

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint Eurostat/UNECE Work Session on Demographic Projections
(Bucharest, 10-12 October 2007)

PROPOSAL ON FUTURE WORK

Note by UNECE-Eurostat

Background

1. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) conducted an in-depth review of population statistics at its meeting held on 12-13 February 2007. The review was based on written contributions previously submitted by UNECE, UNSD and Eurostat¹.
2. The CES Bureau also reviewed the availability or lack of international standards in various areas of population statistics. With regard to demographic projections, the Bureau recommended the preparation of a collection of documented practices in this field, which would represent a useful tool for many countries. The Bureau noted that standards in this area would not be productive since the methodology is based on the best available scenario, which is different across countries.
3. The CES Bureau identified “improving population estimates and projections, and sharing knowledge on best practices in these areas” as first priority in the area of population statistics, and agreed that UNECE would inform the CES group working on population projections on the need to produce a collection of documented practices².
4. In June 2007 the Conference of European Statisticians endorsed the conclusions of the CES Bureau, in particular the need to provide guidance to countries and to develop a collection of documented practices in the production of demographic projections.

Proposal

5. Based on the recommendations of the CES, it is proposed to prepare a collection of documented practices in the field of demographic projections. Work on the collection of practices could be coordinated by a Task Force created for this purpose. The draft Terms of Reference for the Task Force are presented in Annex 4.

¹ The documents are available as Doc. 3, 3/Add.1 and 3/Add.2 respectively on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.02.bureau.htm> Text related to demographic projections extracted from the three documents is presented in Annexes 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

Annex I

Text related to demographic projections extracted from the document:

“IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF POPULATION STATISTICS”

prepared by UNECE and submitted to the February 2007 meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (Doc. ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/3³)

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DEMOGRAPHIC PROJECTIONS

32. Demographic projections have always had a critical importance for policy-making, because they set the basis for medium and long-term planning in many fields. Demographic projections acquired even higher strategic relevance for countries where the effects of population ageing and international migration are expected to be particularly strong over the next decades, as a consequence of decreasing fertility and increasing longevity.

In this context, the preparation of population projections, both by national and international organisations, could be subject to political pressure and influence. The selection of the assumptions on the future developments of fertility, mortality and especially migration, is a critical issue in the preparation of the projections where there is always a degree of subjectivity. Therefore, it is particularly important to guarantee that the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (in particular those concerning transparency, professionalism, and independence) are respected and guaranteed in the preparation of demographic projections.

33. There are no international standards in the field of population projections. The principles guiding the production of population projections are based on the same calculation used to prepare annual population figures: each year the population changes according to the number of births, deaths and net migration. How these components evolve in the future can be estimated based on stochastic or not stochastic models, which each country may adjust to its circumstances. Therefore, international standards in the production of population projections may be inefficient. However, countries may benefit from the development of good practices in this area which could be developed under the existing CES programme on population projections.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

36. In conclusion, the following issues may need the attention of the international statistical community:

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40. Demographic projections: statistical methods to produce demographic projections have in most cases a consolidated tradition, based on the so-called ‘cohort-component model’. Other important developments, as for example the use of stochastic models, are still in the stage of statistical research. Demographic projections can have a crucial importance in influencing policy decisions, as for example in the field of pension reform. The transparency of methods and assumptions and the guarantee of independence of NSOs carrying out demographic projections could be addressed at the international level.

² See the report of the February 2007 meeting of the CES Bureau (in particular, paras. 9-16). The report is available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2007/26.e.pdf>

³ The full version of this document is available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.02.bureau.htm>

Annex II

Text related to demographic projections extracted from the document

UNSD COMMENTS ON THE [UNECE] PAPER “*IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF POPULATION STATISTICS*”

prepared by United Nations Statistics Division and submitted to the February 2007 meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (Doc. ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/3/Add.1 ⁴)

1. The note prepared by the UNECE secretariat points to the lack of international standards or best practices for: a) producing annual population statistics at national level, b) dissemination by international organizations, c) demographic projections and d) intercensal population estimates, for countries that apply annual updates as defined in the note based on previous year population, births, deaths and migration.

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5. The [UNECE] paper notes (paragraphs 32 and 33) that there are no international standards in the field of population projections and that such standards may be inefficient given the differences in national circumstances. It is necessary to mention here the World Population Prospects produced by the United Nations Population Division every two years. The methodology applied for these estimates and projections is documented in special editions accompanying each release. But nevertheless, some guidelines or standards on national practices would be useful.

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⁴ The full version of this documents is available on the UNECE website at:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.02.bureau.htm>

Annex III

Text related to demographic projections extracted from the document

EUROSTAT COMMENTS ON THE [UNECE] PAPER *IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF POPULATION STATISTICS*

prepared by Eurostat and submitted to the February 2007 meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (Doc. ECE/CES/BUR/2007/FEB/3/Add.2⁵)

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.

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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 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).

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⁵ The full version of this documents is available on the UNECE website at:
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2007.02.bureau.htm>

ANNEX IV - Draft Terms of Reference for the Task Force on Documented Practices on the Preparation of Demographic Projections

BACKGROUND

1. The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in February 2007 recommended the preparation of a collection of documented practices in the field of demographic projections. The recommendation was endorsed by the CES at its June 2007 Plenary session.
2. The proposal of preparing a collection of documented practices in the field of demographic projections was presented at the October 2007 Joint Eurostat-UNECE Work Session on Demographic Projections.

OBJECTIVE OF THE TASK FORCE

3. The main objective of the task force is to prepare a collection of documented practices in the field of demographic projections, based on the experience of a selected number of CES member countries.

EXPECTED OUTPUT

4. The expected output of the Task Force is a collection of documented practices on the preparation of demographic projections in CES member countries, to be published by UNECE.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE

5. The Task Force could start its work by reviewing the methodology adopted in CES member countries and by international organizations for the preparation of demographic projections, and selecting a number of cases that could be considered as examples potentially useful for other countries. In this phase, the Task Force should take in consideration the material (technical papers, reports etc.) already available, including material possibly collected or prepared by Eurostat, UN Population Division or other organizations.
6. After selecting the cases, the Task Force should adapt the available material for inclusion in the publication. This may require cutting, expanding or modifying parts of the material. In this phase, the Task Force should work in cooperation with the institute/organization that prepared the original material.
7. The final draft prepared by the Task Force should be reviewed by the Eurostat-UNECE Work Session on Demographic Projections, and possibly amended based on comments and recommendations of the meeting.
8. The Task Force should report regularly to the CES Bureau on its activities.

TIME FRAME

9. The final draft of the publication should be completed by mid 2009, in order to be reviewed at the Eurostat-UNECE Work Session on Demographic Projections. The publication should be published by mid 2010.

COMPOSITION OF THE TASK FORCE

10. The Task Force should be composed mainly by national experts from CES member countries, and include representatives of UNECE (acting as Secretariat), Eurostat and possibly other international organizations or UN Departments.

SYSTEM OF WORK AND POSSIBLE MEETINGS

11. The members of the Task Force are expected to agree on division of labour and to work mainly via e-mail. One or two meetings of the Task Force could possibly be organized back-to-back to other meetings that will be attended by a significant number of Task Force members (i.e. Eurostat Working Party on Demographic Projections).

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