units of statistical analysis in many areas, for instance, in studies of expenditure and income distribution, of the supply and demand of dwellings, of demographic behaviour, and of labour market participation, to name but a few. At the same time, rapid transformations in living arrangements and the emergence of new household types have been noted in many industrialized countries in the recent past. Prominent trends were, for instance, a later start of family life, increased cohabitation, larger numbers of one-parent families as a result of divorce, more reconstituted families, and increased proportions living alone, in younger ages in particular.

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2. Given these rapid changes in household and family behaviour, it is important that statistics in the field map the developments accurately, and that statistics are comparable across countries. Important data sources for family and household statistics are population censuses and sample surveys. Also, a number of countries are paying increasing attention to administrative registers as sources of household and family data. Household and family statistics derived from censuses may be compiled approximately every tenth year, while information from surveys and registers may be used to cover inter-census periods.

II. PREVIOUS WORK

3. Recommendations for the census of population and housing have been updated continuously to reflect the new reality concerning household and family behaviour. The implementation of the recommendations has been evaluated repeatedly, and proposals for improved recommendations have been made. Examples are:

- work by the Secretariat of the Conference of European Statisticians (“Sources of data on and definitions of households and families in countries in the ECE-region”, January 1983);
- work by the Select Committee of Experts on Household Structures of the Council of Europe (“Household structures in Europe”, 1990);
- the ISEGI-Eurostat workshop "Les statistiques sur les ménages et familles à l'aube du 21e siècle" in Lisbon, February 1995; and
- the work of the joint Eurostat/ECE Working Group on Households and Families, who delivered her report in July 1996.

One important overall conclusion of this work is that international comparability of concepts and definitions in the field of family and household statistics is improving slowly, but as of 1996 it was still rather poor.

4. Based on the work of the Eurostat/ECE working group mentioned under point 4, the recommendations concerning households and families in the 2000 round of censuses underwent major revisions compared to the 1990 round. One important revision was that consensual unions were included systematically in the new recommendations. Other revisions concerned *de jure/de facto* place of residence, the distinction between private and institutional households, the concept of child, and the concept of reconstituted family.

5. Given the new recommendations on households and families, evaluating the member countries' experiences must have high priority. To what extent have the new recommendations been implemented? What were the difficulties experienced by member countries? What solutions have been found? Did the new recommendations, and their implementation by individual countries, improve the quality (including the relevance) of statistics on households and families?

6. Censuses are carried out once every ten years in most countries. When it comes to more frequent sources, EU-SILC (European Survey on Income and Living Conditions) will probably be the best comparative annual source also for household statistics. . EU-SILC is a new panel survey, which replaces the European Household Panel (EHP). Data collection for EU-SILC will begin in 2004 in

most EU countries and in 2005 in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. In spite of small differences between the census and EU-SILC definitions, census experiences should be relevant when the first round of this survey is evaluated. LFS (Labour Force Survey) is the other main source for intra-census statistics. Also the LFS differs in design between countries, and labour market statistics, not household statistics, are its main goal.

III. SOME ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

7. Below we illustrate, by means of a few examples, the use of various definitions and concepts in the 1990 round of censuses (points 9-11), and in the 2000 round (points 12 and 13). A systematic overview of these issues does not exist. Therefore, most of the examples draw upon our own experience with Norwegian data.

8. The November 1990 Population and Housing Census for Norway tabulated 102,000 consensual unions. But two sample surveys from 1988 and 1994 indicated that the numbers in those years were 130,000 and 200,000. The three numbers suggest a strong fall between 1988 and 1990, and a steep rise thereafter. In reality, consensual unions have gradually become more and more popular in Norway since the end of the 1970s, and there are no indications for major fluctuations in the numbers. The census number relates to the household situation according to the Central Population Register, i.e. the *de jure* place of residence. However, the surveys are based on the *de facto* place of residence. The register does not always reflect the *de facto* place of residence accurately, and partners in a consensual union in particular are strongly under-registered. The fluctuations are a statistical artefact, which could have been avoided by using one and the same definition across data sources for the place of usual residence.

9. The next example concerns the definition of the "family" concept. The UN-ECE has recommended, in connection with the 2000 round of censuses, to define a family as a group of two or more persons within a private or institutional household who are related as husband and wife, as cohabiting partners, or as parent and child (i.e. family nucleus in the narrow sense). This implies that a family consists of at least two persons. Norway did not use this definition in its 2001 census. According to the Norwegian census definition, a person who lives alone is also considered as a family – a so-called one-person family. One consequence is that some indicators on family structures in Norway cannot be compared directly with those in countries that follow the recommended definition.

10. For instance, the 2001 census of Norway shows that 97 per cent of the 1.962 million private households are one-family households; see the table below. Compared to other countries, the Norwegian share is artificially high, since persons who live alone are also considered as families. In cases where one uses the recommended family definition, the share of one-family households is 59 per cent.

Table: Private households broken down by type. Norway, 2001

| | One-family households | | | Multi-family households | All private households |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| | All one-family households | One-person families | Multi-person families | | |
| Numbers in 1000s | 1 903 | 740 | 1 164 | 58 | 1 962 |
| As a % of all private households | 97 | 38 | 59 | 3 | 100 |

11. Next we present a brief international comparison of the notion of “private household”. There are two common options. First, a private household may be defined as a group of persons who share the same dwelling. This definition is commonly known as the “dwelling-unit concept of a household”. A somewhat stricter definition is the “housekeeping-unit concept”: in addition to living in the same dwelling, household members should also have common housekeeping (share a budget, share meals, etc.). Nine of the fifteen countries of the European Union (EU), as well as Switzerland, applied the housekeeping-unit definition in their census carried out around 1990. The household-dwelling concept was used in Denmark, Finland, France and Sweden, whereas Italy and Portugal defined a private household as all persons (sharing the same dwelling) with kinship relations (hence in practice the household in Italy and Portugal is equivalent to the family). Norway also employed the household-dwelling concept in its 1990 census.

12. Whether one uses the housekeeping-unit definition or the dwelling-unit definition has little effect on the total number of households. But one-person households may be affected more strongly: lodgers are counted as one-person households according to the housekeeping-unit concept, whereas they are members of the households with which they share the housing unit, when the dwelling-unit concept is used. Strictly speaking, one can only compare the share of one-person households across countries, provided one controls for the type of definition used for a private household.

13. To illustrate some of the experiences with the 2000 round of censuses, we discuss briefly the definition of “child” in the 1999 census of France and the 2001 census of Norway. The guidelines drawn up by the UN-ECE in connection with the 2000 round of censuses recommend considering as a child any person with no partner and no child who has usual residence in the household of at least one of the parents.

14. The guidelines propose no restriction on the child’s marital status or its age, when it comes to the *definition*. In connection with *classifications* of the population by family or household status, and of families and households by type, the UN-ECE recommend that a child should be below 25 years of age. Children aged 25 or more should not be classified as “child” but as “adult son/daughter”.

15. The dwelling form of the 1999-census of France recorded the relationship between all household members and the household’s reference person, including “Child of reference person”. The coding instructions stated that children should be recorded as such, irrespective of age or marital status.

Absence of a partner or children of the person who was to be recorded as child were not mentioned. In that respect, the French definition deviates from the UN recommendation. In the tabulations, however, the situation is different. INSEE PREMIERE no. 789 (July 2001) reports any never-married person who lives in the same household as his or her parent(s), without a spouse and without an own child, and irrespective of age, is considered a child. Both the condition “never-married” and the absence of any age limit (about ten per cent of all children in France are aged 25 or over) imply that the notion of child in the census tabulations is different from the UN recommendation.

16. The Norwegian census of 2001 considers a child to be any person younger than 18 years of age with no partner and no child, who has *de jure* residence in the household of at least one of the parents. This means that the Norwegian census follows the UN recommendations, except that the age limit is 18 years, not 25 years. This age limit makes it difficult to compare the number of children between the two countries, unless one controls for their ages.

17. The examples given in points 8-16 illustrate the importance of harmonized definitions and concepts in the field of households and families, both across countries and between various data sources in the same country. Therefore a project that explores how those definitions and concepts have been used in the 2000 round of censuses, as well as in major European surveys, should have high priority.

IV. PROPOSAL FOR A PROJECT

18. Statistics Norway proposes that a joint Eurostat/ECE research project on households and families in European censuses and other types of statistics be carried out. The purpose of the project is threefold.

(i) To evaluate questions and tabulations on households and families as implemented in the 2000 round of censuses by member countries of Eurostat and the ECE (Task 1). How useful were the 2000 set of recommendations for censuses of population and housing? To what extent were they implemented? What are the empirical outcomes? What circumstances caused particular problems in implementing the recommendations?

(ii) To compare family and household concepts, definitions and tabulated results in the census with those from other national and European sources (Task 2). Regarding concepts and tabulations, how do the census results relate to sources such as the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), the LFS, or the EU-SILC? How can household and family concepts in the latter type of sources be modified, so as to increase two types of comparability: first, comparability across countries, and second, comparability between censuses that cover the whole population roughly ten years apart on the one hand, and inter census survey results on the other hand.

- (iii) To propose improved recommendations on households and families for the 2010 round of censuses (Task 3).

19. The findings of the proposed project would serve several purposes. First, the project results would serve as an input to the work in connection with the forthcoming EU-SILC household surveys. The second purpose is important from a long-term perspective: the project results will facilitate Eurostat and the ECE secretariat in their work on evaluating the recommendations for the 2000 round of population censuses in the UNECE region, leading to an improved set of recommendations for use in the 2010 round of censuses. Finally, the project would provide input to future explorations of the usefulness of register data for the compilation of statistics on families and households. In general, the project would contribute to improved statistics on households and families in Europe. The results will also serve as a basis for descriptions of the family and household situation across Europe.

20. This proposal was presented informally at the February meeting of the Bureau of the Conference. The Bureau reaffirmed the importance of advancing the work in this area. The ECE supports the proposal and is ready to participate actively in this initiative.

21. The initiative was approved by the April 2002 Eurostat meeting of Directors of Social Statistics, and it was reaffirmed in their April 2003 meeting. It was suggested that the project be organized as a Task Force, representing the statistical agencies and some member states in the ECE region, to follow the project. Several countries expressed their interest in the proposed project.

V. SUMMARY AND OPEN ISSUES

22. Statistics Norway proposes a joint Eurostat/ECE research project on households and families in European censuses and other types of statistics. The project should evaluate household and family issues in the 2000 round of censuses (Task 1), in major European surveys such as EU-SILC and LFS (Task 2), and propose improved recommendations on households and families for the 2010 round of censuses (Task 3). We hope to carry out the work on Task 1 during the period from late Autumn 2003 to the summer of 2004. Next, Task 2 can be performed, provided that financial means have been identified. Task 3 can be undertaken by a small Task Force with representatives from CES/ECE and Eurostat. The Task Force should also monitor Tasks 1 and 2.

23. Several issues have yet to be addressed, two of which are mentioned here. First, given that different family forms are not equally important across Europe, should the project focus on selected parts of Europe? Second, EU-SILC and LFS are major surveys for countries in the European Economic Area. At the same time, censuses are equally important for all countries across Europe. This brings up the question of an appropriate balance between the census parts and the survey parts in the project.