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Item 10a of the Provisional Agenda

OUTCOME OF THE MEETING OF UNECE DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL STATISTICS

Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat

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**STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE
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(EUROSTAT)**

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN
STATISTICIANS**

**ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC
COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT
(OECD)**

Luxembourg, 29-30 September 2005

**REPORT OF THE SEPTEMBER 2005 JOINT UNECE/EUROSTAT/OECD
MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL STATISTICS**

Prepared by the UNECE secretariat

INTRODUCTION

1. The Joint UNECE/Eurostat/OECD Meeting of Directors of Social Statistics was held on 29-30 September 2005 in Luxembourg. It was attended by participants from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) were also present.

2. Mr. Hermann Habermann from the U.S.A. was elected as Chairperson of the meeting.

3. The following substantive topics were discussed during the meeting sessions based on the 4 invited and 1 supporting papers:

Session 1: Overview of the problems related to the measurement of new forms of households and family formations and to identify key areas of work for a common approach.

Presentations given by Italy and Canada.

Supporting paper by Eurostat and UNECE

Discussant: Ms. Barbara Dunlop, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Session 2: Development of common survey modules to measure new forms of households and to develop a plan to draft such modules.

Presentations given by United Kingdom.

Discussant: Mr. Martin T. O'Connell, US Census Bureau.

Session 3: The programme and the structure for the future work of the ECE directors of social statistics.

Presentations given by Organizing Committee.

Discussant:

4. All papers and presentations from the meeting are available on the UNECE website:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2005.09.social.htm>

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE MEETING

Session 1:

During the session, participants discussed the emerging needs in the field of families and households statistics. Different forms of living arrangements such as same-sex couples, living apart together, commuters between households (people with multiple residence), persons living a part but within the network were discussed as forms that are becoming more and more relevant in modern societies and that need to be defined at international/regional level. These areas were also identified as a field where common survey modules could be designed. During the discussion, it was also pointed out that policy concern is focusing on understanding of family background and history, which seem to greatly affect social outputs of individuals such as education and employment.

The meeting discussed the relevance of definitions and classifications given in the draft Conference of European Statisticians Census Recommendations on families and households as a framework for future work. The meeting welcomed those recommendations.

The meeting urged that future work follow a process of:

1. defining the concepts related to policy concerns that could vary from the new forms of families and households above described (same-sex couples, living apart together, commuters between households -people with multiple residence), persons living a part but within the network) to the issues related to family background
2. designing common survey prototypes to test in selected countries
3. assessing the feasibility of establishing common survey modules after taking into account the results of the testing.

Session 2:

The objective of this session was to evaluate the possibilities of developing common survey modules to measure complex household compositions as well as of drafting such modules.

A presentation of the UK outlined the increasing complexity of households due to changing patterns of partnerships and family formation, but also to an increasing flexibility and mobility that result from personal and work-related causes. Social statistics have to reflect this increasing complexity properly to avoid that the statistical output distorts the patterns of today's everyday life which would carry the risk of leading to flawed conclusions.

The UK underlined the importance of the work the UNECE/Eurostat taskforce on families and households has done so far to achieve active participation of many countries in this field. However, more needs to be done to further develop recommendations for large-scale household surveys and/or administrative sources. Existing guidelines about family and households need to be reviewed and, ideally, be harmonized. The relation between the recommendations for population censuses and those for household surveys has to be clarified. Key concepts like `household`, `family`, `child`, `usual residence` should be clarified further, and ideally, harmonized.

The household relationship matrix (HRM) was discussed as a tool to identify in detail complex family relationships of all persons living in the household. The HRM allows for flexible tabulations of different types of households/families and according to different point of views (household, parent, child, etc.). The majority of countries reported the adoption of this tool using interviewer techniques, the UK, however, reported its adoption in the census using a self-administrated mode. It was discussed that the flexibility and accuracy of the HRM has to be balanced against the costs involved. The majority of the countries using registers reported that they are able to produce the information collected in other countries through the HRM.

Session 3: Conclusions and Future Work

1. The meeting agreed with the objective of developing common modules and concluded that while significant steps have been taken and a process has been identified, there is yet insufficient convergence to allow for implementation of common modules.
2. The meeting recognized the concrete achievements of the Eurostat / UNECE *Task Force on Households and Families* in the context of censuses, and recommended that its mandate in regards to social surveys be reaffirmed and expanded as appropriate.
3. The meeting felt strongly that the Social Statistics Forum's functions should be expanded to include the monitoring of all existing CES groups on social statistics.
4. The meeting proposed to establish a task force initially consisting of Canada (chair), Australia, representatives of the Eurostat strategic development group, Italy, UNECE and the United States to:
 - identify and develop concrete proposals to examine emerging issues in social statistics, including measurement concepts, common questions / modules and modalities to achieve them (including prototyping and/or testing strategies) and organize the discussion at the next meeting.
 - develop the proposed new Terms of Reference for the task force on families and households
 - propose date, organization and frequency of the meetings.
5. The meeting recommended that Eurostat explore the possibility of extending the Eurostat project on harmonization of core variables to countries outside the EU and make recommendations to the Forum.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

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