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**TOWARDS POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE CENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS ON
FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS**

Submitted by Statistics Canada *

1. Introduction

1. This short working paper is an extension of the Report by the ECE Task Force on Families and Households entitled *Families and Households in the 2000 Round of Censuses in ECE Member Countries*. It presents an overview of some of the main concepts related to families and households likely to require new, improved or modified recommendations in the 2010 round of censuses. The report focuses on 4 concepts: reconstituted families, same-sex relationships, private versus institutional households, and homelessness. For each of these concepts, the report will briefly discuss the 2000 recommendations, present some issues with the collection and processing of census data in each area, and will suggest some options for the upcoming censuses. The commentary will rely extensively on recent work conducted in Canada (in the 2001 Census and in the recent preparatory work for the 2006 Census) but is also based on the experiences of

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other ECE countries. Since the report has not been discussed yet with other members of the Task Force, it solely represents the views of the authors.

2. Reconstituted families

2. With the increase in the number of family events (especially the formation and dissolution of marital and nonmarital unions), there is an increasing proportion of people (adults and children) who are living with family members with whom they have a step relationship. In general, two approaches can be used to measure reconstituted families: the full matrix approach, in which each member of the household defines his/her relationship to the other members, and the “relationship to the reference person” approach, in which relations are defined with respect to one person.

3. On one hand, reconstituted families are not easily captured with the “relationship to the reference person” approach. The step relationship (between a child and a spouse) could be with another adult in the household, most often the spouse of the reference person. This relationship is lost in the conventional relationship question. On the other hand, the full matrix approach appears complex and cumbersome in self-administered questionnaires and would require major changes to the relationship question for many countries.

4. In the 2000 recommendation, a reconstituted family was defined as “a family consisting of a married or cohabiting couple with one or more children, where at least one child is a non-common child i.e. either the natural or adopted child of only one member of the couple. If the child (natural or adopted) of one partner is adopted by the other partner, the resulting family is still a reconstituted family.” A minority of ECE countries collected and disseminated data on these families. Only 19 of the 46 countries surveyed by the Task Force said that they were able to identify reconstituted families using census data, but only eight have provided data on reconstituted families in their tabulation programme. The Task Force concluded that reconstituted families have created problems for many countries. It recommended that, in trying to improve the situation in 2010, the issue of whether or not mapping the full matrix of relationships between all household members should receive considerable attention.

5. In an effort to minimize changes to the relationship question, to keep the question as simple as possible, and yet to come up with reliable estimates of reconstituted families, considerations may also be given to other alternatives. For example, the introduction of key relationships between selected household members in the “relationship to the reference person” approach may be sufficient to identify these families. If one assumes that the vast majority of step relationships are found between the household reference person or his/her spouse and their children living in the same household, capturing the relationships between these children and the two spouses could provide enough information to derive reliable estimates of reconstituted families.

6. Tests have recently been conducted in Canada. In an April 2003 (small-scale cognitive) test, new response choices reflecting other possible relationships between household members were added to the relationship to the reference person question.¹ The following question was tested:

¹ In Canada, the household reference person is referred to as Person 1 in the questionnaire.

<p>6 RELATIONSHIP TO PERSON 1</p> <p>For each person usually living here, describe his/her relationship to Person 1.</p> <p>Mark "X" or specify one response only.</p> <p>If none of the choices apply, use the "Other" box to indicate this person's relationship to Person 1.</p> <p>Examples of "Other" relationships to Person 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * grandparent * son-in-law or daughter-in-law * brother-in-law or sister-in-law * niece or nephew * lodger's husband or wife * room-mate's daughter or son * employee 	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PERSON 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Husband or wife of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Common-law partner (opposite sex) of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Common-law partner (same sex) of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Son or daughter of both Person 1 and Person 1's spouse <input type="checkbox"/> Son or daughter of Person 1 only <input type="checkbox"/> Son or daughter of Person 1's spouse only <input type="checkbox"/> Grandchild of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Father or mother of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Brother or sister of Person 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Lodger or boarder <input type="checkbox"/> Room-mate <input type="checkbox"/> Other — Specify
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7. The response categories for children allow for the distinction between the child of both the reference person and his/her spouse, the child of the reference person only, and the child of the reference person's spouse only. Results were promising but the effectiveness of the new response choices depends on the order in which household members are reported. When the proper order is followed – i.e., spouses are listed first, followed by the children – the response choices are clear. On the other hand, if the children's names precede the names of one or both members of the couple, the response choices become confusing. It was decided that further tests with a larger number of blended-family participants should be carried out before this approach is included in a statistically representative test.

8. In the 2000 round of censuses, selected ECE countries captured step relationships between children and the reference person. One key element to that approach is that adults in the household must report in the proper order so that the step relationship can be captured. Examples of that approach can be found in Australia and in the USA.

9. It is recommended that the Task Force assess the different approaches and try to formulate new recommendations for 2010. Considerations should also be given to the expansion of the reconstituted families definition. A further breakdown between "simple" and "complex" reconstituted families should be discussed. A "simple" reconstituted family (often referred to as a "step" family) contains at least one child from a previous relationship of one of the parents. A "complex" reconstituted family (often referred to as a "blended" family) contains children of both spouses from previous unions, or one or more children from previous unions and one or more children from the current union.

3. Same-sex partnerships

10. Few countries are collecting data on same-sex partnerships in their census of population, including Canada, the USA and New Zealand. In Canada, numerous legal changes and the growing societal recognition of same-sex partnerships increased the need for data. These three countries have used different data collection methods. No specific United Nations recommendations for the collection of such data were formulated for the 2000 round of censuses. The definition of couple was not however exclusive of same-sex relationships. The term couple included 'married couples and couples who report that they are living in consensual unions, and where feasible, a separate count of consensual unions and of legally married couples should be given. Two persons are understood as partners in a consensual union when they have usual

residence in the same household, are not married to each other, and report to have a marriage-like relationship to each other.” No mention was made of the spouses’ sex.

11. It is recognized that the inclusion, in the census of population, of any new concept requires a complete testing strategy. The introduction of definitions and response categories on a sensitive issue, such as same-sex partnerships, would be no exception. The collection of such data is closely related to confidentiality and privacy issues. It is understood that not all countries will see the need to collect data on this topic. Still, the Task Force could recommend some “good practices”.

12. The collection approach taken in the 2001 Canadian Census differs somewhat from the one used in the United States and in New Zealand. One main distinction is that, in the United States and New Zealand, the categories used in the Relationship to the household reference person question do not allow for the distinction between opposite-sex and same-sex cohabiting partners. The United States uses the term “unmarried partners” whereas New Zealand has the category “My wife/husband/partner/de facto” to identify all spouses and partners. Thus, one has to rely on the sex question to make the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual couples. A similar approach was tested in Canada prior to 2001. Analysis of the 1991 and 1996 Census data revealed however that many *apparent* same-sex relationships were actually cases of opposite-sex partners who mistakenly provided the same response on the gender question. (This could in part be due to the matrix format of the Canadian Census questionnaire, which may encourage some respondents to answer a question for all household members before moving to the next question. That can lead to some confusion as to whom the answer is provided for.) A very small error rate on a base of several million individuals may have a major effect on the accuracy of the data for a small population if errors are concentrated in that latter population. After careful testing, a different data collection method was used in the 2001 Canadian Census. A separate category for same-sex partners was added to the question on the relationship to the reference person. The question is reproduced in Appendix A.

13. It is recommended that the Task Force on Families and Households review the concepts and methods used in several countries and come up with recommendations on this issue for the 2010 round of censuses. Furthermore, given recent legal changes in some countries, the possible collection of data on same-sex marriages should be discussed, and implications on the current definitions should be assessed.

4. Private versus Institutional Households

14. For the 2000 round of censuses, the UN definition of a private household made the distinction between one-person and multi-person households, and between the housekeeping-unit concept and the household-dwelling concept. The following definition was provided for institutional households: “An institutional household comprises persons whose need for shelter and subsistence are being provided by an institution. An institution is understood as a legal body for the purpose of long-term inhabitation and provision of institutionalized care given to a group of persons. The institution's accommodation is by nature of its structure intended as a long-term accommodation for an institutional household.”

15. The distinction between private and institutional households is not always straightforward. Classification problems arise when households have attributes of both private and institutional households. Certain specialized housing estates, such as retirement villages for the elderly, fall in that category. Other examples include multi-purpose institutional households, such as those providing different services according to people’s needs, and self-contained

apartments on campus). The distinction between private and institutional household is also important because it often impacts on the level of information collected from household members (often only limited information is collected from people in institutions).

16. In Canada, persons in seniors' residences² may have living arrangements that are more similar to persons in private households than to those in other collective institutional dwellings. There has been a significant increase in the growth of residences for senior citizens, and this is expected to continue as baby-boomers reach the age of retirement. Persons in seniors' residences represent a substantial component of the total institutional population in Canada (between 15% and 20%). Very little is known about the socio-economic status of persons who live in residences as opposed to seniors who live in private households.

It is recommended that the Task Force review carefully the definitions of private and institutional households used in ECE countries, and try to formulate with new recommendations that would facilitate the distinction between the two household types.

5. Homelessness

17. In censuses, people are enumerated at their place of residence (usual or *de facto*). The dwelling (private or institutional) is the basic unit of enumeration. Since, by definition, the homeless population do not have a (permanent) place of residence, their enumeration in a census poses a major challenge. The transient nature of the population is also an issue. The greatest challenge to counting the homeless population is finding them. Yet, many major users of census data (including policy makers) have expressed a need for data on the homeless population.

18. There is no consensus on how to define and to measure homelessness. Some definitions are quite narrow in scope and focus solely on persons who live on the street. Other definitions are much broader and encompass not only persons living on the street, but those living in temporary housing (shelters), single rooms which exclude private kitchens and bathrooms, and people living in housing which is close to the minimum standard.

19. The definition of homelessness is often comprised of two components and levels of homelessness: the *absolute homeless* and the *relative homeless*. Who should be included in each group, however, can vary from one definition to another, thereby confirming the fluidity of the concept. For example, while there appears to be consensus on defining persons living outdoors as *absolute homeless*, there is no consensus on whether to include persons living in shelters as *absolute homeless* or *relative homeless*.

20. The UN considers the right to adequate housing very broadly and emphasises the right to security, peace and dignity. Adequacy should take into account affordability, protection from the elements, access to safe water and sanitation, security of tenure, accessibility to employment, education and health care and cultural identity and diversity.

21. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992)³ stress the importance of the relative nature and the cultural basis of homelessness. A definition of homelessness should be considered in relationship

² Seniors' residences provide mainly supervision and supportive services or "assisted living" to residents who are able to function independently even though they might be losing this ability. Residents have their own living quarters similar to an apartment but they usually have access to a common dining room/cafeteria, and recreational services.

³ C. Chamberlain and D. MacKenzie. 1992 "Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning", Australian Journal of Social Issues, 27 (4), pp. 274-297.

to the housing conventions of a particular culture. Thus, a definition of homelessness will vary from culture to culture.

22. How to measure homelessness and operationalize the definition of homelessness within the context of a national census is a complex issue. Persons who make use of shelter facilities are certainly easier to enumerate than people living on the street. However, even enumeration in shelters can be a challenge. The one-day “snapshot” approach used in most censuses may not be the most conducive way to determine the number of persons living in shelters. The number of persons who use shelters on census day may depend on the weather, the time of the year when enumeration takes place, the time of the month when government cheques are distributed and, the availability of space in the shelter. To identify persons living temporarily with others is also complex because it requires a specific question on all census forms. There is also the issue of identifying homeless persons who are living in collective dwellings other than shelters such as hostels or rooming houses.

23. In the 2001 Canadian Census, the initiative in terms of enumerating the homeless population focused on gathering information on persons in shelters.⁴ As a result, the data from the 2001 Census are largely based on the number of persons living in shelters. Homeless persons living on the street were not systematically counted in all geographic areas. Furthermore, homeless people that spent Census night in other institutional or private dwellings (such as rooming houses, halfway houses, hostels, or people living with friends or family) were enumerated but were not counted as homeless people.

24. For the 2006 Canadian Census, the focus of the “homeless strategy” likely will focus on improving the enumeration of homeless persons in shelters and other collective dwellings as opposed to counting persons on the street. Testing the possibility of using a method other than the one-day “snapshot” approach is also considered.

25. It is recommended that the Task Force review the definitions of absolute and relative homeless, and provide guidance as to how these populations can be enumerated. The Task Force should also pay special attention to the work done in Australia to count the homeless population. There has been a great deal of effort in this country to collect and disseminate information about the homeless. One should note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines homelessness broadly, i.e. including both the absolute homeless and the relative homeless. That definition was operationalized for Census purposes by including persons sleeping outdoors and in shelters, persons living in boarding rooms and caravan/trailer parks, as well as persons staying with family or friends. The Australian Homeless Enumeration Strategy appears to be, to date, the most systematic effort to count the homeless population in a census of population. Australia reported that 99, 900 persons were homeless in the 2001 Census.

⁴ Shelters refer to facilities for persons lacking a fixed address as well as other shelters with lodging and assistance services.

Appendix A: Selected Demographic questions, 2001 Census of Canada

<p>5 IS THIS PERSON LIVING WITH A COMMON-LAW PARTNER?</p> <p><i>Common-law refers to two people of the opposite sex or of the same sex who live together as a couple but who are not legally married to each other.</i></p>	<p>09 <input type="radio"/> Yes 10 <input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p>09 <input type="radio"/> Yes 10 <input type="radio"/> No</p>
<p>6 RELATIONSHIP TO PERSON 1</p> <p>For each person usually living here, describe his/her relationship to Person 1.</p> <p>Mark "X" or specify one response only.</p> <p><i>Stepchildren, adopted children and children of a common-law partner should be considered sons and daughters.</i></p> <p><i>If none of the choices apply, use the "Other" box to indicate this person's relationship to Person 1.</i></p> <p><i>Examples of "Other" relationships to Person 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grandparent • cousin • niece or nephew • lodger's husband or wife • room-mate's daughter or son • employee 	<p>11 <input checked="" type="radio"/> PERSON 1</p>	<p>12 <input type="radio"/> Husband or wife of Person 1</p> <p>13 <input type="radio"/> Common-law partner (opposite-sex) of Person 1</p> <p>14 <input type="radio"/> Common-law partner (same-sex) of Person 1</p> <p>15 <input type="radio"/> Son or daughter of Person 1</p> <p>16 <input type="radio"/> Son-in-law or daughter-in-law of Person 1</p> <p>17 <input type="radio"/> Grandchild of Person 1</p> <p>18 <input type="radio"/> Father or mother of Person 1</p> <p>19 <input type="radio"/> Father-in-law or mother-in-law of Person 1</p> <p>20 <input type="radio"/> Brother or sister of Person 1</p> <p>21 <input type="radio"/> Brother-in-law or sister-in-law of Person 1</p> <p>22 <input type="radio"/> Lodger or boarder</p> <p>23 <input type="radio"/> Room-mate</p> <p>Other — Specify</p> <p>24 <input style="width: 100px; height: 15px;" type="text"/></p>
