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**Economic Commission for Europe**

## Conference of European Statisticians

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Item 6(c) of the provisional agenda

**Guidelines for harmonizing time use surveys****Summary of comments on the Guidelines for harmonising  
time use surveys****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the Guidelines for harmonising time use surveys, resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in April-May 2013.

A total of 31 replies were received: from 27 countries and 4 international organizations. The comments showed broad support to the Guidelines. The countries also provided many proposals and suggestions for revision and clarification, which are summarized in this document.

The Conference is invited to discuss the Guidelines in the light of the comments summarized in this document. The Task Force on Time Use Surveys will revise the Guidelines reflecting the comments from the consultation and from the CES plenary session, and present them for endorsement to the October 2013 meeting of the CES Bureau.

## I. Introduction

1. The present note summarizes the comments by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Guidelines for harmonising time use surveys*, resulting from the electronic consultation conducted by the secretariat in April-May 2013.

## II. Summary

2. The secretariat has received 31 responses through the consultation. Twenty-seven countries and four international organizations responded: Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Eurostat, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

3. The comments showed broad support to the Guidelines. Nineteen countries and four international organizations provided explicit statements of support and appreciation of the Guidelines and highlighted their various positive aspects. No country or organization opposed the Guidelines.

4. The comments included many proposals and suggestions for revision, which are summarized in sections III-V and in the annex. Additionally, Canada, United States and UNSD provided detailed comments on specific formulations. Several countries stated agreement with specific recommendations in the Guidelines and provided information on their experience with time use surveys.

5. The Task Force on Time Use Surveys has reviewed the comments and held an audio conference on 22 May to discuss them. The Task Force agreed on specific actions to implement the many proposals to improve the Guidelines. The Task Force also noted that a number of proposals requested are beyond the scope of these Guidelines and cannot be pursued in this context. To address some of the comments, the Task Force will have to contact the responding organizations to obtain more detailed information.

## III. General comments

6. **Canada** pointed out the need for further editing of the Guidelines to ensure consistency in the scope of material covered as well as in style, terminology and references. In the same vein, **ILO** emphasised the need to adjust references to several concepts with existing international statistical standards adopted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians. In particular the guidelines should make use of existing standards/resolutions on the boundaries of employment, unpaid activities, volunteer work and voluntary activities and the measurement of working time, as well as the production and general production boundaries of the System of National Accounts. **ILO** also suggested that the deliberations on harmonising time use surveys should consider the importance of the benefits that result from complementing labour force surveys with time use surveys, including the possibility of aligning the time use information to particular jobs.

7. **Sweden** found that the purpose of the Guidelines should be more clearly explained. They also referred to the need for a clearer distinction between the recommended and not recommended approaches, particularly concerning the choice between surveys with a light and full-scale diary (also brought up by **UNSD**), the use of stylised questions (also brought

up by **Latvia**), the linkage between survey objectives and their periodicity and the presentation of different data collection methods.

8. **Sweden** further referred to the need to explain the relation between the level of detail and costs/response burden from the perspective of distinguishing between an activity within the economic production boundary or outside the production boundary.

9. The **United Kingdom** mentioned that time use surveys are valuable but very expensive surveys. In a time of severely constrained resources an extremely strong business case would be required to collect more time-use data, in response to the Guidelines recommendation on carrying out a full-scale time use survey every ten years. They also referred to the existence of alternative sources to produce the indicators of household production which the Guidelines claim can only be produced through time use surveys.

10. **Germany** requested additional recommendations on the combination of light and full-scale diaries, the use of mixed-mode methods and sample design and weighting.

11. To support the planning of time use surveys, **Ukraine** found that it would be appropriate to supplement the Guidelines (possibly as an annex) with the following information on time use surveys in the countries where they were held: type of survey (light or full-scale), the type of data collection (telephone interview, the interviewer's visit to the household, the diary sent by mail, on the Internet, etc.), the period of keeping a diary, on whether it was a separate survey or a part of comprehensive statistical surveys.

#### **IV. Comments on the structure**

12. Most countries pointed out the clear and useful structure of the Guidelines. **Canada**, **New Zealand**, **Sweden** and **OECD** emphasised the importance of the chapter on policy relevance and suggested additional aspects that it could include. **Slovakia** commented that the Guidelines are brief and that more technical instructions would be needed in order to use them as a supporting document in a big survey.

13. The **Czech Republic** found the Guidelines as a too long document where essential points are difficult to find and where excessive attention is devoted to policy relevance. Austria proposed to include a short summary or outline in keywords for each chapter or at the end of the Guidelines.

14. **Canada** suggested that an explanation of the time diary method for the measurement of people's time is needed near the beginning of the Guidelines.

#### **V. Comments on proposals for further work**

15. There was a general agreement on the issues that are identified as requiring further work.

##### **A. Shared working space**

16. **Canada** suggested that in the view of the many issues requiring further work, it would be useful to establish a shared working space to encourage national statistical offices to share their experiences in these areas as they are gained, after the substantive work of the Task Force is complete.

**B. Guidelines on valuing unpaid household service work**

17. **ILO** noted that the international system should consider prioritising development of international guidelines on methods for valuing unpaid household service work based on the many national examples worldwide.

**C. Light diaries**

18. **Finland, Germany, Italy and Poland** welcomed further investigations on the use of light dairies. The **United Kingdom** identified this as the priority area for further work. **Italy** emphasised the need to compare experiences in countries that ran light versions in parallel with full-scale surveys (such as **Finland**) with countries usually running light diary form, to understand the comparability issues better. **ILO** expressed interest in working with the other organizations regarding testing of the questionnaire design and diaries to ensure the capture of activities within and beyond the System of National Accounts production boundary.

**D. Subjective well-being**

19. **Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia** welcomed further investigations on methodological concepts to collect information on subjective well-being, whereas the **Czech Republic** and **Latvia** expressed scepticism on the possibility to include measurement of subjective well-being in a time use survey.

**E. New data collection methods**

20. **Finland, Germany, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Ukraine** welcomed further work and testing on new data collection methods and online surveys.

**F. Activity classification**

21. Regarding further work on the activity classification, **ILO** referred to the need for a coherent and coordinated approach to identify all activities, related to work within and beyond the System of National Accounts production boundary, and other personal activities. **UNSD** referred to the current work towards finalizing the trial International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics (ICATUS), to which all the current classifications could be matched. **Finland** welcomed further work in the standardization of the activity classification worldwide and mentioned that an internationally comparable classification is also needed for the pre-coded light diary surveys.

**VI. Proposal**

22. **The Conference is invited to:**

(a) **Discuss the Guidelines in the light of the comments summarized in this document, including the proposal to produce an annex with information on conducted time use surveys (para. 11). The Task Force on Time Use Surveys will revise the Guidelines reflecting the comments from the consultation and from the discussion at the CES plenary session, and present them for endorsement to the October 2013 meeting of the CES Bureau.**

(b) **Ask the CES Bureau to review the proposals for further work in the Guidelines and the related comments in section V, and decide on next steps, such as**

(i) **Further study of the use of light dairies;**

- (ii) Further work and testing of new data collection methods and online surveys;
- (iii) Further study of methodological concepts to collect information on subjective well-being in time use surveys;
- (iv) Establishment of a shared working space;
- (v) Preparing guidelines on valuing unpaid household service work.

## Annex

### Comments on specific issues

#### Policy relevance

1. **New Zealand** proposed that the Guidelines should make it clear that time use surveys can be used also to assess equality between other social groups, not only by gender.
2. **OECD** suggested making an explicit reference to ‘time poverty’, a concept that has become prominent in the recent literature on time use. Time poverty can be understood as the lack of enough time for rest and leisure after taking into account the time spent in paid work and nonmarket activities. Time use surveys are particularly suited to measure this particular form of deprivation.

#### Recommended outputs

3. **Sweden** pointed out the need to ensure that the purpose of the key outputs is well conveyed in the text.
4. With respect to key outputs on gender equality, **ILO** requested to go beyond describing the big differences and to frame the discussion of co-responsibility or participation of both sexes in unpaid household service work to support change rather than simply acknowledging the differences.
5. **Latvia** mentioned that it would be desirable to look at some time use activities, such as physical activity and sedentary behaviours, more in detail and to extend the survey to new themes, possibly with an eating and health module.

#### Activity classification

6. Many countries acknowledged the usefulness of the minimum list of activities included in the Guidelines. **Sweden** pointed out the need to explain their purpose well and early enough, to avoid misleading users. Suggestions requested to ensure its comprehensiveness and suitability for responding to the main policy questions.
7. **Hungary** pointed out the need to maintain comparability with the classifications used in previous national time use surveys.
8. **Mexico** advised on the possibility to code the activities of help to other households on the first level of classification or else to specify which category will be included, because in the overall scheme these activities that are frequent in Mexico are not observed.
9. **OECD** encouraged the breaking down of childcare into more detail. This would provide important information of the gender-biased allocation of time devoted to childcare. While both men and women participate in childcare, women tend to spend more time in physical routine tasks like feeding and bathing, while men tend to take on more pleasurable tasks such as reading and playing with children.
10. **Poland** considered the proposal of indicators using both the main and secondary activities to describe certain phenomena as worth developing.
11. **Finland** and **Latvia** pointed out the need for a recommendation on a more expanded list of activities.
12. **Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden** and **UNSD** provided detailed comments on specific activity categories in the proposed minimum list.

**Other specific comments**

13. **Germany, Latvia and Lithuania** disagreed with the recommendation on including measures of life satisfaction and well-being questions in the survey, referring to the potential difficulties with the response burden and difficulties of interpretation.
  14. **Latvia** expressed doubts of the feasibility of a longitudinal time use survey in the context of official statistics.
  15. **Lithuania** commented on the recording of simultaneous activities that no more than one simultaneous activity should be collected for each primary activity. The ranking of importance of activities should always remain with the respondent's perception of what is considered a primary versus a secondary activity and should not depend on the objectives of a particular survey.
  16. **Sweden and UNSD** requested more information on testing and the transition from a pilot study to a full-fledged survey.
  17. **Latvia** was inquiring about a recommendation on the age range of respondents and Sweden about individuals or households as survey units.
  18. **Germany and UNSD** requested clarification on the recommendations on sampling the weekdays and weekend days.
  19. **Ukraine** suggested that the Guidelines provide recommendations on data processing and evaluation of time-use surveys, in particular on data coding and refinement, weighting, evaluation and seasonality.
  20. **Latvia** pointed out that the Guidelines should discourage coding by respondents themselves, because of the many mistakes to which this can lead. They also mentioned that the adjustment for non-response as outlined in paragraph 329 of the Guidelines cannot be easily realized in case of great non-response.
  21. **Australia and Germany** pointed out that the web questionnaire is to be seen as an additional, not as an alternative mode of data collection, because it cannot fully replace the existing modes.
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