



UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

FERTILITY AND FAMILY SURVEYS



Comparative Research

Introduction

The standard national FFS data files have been prepared to stimulate cross-national comparative research on fertility and family issues. In 1996 an FFS programme on comparative research started. By submitting a research proposal to the FFS Advisory Group, the standard national files of the participating countries could be and still can be obtained for research purposes. The information on how to apply for these standard national data includes an application form.

Some basic guidelines are given on how to start working with the FFS data files.

As of June 2002, 100 research projects were approved. Information on their outputs is available.

In the context of a request of an evaluation of the FFS project by the Conference of European Statisticians, a comparative research project evaluating the FFS project has been commissioned. The report is available.

FFS Comparative Research Programme

In November 1994, the PAU convened a small FFS ad-hoc expert group in order to develop a programme of FFS comparative research. In 1996, the FFS Informal Working Group decided to create an Advisory Group on the FFS programme of comparative research.

Researchers from all countries participating in the FFS project, as well as those not taking part in it, who are interested in analysing standard national files available from the FFS database were welcome and still are welcome to submit their research proposals and corresponding data requests to the FFS Project Manager.

A deadline for submitting first-round proposals was 1 March 1997, that for second-round proposals was 1 October 1997. For third-round proposals there were 4 dates in 1998. For this third round, the FFS AG emphasized that they would welcome in particular proposals for analysis of selected methodological issues affecting cross-national comparability of results, such as national differences in

- total non-response
- sampling frame used
- sampling errors
- selecting single- versus five-year birth cohorts
- interviewing one or more than one respondent per household
- collecting event histories (connected versus disconnected)
- post-stratification weighting
- imputation of missing and/or implausible data.

As of 1999 no more formal deadline is set. Proposals can be submitted at any time.

Countries for which standard national data became available for comparative research up to now are:

<i>Austria</i>	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Poland</i>
<i>Belgium</i>	<i>Greece</i>	<i>Portugal</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Slovenia</i>
<i>Canada</i>	<i>Italy</i>	<i>Spain</i>
<i>Czech Republic</i>	<i>Latvia</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
<i>Estonia</i>	<i>Lithuania</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Finland</i>	<i>Norway</i>	<i>United States of America</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>	

How to Obtain FFS Standard National Files

FFS Standard National Files can be obtained for research purposes by submitting a research proposal to the UNECE Population Activities Unit (UNECE PAU). Since 1999, no more formal deadline is set. Proposals can be submitted at any time. As of January 2001, 85 research projects were approved.

Before submitting a research proposal researchers should consult the list of the titles of the approved research projects that are going on and their outputs, so that overlap can be avoided and/or collaboration can be initiated. The address of the first author of each research project is mentioned in this list. The PAU has been requesting the authors of the approved research proposals to provide information on the progress made with the research project. Under the item 'Progress Report' the information on the outputs as it was provided by the authors can be found.

FFS research proposals and their corresponding data requests should be submitted through a special application form. Individuals wishing to submit proposals for cross-country comparative research along with requests for standard national files are invited to complete this application form and return it to the UNECE PAU. Only proposals for specific, well-defined comparative research projects with finite time frames will be accepted. Completed applications exceeding 4 pages will not be considered; each accompanying CV shall be at most 1 page long.

Proposals and requests will be reviewed by the UNECE PAU in due course after submission of the proposal.

After this, successful applicants will be requested to submit signed data confidentiality pledges to the PAU before the requested data can be distributed. Confidentiality pledges are part of the application form. Special permission has to be obtained from the National Statistical Office to work with the Swedish and Swiss data files.

Starting To Work With FFS Standard National Files

Before starting to work with the Standard National Files, users are advised to read carefully all the available information on the survey design used in the participating countries.

A particular variable in the different standard national files is not always based on exactly the same question from the national questionnaire in the participating countries. Therefore it is necessary to consult the 'link-tables' where a link is made between each variable in the standard national file and the specific question (or related questions) in the national questionnaires.

Whenever an asterisk is mentioned in the 'link-table', it may be useful to consult the question and its phrasing and/or routing in the original questionnaire of the country concerned.

At the moment we are collecting useful information from previous users of the FFS data files on the problems they had with particular variables and the solutions, if any.

A critical evaluation of the Survey design and of the Standard Recode Files can be found in the a report written by P. Festy and F. Prioux that will be published in the beginning of 2001.

Evaluation of the FFS Project

The UNFPA has funded the FFS project and other projects of the PAU. In this context the UNECE along with the UNFPA commissioned an evaluation of these projects. A first evaluation of three UNFPA-assisted projects of the PAU was commissioned to D.J. van de Kaa and C. Scott. Their report was published in January 1996. A second evaluation of four UNFPA-assisted projects of the PAU was commissioned to D.J. van de Kaa and R. Palomba. Their report was published in May 1998.

The activities of the PAU are carried out under the supervision of the Conference of European Statisticians since 1998. The Conference of European Statisticians has requested an evaluation of the FFS project as a condition to start any second survey round (CES/1998/34/Add.4). In order to meet this request the PAU has commissioned an evaluation of the FFS project to Mr. P. Festy (INED, Paris) in February 2000.

The terms of reference for this evaluation were to review and assess the methodological development of the FFS project; to assess the degree of achievement of the immediate objectives, as adjusted over time, and progress made towards the long-range objectives; to assess the implementation and achievements; to assess the contribution of the FFS project to the knowledge of fertility and family behaviour in the UNECE region.

A first report on the evaluation of the FFS project has been presented by Mr. Festy and Ms. Prioux at the FFS Flagship Conference in Brussels (29-31 May 2000). The final report "*An evaluation of the Fertility and Family Surveys Project*" by Patrick Festy and France Prioux, Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques, Paris, is available.