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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Plans for census quality evaluation****Data collection on the de facto same sex couples in the 2010 round of Censuses****Note by the National Institute of Statistics, Italy***Summary*

The Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), at its meeting held in Washington, D.C. (United States) on 19-20 October 2006, approved the renewed terms of reference for the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses and the plan for future CES activities on population and housing censuses. The CES Bureau also agreed that the Steering Group would coordinate the work on the diverse types of meetings.

The present document was prepared on request by the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses, for presentation and discussion at the Thirteenth Meeting of the Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses, in Geneva on 7-9 July 2010.

This document presents information on how different countries in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region are going to collect information on de facto same-sex cohabiting couples in the 2010 round of population censuses. Information on same sex couples is of interest to policy makers for a number of reasons. It may help them in understanding housing need and family information and in determining groups which may be at risk of discrimination. The Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing consider that some countries may wish to collect and disseminate data on same sex partnerships. The Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) is studying the opportunity of collect this kind of information, and conducted a survey among other UNECE countries about their plans in this regard.

## I. Introduction

1. In the last months some Italian newspapers and specialized web sites published articles on the counting of same sex couples in the upcoming 2011 General Population Census. Compared to the past, it represents a product innovation for our Country and so the Division of General Census of the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) is studying the opportunity of collect this kind of information and how to better do it.

2. As known, the Commission Regulation (EC) N° 1201/2009 of 30 November 2009 implementing Regulation (EC) No 763/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on population and housing censuses as regards the technical specifications of the topics and of their breakdowns<sup>1</sup> foresees as optional all the items referring to the distinction between partners in an opposite sex consensual union<sup>2</sup> and partners in a same sex consensual union<sup>3</sup>.

3. Anyway, counting population with specific features is one of the main purposes of a Census and increasing acceptance of same-sex cohabiting partners has made it easier for such families to be visible. Information on same sex couples is of interest to policy makers for a number of reasons. It may help them in understanding housing need and family information and in determining groups which may be at risk of discrimination<sup>4</sup>.

4. Also CES Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing<sup>5</sup> consider that some Countries may wish to collect and disseminate data on same sex partnerships (derived non core topic). They can be derived by adding specific categories to the relationship to the reference person question or the household relationship matrix. Recommendations suggest that a through testing program (both cognitive and quantitative) be conducted prior to introducing sensitive topics on the census questionnaire.

5. In general, the number of same sex couples is useful to investigate a social phenomenon about which, in Italy, reliable figures are not available and the 2011 Census represents a precious occasion to solve this lack of information. Planning the enumeration it is necessary to take into considerations all the involvements in terms of questionnaire space constraints, self filling and, in terms of the personal data code.

## II. The counting of same-sex partnerships in the next Italian general population census: definitions and working hypothesis

6. Last October Istat carried out the 2009 Pilot Survey. It involved 80.000 households living in 31 municipalities of different population size. All the questionnaires proposed (short, medium and long form) include the relationship to the reference person question; it

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<sup>1</sup> Text with EEA relevance, *Official Journal L 329*, 15/12/2009 P. 0029– 0068.

<sup>2</sup> We do not consider registered partnerships because Italy doesn't have a legal framework regulating partnerships that lead to legal conjugal obligations between two persons that are not married.

<sup>3</sup> These categories refer to the topics "Household status" and "Family status". The same is for the categories related to the consensual union couples families ("Type of family nucleus") and to the consensual union couples households ("Type of private households").

<sup>4</sup> "Measurement of different emerging forms of households and Families", note prepared by the Task Force on Families and Households, Conference Of European Statisticians, First meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau, Washington, D.C., 15-16 October 2009.

<sup>5</sup> UNECE, Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing  
[http://www.unece.org/stats/publications/CES\\_2010\\_Census\\_Recommendations\\_English.pdf](http://www.unece.org/stats/publications/CES_2010_Census_Recommendations_English.pdf).

will be possible<sup>6</sup> to derive same-sex couples using sex variable. The counting wasn't among the issues of the survey and we haven't foreseen any measures to improve the collection of this kind of data.

7. In any case we will analyse the results as soon as possible to verify how many same sex cohabiting couples have decided identify themselves as such.

According to the note prepared by the Task Force on Families and Households (2009), the key points for definition of a de facto same-sex partnership are:

- (a) both partners share the same household;
- (b) both partners are of the same-sex;
- (c) both partners recognise themselves as living as a couple<sup>7</sup> (i.e. it is more than just a flat share or friendship).

8. The number of lesbian or gay is larger then those that have formed same sex cohabiting couples.

9. The Italian Division of General Census is studying the enumeration method for 2011 in order to ensure a high quality of collected data. It is important to take into account the potential underestimation of the phenomenon, especially considered the official status of the census that could lead same-sex couples do not declare to live in such family arrangement. In Countries where there is less acceptance of same-sex relationships there is the need to consider how to encourage same-sex cohabitations to identify themselves.

10. First of all it is necessary to find the better way to collect the information. The hypothesis in course of study are:

- (a) As in the Pilot Survey, to include in the questionnaire the relationship to the reference person question (or the relationships matrix) and use sex variable to derive same sex couples;
- (b) To add a specific category in the relationship to the reference person question (or in the relationships matrix);
- (c) To ask a separate specific question.

11. Point (a) doesn't have any impact in terms of space or question complexity, but same sex partners may feel ignored or not realize that Istat wants them to be identified. Point (b) makes clear that information on same sex couples is required, but the question increases in size. As far as point (c) is concerned, it encourages same sex couples to answer but it's very difficult to design the question and to include it in the questionnaire in the correct position.

### III. What other countries do

12. In six European Countries marriage between same sex partners is legal, the same in five States of the United States of America. Many States of the old country have legal recognition of same sex partnerships<sup>8</sup>.

13. At the beginning of 2010, in order to acquire further evaluation criteria, Istat decided to get information about how other Countries are going to manage the enumeration of the

<sup>6</sup> Data entry of the enumeration forms hasn't yet finished.

<sup>7</sup> We do not consider registered partnerships .

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/04/14/news/matrimoni\\_gay\\_mondo-3345343/](http://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2010/04/14/news/matrimoni_gay_mondo-3345343/).

de facto same-sex cohabiting couples in the upcoming round of censuses. So, on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2010, the Italian Division of General Census sent by e-mail a small set of questions concerning the collection of data on same sex consensual unions in the 2010/2011 population census to 30 European Countries and to United States.

14. We kindly asked Countries to indicate if they intend to deal this matter in the census, the method used and if non census surveys are foreseen to collect this kind of information.

15. In more detail, the questions were structured as follows:

**A. With reference to the collection of data on same sex couples in the next population and housing census, which of the following case is applicable to your Country:**

1. *We are going to survey relationships by a relationships matrix, or by a question on the relationship to the reference person. We ask whether a person is partner of another person and we obtain de facto same-sex couples by variable sex;*
2. *We are going to survey relationships by a relationships matrix, or by a question on the relationship with the reference person. We include a specific relationship category for de facto same-sex couples;*
3. *We are going to survey de facto same sex partnership asking a separate specific question;*
4. *No, we don't survey the de facto same sex couples*
5. *Others, specify*

**B. How the data of previous item A will be collected:**

1. *From registers*
2. *By a traditional census*
3. *On sample basis*
4. *Others, specify*

**C. Is there in your Country any other non census survey to collect these information (data at national level and done by an official statistical institution)**

1. *Yes, a registers-based survey*
2. *Yes, a sample survey*
3. *Yes, others survey, specify*
4. *No, there isn't*

16. Seventeen countries provided us with an answer. They are:

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Census type<sup>9</sup></i>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Traditional
Czech Republic	Combined

<sup>9</sup> Note by UNECE (2010) "Main results of the UNECE/UNSD Survey on the 2010/2011 round of censuses in the UNECE Region".

<i>Countries</i>	<i>Census type<sup>9</sup></i>
Finland	Register-based
France	Rolling
Iceland	Combined
Ireland	Traditional
Israel	Combined
Latvia	Combined
Luxembourg	Traditional
Portugal	Traditional
Republic of Moldova	Traditional
Spain	Combined
Sweden	Register-based
Switzerland	Combined
Turkey	Combined
United Kingdom	Traditional
United States of America	Traditional

17. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States are intentioned<sup>10</sup> to collect information on de facto same sex couples.

18. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Ireland, Israel, Luxembourg, Spain and the United States survey the relationships by the relationship to the reference person question or the relationships matrix and use sex variable to derive same sex couples. Ireland, in correspondence to the item “partner” (relationships matrix), specifies “incl.same sex partner” to make clear that information on same sex partnerships are required.

19. Portugal, Switzerland and United Kingdom are going to survey relationships by a relationships matrix, or by a question on the relationship to the reference person, adding a specific relationship category for de facto same-sex couples. United Kingdom collects data using a matrix question similar to Ireland's with specific categories for 'same-sex civil partner' (= registered partnership) and 'partner' (= non-registered cohabitation). Sex is recorded on a separate question. In Switzerland the item is collected with paper- or e-survey-questionnaire on sample basis, but information about sex and other characteristics come from administrative registers.

20. Finland and Sweden will carry out register-based censuses, Iceland a combined one. Iceland foresees the items “same sex registered partnership (equivalent to marriage)” and “same sex registered cohabitation” but exclude non-registered cohabitation (data will be collected from registers).

<sup>10</sup> In the United States the census reference date is 01st April 2010.

21. In Sweden there aren't information on who is in a couple if the person is not married, in a registered partnership or have children together. The plan is that all Swedes shall be registered to a dwelling in time for the census (they are building a new register on dwellings). If everything goes as planned, statistics on cohabiting couples of different sex could be estimated from this new information. Anyway, they don't know if it will be possible to do statistics on cohabiting couples that are same-sex and whom are not in a marriage or registered partnership or have children together. If not, they will consider these persons as single.
22. Similarly in Finland where same sex persons living together are defined as a couple only if they are living in a registered partnership. Other same sex couples are defined as other family type. So they have (de jure) information on persons living together but they are not able to define if they live as a same sex couple.
23. France, Latvia, the Republic of Moldova and Turkey do not collect data on same sex consensual unions. In France, during the 2011 census survey, they will make a "micro census" on a sample of 350.000 persons, about family and housing. In the questionnaire the question is clearly stated: "Your partner is a man? A woman?". Objective of this issue is a national assessment of the number of same sex couples.
24. As far as the third item of our enumeration is concerned (*Is there in your Country any other non census survey to collect these information - data at national level and done by an official statistical institution*), all of the United States sample surveys contain the unmarried partner relationship category; also in the United Kingdom, information on same sex couples are collected by sample surveys such as the Integrated Household Survey.
25. In Spain sample surveys (for example Labour Force Survey) are useful to collect these information but they do not disseminate data. The same in Israel where, thanks to the Labour Force Survey (1% sample of households), it is possible to collect information on same sex couples but data are not published because the sample size and the prevalence of same sex couples in the sample are too small.
26. Summarizing the results, 10 out 17 Countries collect information on de facto same sex couples by the relationship to the reference person question or the relationships matrix and using sex variable to derive same sex couples (7) or by adding specific relationship categories (3).
27. In Countries with register-based censuses (2) and in Iceland same sex partners will be defined as a couple only if they live in a registered partnership.
28. In Latvia, Republic of Moldova and Turkey data on de facto same sex couples will be not collected such as in France where, however, a sample survey on family and housing will carry out to evaluate the phenomenon.
29. The information provided by the countries that responded to the survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

## Information on data collection on same sex couples in the 2010 round of censuses – Selected UNECE countries

COUNTRIES	Counting de facto same sex couples (A)				How data will be collected (B)				Non census survey (C)*			
	Relationship to the reference person question (or the relationships matrix) and variable to derive same sex couples	yes	Specific categories in the relationship to the reference person question or the relationships matrix	Specific question	No	Other	Traditional	Sample	Registers	Other	Sample survey	No
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	x						x					x
CZECH REPUBLIC	x						x					x
FINLAND						Same sex persons living together are defined as a couple only if they are living in a registered partnership. Other same sex couples are defined as other family type. So they have (de jure) information on persons living together but they are not able to			x			x
FRANCE					x						"Micro census" on a sample of 350 000 persons, about family and housing during the census	
ICELAND						Iceland foresees the items "same sex registered partnership (equivalent to marriages)" and "same sex registered cohabitation" but exclude non-registered cohabitation			x			No survey covers this field. It is, however, part of the annual statistics on families
IRELAND		In correspondence to the item "partner" (relationships matrix), Ireland specifies "incl.same sex partner"					x					
ISRAEL	x							x			Thanks to the Labour Force Survey (1% sample of households) it is possible to collect information on same sex couples but data are not published because the sample size and the prevalence of same sex couples in the sample are too small.	
LATVIA					x							
LUXEMBOURG	x						x					x
MOLDOVA					x							x
PORTUGAL		x					x					x
SPAIN	x						x	x			Sample surveys (for example Labour Force Survey) are useful to collect these information but data are not disseminated	
SWEDEN						There aren't information on who is in a couple if the person is not married, in a registered partnership or have children together			x			
SWITZERLAND		x						The item is collected with paper- or e-survey-questionnaire on sample basis, but information about sex, country of citizenship and other characteristics come from administrative registers	x			In the future, when they will have introduced core variables (comparable to the "core social variables" of EUROSTAT)
TURKEY					x							x
UK		x					x				x	
USA	x						x			x		

\*Some Countries didn't provide us with the information.

## IV. Future developments

30. Waiting for the final data of the 2009 Pilot Survey and analyzing how other Countries manage the enumeration of de facto same sex couples, Istat in this period is also meeting representatives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) associations to discuss in which way best results may be gained.

31. In general, the potential underestimation of same sex cohabitations should be taken into account, also considering that, for the first time, the counting represents one of the issues of the Italian General Population Census. It is important to adopt appropriate measures to encourage respondents to declare that they live in such family arrangement and to give them greater confidence in reporting a cohabiting same sex relationship.

32. In the meantime questions to collect information on sensitive topics must be avoided: they may cause problems with the overall acceptability of the census enumeration. Besides, Istat is arranging all the instruments, technological and organizational, to ensure that the data production process and treatment be suitable with disclosure.

33. Appropriate sample surveys should be planned in order to achieve more accurate estimates of the phenomenon or a benchmark for the estimates of same sex couples provided by census<sup>11</sup>. It is a challenge that Istat is going to face with a new sample survey, already recorded in the Italian National Statistic Plan, that collect information on sexual identity/orientation, gender discrimination and ethnicity.

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<sup>11</sup> “Measurement of different emerging forms of households and Families”, note prepared by the Task Force on Families and Households, Conference Of European Statisticians, First meeting of the 2009/2010 Bureau, Washington, D.C., 15-16 October 2009.