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COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL WORK IN THE UNECE REGION

Eurostat comments on the paper "Review of population statistics" (ECE/CES/2007/3)

Submitted by Eurostat

1. The paper provides a useful and comprehensive analysis of the problems in the field of population statistics and highlights as a major issue the absence of international standards for the production of these statistics. Dissemination is also considered a critical topic for the European region following the end of the activities of the European Population Committee of the Council of Europe (CoE). Although there are some areas where Eurostat would take a more positive view of the current situation and likely developments, there are no significant points of disagreement with the main facts detailed in the paper.
2. The problem of differing practices at national level in the European region has been known for some time. Eurostat published a detailed report in 2003¹ describing and comparing the systems used to collect demographic statistics, the definitions of main vital events and methods used to compute demographic indicators in 31 European countries. This publication was a follow up to an earlier report in 1994².
3. Eurostat has undertaken a series of actions to improve the comparability of demographic

¹ Eurostat (2003): "Demographic statistics: definitions and method of collection in 31 European countries". Eurostat Working Papers and Studies, 3/2003/E/5. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

² Eurostat (1994): "Definitions and methods of collecting demographic statistics in the European Community countries". Theme 3, Series Methods. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

statistics. Among these, there is an in-depth review of the annual demographic data collection carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and, until 2006, Council of Europe. This action should result in a revised Joint Eurostat/UNSD demographic questionnaire and related definitions. This will have an important impact on the harmonisation of demographic statistics.

4. The next step will be the launch of the procedure for a European Union (EU) regulation on annual demographic statistics, which will establish a legal base for the content and definitions for the EU demographic data collections. Of particular importance will be those population statistics used as part of the qualified majority voting procedures in the Council of the EU.

5. The demographic data collection formerly undertaken by the CoE in ten countries³ has now been taken over by Eurostat. The addition of these countries to the 38 countries⁴ already covered by the Eurostat data collection will ensure almost full coverage of Europe and of the Caucasian region.

6. Eurostat demographic data are disseminated in a timely and impartial manner. Every year, Eurostat carries out four demographic data collections: in spring, on the main demographic aggregates ("Rapid" questionnaire); by the end of the summer, on detailed demographic data ("Joint" questionnaire); in autumn, on the most recent monthly data ("Nowcasting" questionnaire) and by the end of the year on the regional detail ("Regional" questionnaire). All these data are freely available in the Eurostat online dissemination database shortly after the reception of the data from the countries. For example, at the very beginning of the year, Eurostat releases estimates (nowcasting) for the main aggregates, including the total population on 1 January of the same year. The normal delay between the data transmission from the countries and the release of the data from Eurostat is around 2-3 months. This short delay will be further reduced thanks to the adoption of new technologies. Timeliness of the demographic data for the European region is therefore not really a concern; on the contrary, the EU performs well on this.

7. In addition to the free dissemination via on-line database, Eurostat has a series of publications, highlighting the main demographic issues. With the inclusion of the 10 ex-CoE competence countries in the relevant demographic publications, Eurostat will cover the whole CoE area, as it was in the past for the European Population Committee. This was already the case for some Eurostat publications, generally issued in the series "Statistics in Focus".

8. Eurostat also facilitates the exchange of national expertise through its Working Group on Demographic Statistics and Population and Housing Censuses. Several members of this forum were also members of the European Population Committee and actively contribute to the analysis of national demographic data⁵.

9. The importance of demographic projections carried out independently from any kind of external influence is recognised. Governments and statistical authorities in the European Union

³ Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Monaco, Russian Federation, San Marino and Ukraine.

⁴ This set includes the EU-27 Member States, the three EU Candidate Countries (HR, MK and TR), the four EFTA countries, plus Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro.

⁵ See for instance Eurostat (2007): "Demographic Outlook – National reports on the demographic developments in 2005". Eurostat Methodologies and Working Papers series. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

have committed themselves to adhering to this principle in the European Statistics Code of Practice.

10. Eurostat regularly carries out independent and internationally consistent population projections at national and regional level for the EU-27 Member States. For the next exercise, it is likely that the coverage will be enlarged, given the explicit request of extra-EU countries.
11. Beside the joint Eurostat/UNECE workshop on demographic projections, the development of good practice at national level is facilitated by Eurostat through the Working Group on Population Projections. In this forum, national experts can present and discuss technical issues and be informed of the latest methodological developments (e.g. ongoing international projects funded by the European Commission under the 6th Framework Programme).
12. The need for guidelines and assistance for the post-census revision of population estimates is acknowledged. Eurostat has planned to further⁶ contribute to this topic, reviewing current national practices in the EU area and adding this item to the agenda of the next meetings of the Working Group on Demographic Statistics and Population and Housing Censuses. In addition, *ad-hoc* workshops can be envisaged in co-operation with other international organizations.
13. The paper is correct in highlighting the particular problems that reduce the quality and completeness of migration data as an input to population statistics. However, some of the successes of international cooperation in migration statistics need to be mentioned, as well as areas of ongoing improvement.
14. In parallel to the cooperation in the collection of demographic data, there is well-established international cooperation and coordination for migration statistics. The Joint Annual Migration Questionnaire is administered by Eurostat, with data being requested from all countries in the UNECE region and transferred to UNSD, UNECE, and the International Labour Organization (and formerly the Council of Europe).
15. Within the EU, the development of legislation for migration statistics is well advanced. A framework regulation covering many of the 'core' statistics on migration and asylum should come into force later in 2007. The approach followed by the legislation is to introduce harmonised statistical definitions based on established international standards and the existing EU legislation on border controls, immigration and asylum. In effect, within the EU this gives legal force to the definitions of usual residence and long-term migration set out in the *UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*. The effects of this will also be seen in countries outside of the EU, as this has had the effect of re-stating the importance of implementing the *UN Recommendations*. Practical efforts will be made to assist Member States with the implementation of the legislation – through consultancy and methodological assistance to ensure that the best use is made of available data and through the development of statistical estimation methods to be used in the absence of directly observed data. Again, this assistance will have a positive effect outside of the EU as the methods and data sources developed will be

⁶ See Eurostat (2003): "Basic methodology for the recalculation of intercensal population estimates". Eurostat Working Papers and Studies series, 3/2003/E/27. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

fully published.

16. The Eurostat Migration Statistics Working Group serves as a forum for the exchange of views among national experts. The established series of Joint UNECE/Eurostat work sessions on migration statistics also offers an important opportunity for the practical discussion and review of the main challenges relating to migration statistics. Recent meetings have supported the organization and coordination of practical studies such as the review of the use of destination countries' immigration data as an input to the estimation of emigration. A long-standing problem of migration statistics in a number of countries has been the poor communication between national statistical institutes and the Ministries of Interior that are often the major (potential) source of data and user of the statistics. It is encouraging that at these international meetings, countries are increasingly represented by officials from both national statistical institutes and Ministries of Interior.

17. It is true that the removal of border controls in the Schengen area and the reduction in formalities for EU citizens wishing to live and work in other EU Member States has reduced the availability of some of the administrative data previously used for migration statistics. However, a significant positive effect of improved European cooperation is the growing harmonisation of asylum and immigration legislation and practices – meaning that common concepts and definitions can increasingly be applied to data collections.

18. The overall aim of Eurostat in this field is to achieve full and harmonised databases of population data for the European region, freely accessible by all and at any time. In some of the activities necessary to achieve this goal, Eurostat is cooperating closely with UN agencies, other international organizations and with leading European demographic institutes.

19. In conclusion, the views expressed in the paper take a rather pessimistic position. The importance of agreeing and implementing harmonised definitions and improved demographic (not only population) statistics is acknowledged. Similarly the concerns and problems described in the paper are well understood. However, in the European region at least, many of these problems are being addressed in a positive manner. In particular, the systematic and timely dissemination of data and publications on Europe and Caucasian countries should be noted. To assist in the production of annual population statistics, forums and materials already exist that can provide useful help to improve national practises. Actions are undertaken at European levels that are continuing to improve harmonisation of population statistics. This paper serves a useful purpose in raising the awareness of the problems at a higher level, thereby supporting ongoing activities and facilitating the transfer of know-how between regions and countries.

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