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**Reports, guidelines and recommendations prepared under the umbrella of the Conference:  
Intra-household decision-making**

### **Results of the consultation on the *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making***

#### **Note by the Secretariat**

##### *Summary*

This document summarizes the comments made by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making* (ECE/CES/2020/6). The Secretariat carried out a consultation in March and April 2020.

Thirty-seven countries and international organizations provided responses to the consultation. No country opposed endorsement by CES, subject to the amendments resulting from the comments provided during the consultation. This document summarizes the comments and suggestions for amendment received and outlines the work that will be undertaken by the Task Force on measuring intra-household power and decision-making to amend the Guidance accordingly.

The Conference is invited to endorse the *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making*, subject to the amendments outlined in this document.



## I. Introduction

1. This document summarizes comments made by members of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) on the *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making*.
2. The Guidance was prepared by the UNECE Task Force on measuring intra-household power and decision-making (chaired by Canada), established in February 2017. The CES Bureau reviewed the draft Guidance in October 2019 and requested the Secretariat to send the Guidance to all CES members for consultation. The Secretariat conducted a consultation on the Guidance in March–April 2020.
3. The following 37 countries and international organizations provided responses to the consultation: Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America (Bureau of the Census), United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), European Central Bank (ECB), Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
4. The comments and the Task Force’s reactions are summarized in sections II and III. Several countries provided editorial comments and suggestions related to document formatting, typographical issues and the structure of headings. These are not presented in this note but will be taken into account when revising the Guidance for publication. Comments on the specific situation in individual countries which have no direct implications for the content of the Guidance are also not presented in this note.

## II. General comments

5. Many responding countries and organizations expressed their appreciation for the work of the Task Force in this challenging area, especially for the arguments presented to support conducting work in this topic area. For example:
  - (a) United Kingdom: “The recommendations describe the topic and issues well, including demonstrating its importance.”;
  - (b) Colombia: “This document is a great tool for NSOs, universities and NGOs to explore this topic and start doing analysis on these dynamics.”;
  - (c) Latvia: “We appreciate the recommendations and the guidance given... We find the content very useful.”;
  - (d) Slovakia: “Recommendations concerning measuring the gendered dimensions of intra-household power and decision-making are very useful.”;
  - (e) Mexico: “Congratulations for the work done.”;
  - (f) Finland: “The recommendations are very useful and comprehensive. Congratulations to the Task Force for this excellent work!”;
  - (g) ECB: “Argumentation for the business case is sound and can be used to support justification of enhanced or new surveys. It points out maybe the most neglected part of the question of gender equity.”
6. Some countries remarked on the value of the extensive presentation of other countries’ experiences so far in this area (Ukraine, Switzerland, Colombia, Italy, Mexico, United States).
7. It was widely acknowledged that the work of the Task Force should be viewed as a starting point, with a need for continued work to develop further guidance (see section III.G for more detail). Sweden considered that the work is “a first examination of a relatively new field”, and Mexico stated that the document “makes clear that this is a subject still under construction”. This early stage of development led Chile to suggest that the title of the

document circulated for consultation (*Recommendations for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making*) should be changed to reflect the fact that at this stage the document offers suggested directions rather than detailed instructions.

8. Several countries noted that given the early stage of development of the topic combined with the significant methodological challenges entailed, they do not currently plan to carry out statistical work in this area (Bulgaria, Germany, Slovakia). Other countries stated that they would or might apply elements of the guidance, in some cases with caveats, such as that they would be used on the condition that respondent burden were not increased, or by adding questions to an existing survey, or if additional financing were made available for a special survey (e.g. Romania, Malta, Norway).

9. Some countries indicated a current or future intention to apply the Guidance or parts of it, or to contribute to additional qualitative testing to help further develop the work (Colombia, Italy, Serbia).

#### **Response and changes proposed by the Task Force**

10. The title of the document will be changed to *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making* and this will be updated throughout the document. The title ‘Guidance’ is therefore used throughout the present note.

### **III. Specific comments**

11. This section summarizes comments received on specific chapters of the Guidance, together with the responses by the Task Force where applicable.

#### **A. Chapter I – Introduction**

12. The introduction was welcomed. Chile noted that it is “presented in a very interesting way that encourages a continued reading of the document”, while Croatia remarked that the aims and structure of the work are well explained in the introduction.

13. Hungary suggested enhancing the readability of the Guidance by including the recommendations and suggestions for future work in the chapter, allowing it to serve as an executive summary.

14. Hungary also commented that for a complex issue such as this, quantitative approaches may not be able adequately to capture the complexity and that qualitative research may shed more light on the phenomena.

#### **Response and changes proposed by the Task Force**

15. A more detailed summary of the main methodological recommendations from chapter 7 (Recommendations and future work) will be added into the section ‘Overview of the Recommendations’ in this chapter, contributing to this section’s role as a summary of the main content of the document.

16. Qualitative study of intra-household power and decision-making is certainly essential. The present Guidance, having been developed under the auspices of the Conference of European Statisticians, aims to shed quantitative light on the issues – but researchers using the resulting statistics can combine both quantitative and qualitative insights. As for many topics in social statistics, quantitative insight through statistics can add important weight to the decisions made by policymakers. The Task Force proposes to add these points in the ‘importance and policy relevance’ section of the introduction.

#### **B. Chapter II – Conceptual background**

17. The chapter situated the Guidance within existing research and attempted to identify and describe the main concepts used, as well as applying some delimitations to define the scope of the work. Being a complex issue within the arena of gender equality, itself also

complex and subject to much debate, the consultation gave rise to a range of perspectives on these concepts.

18. A variety of views were expressed about the decisions to delimit this initial stage of work to heterosexual couples in private households. Finland and Croatia supported such delimitation and felt that the reasoning was well explained. Finland and Slovakia also emphasized that it will be important to extend beyond this delimitation in the future. Sweden felt that while such initial delimitation is understandable, the phrasing used to explain it should be adjusted to be more clear in its reasoning and to avoid unintended interpretations. Chile suggested that the Guidance explicitly state the proportion of survey respondents in surveys used to develop the Guidance who are members of such couples.

19. The way in which the Guidance describes the concept of power elicited a diversity of reactions from responding countries. Sweden felt that the emphasis on subjective aspects of power was stronger than warranted and suggested rephrasing the explanation to avoid elevating either subjective or objective aspects above others. Colombia proposed the addition of a consideration of bargaining power models, and Germany noted that power is dynamic rather than fixed. Lithuania suggested that more attention be given in the text to the overlapping spheres of power identified in the diagram accompanying the discussion. Chile felt that this part of the Guidance should be more closely linked with the dimensions of intra-household power and decision-making identified in chapter 4, with an explanation of how they are linked to the concepts described. Hungary proposed that the concepts under consideration be extended to include civic, political and economic power.

### **Response and changes proposed by the Task Force**

#### *(a) Heterosexual couples*

20. The draft Guidance states that “heterosexual couple relationships are a significant majority and are therefore the most logical ground for concepts and methods to be carefully developed before attempting to apply them more broadly”. The basic motivation for the current Guidance stems from the need to measure gender equality and gender aspects of power in couple relationships. To clarify that this is not meant to limit the scope of such measurement to heterosexual relationships between cisgender people, but only as a means of reducing the initial scope for the purposes of developing measures, the Task Force will add the following:

*“Much can be learned from other constellations than heterosexual couples, including findings that could potentially contribute to increased understanding of such couple relationships. This limitation in scope is therefore only a starting point, with a view to subsequent expansion, for example to same-sex couples, or relationships to household members other than an intimate partner”.*

21. The Task Force will also add a footnote noting the proportion of respondents living in coresident heterosexual couples among respondents to some of the key surveys used in the development of the Guidance.

#### *(b) Conceptualizing power*

22. The section entitled ‘the subjective nature of power’ will be renamed ‘subjective aspects of power’, to make clear that these are not its only aspects. Currently, this section states that some aspects of power can be objectively measured, and stresses that there are numerous elements of power, among which plenty are objective. To make clear that these objective aspects are not the focus of this work, the Task Force will reformulate the text as follows:

*“The power to spend a household’s money on certain items rests both on actual and perceived permission to do so. Discordant responses between partners are not to be viewed as errors but as indications of different personal perceptions, which tell us something valuable about the respondents’ feelings of power or its absence. If answers to questions about intra-household power and decision-making differ depending on who is being asked, this can provide useful information about the perspective of the respondent—a perspective which is important in affecting their*

*ability to act. In combination with existing, objective, measures of power this can offer a more comprehensive view of power dynamics within households” (p.21)*

*“Since power has both objective and subjective aspects, people’s subjective feeling about whether or not they can take decisions cannot be discounted when trying to understand power.” (p.105)*

23. The Task Force will add to the end of the section ‘Conceptualizing power and empowerment’ (p. 20) the following text:

*“The personal sphere encompasses all interactions that take place privately, between members of the same household, relatives and friends. Within this setting there are many different areas in which power can be exercised or limited – such as matters involving children, decisions about health, or power over finances – and the extent of empowerment need not be similar across all of these areas. Chapter 4 below details seven such areas, or dimensions, in which information about decision-making may offer insights into variation in intra-household power.”*

24. Additions will also be made to the text to include a mention of bargaining power, the dynamic nature of power and to further link the diagram to the text.

### **C. Chapter III – Current practices and experiences in measuring intra-household power and decision-making**

25. Countries welcomed the experiences and lessons learned from existing research. Colombia stated “we want to highlight how useful this chapter is for NSOs.”

26. Some aspects were identified as particularly useful, such as the description of sampling issues (Croatia) and practical aspects of conducting surveys on this topic (Slovakia). Some countries made suggestions for adjusting the organization of the information presented to improve clarity (Turkey, Canada, Lithuania, Hungary, Mexico). A common element of these proposals is to reduce the amount of detail presented about existing surveys and survey questions and to move much of this detail to the annex of the Guidance.

27. Mexico proposed sub-dividing the consideration of methodological challenges into those related to design of the instrument and those related to practical aspects of carrying out a survey.

28. Some countries provided additional information on existing experiences which could be added to this chapter and/or to the annex.

#### **Responses and changes proposed by the Task Force**

29. The Task Force will adjust the structure of the section ‘Existing initiatives to measurement of intra-household power and decision-making’ by moving the survey details to the annex and keeping only the summary text in the body of the chapter.

### **D. Chapter IV – Indicators of intra-household power and decision-making**

30. This chapter was welcomed as a helpful guide to conceptualizing intra-household power and decision-making in terms of the dimensions and sub-dimensions presented. Colombia, Croatia and Finland remarked that this organizing principle was useful. The diagram representing these dimensions was welcomed by Colombia as was the prioritization into core and supporting indicators.

31. Several countries remarked on the sensitivity of some of the topics covered and the risk of non-response that this presents (Belarus, Russian Federation, Germany).

32. Some countries remarked on areas that would be of limited or no relevance in their particular national circumstances (Germany, Norway).

33. Finland and Colombia echoed the call in the Guidance for future research to test the conceptual distinctiveness of the dimensions in practice.

34. Lithuania proposed making indicator 3.1.2 (Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who are primarily or equally responsible for deciding when a child needs to be taken to the doctor, by sex) into a core indicator. Lithuania also proposed the addition of a contextual background question on money left for spending on personal items.

35. The United Kingdom observed that considerable work would be needed by any country to identify and adapt survey instruments to produce indicators.

36. Sweden proposed changing the name of indicator 1.1.1 to remove the phrasing “the majority of the time” in an indicator referring to empowerment in decisions to engage in sexual intercourse.

37. Sweden requested increased clarity in explaining the decision to exclude partnership formation and dissolution as a sub-dimension, stating that limited decision-making power in this arena may be related to issues such as honour-related violence and oppression, and/or financial limitations.

### **Responses and changes proposed by the Task Force**

38. The issue of sensitivity is very important for the entire topic in question, and is discussed at length in the Guidance.

39. Indicator 3.1.2 will be marked as a core indicator and a contextual question on availability of money for personal discretionary spending will be added.

40. The Task Force will adjust the wording in the chapter’s introduction to recognize more explicitly the degree of work that might be entailed in producing indicators.

41. Indicator 1.1.1 will be renamed “Proportion of individuals in co-residing couples who report that the decision to have sexual relations is always made jointly, by sex”.

42. Partnership formation and dissolution is an important area of empowerment and limitations on making or ending partnerships can be reflections of major disempowerment or even gender-based violence. The Task Force decided, however, not to include this in the current work since the power (or its absence) manifested in these kinds of decisions is not the power relationship between current partners. Arranged marriage, or limitations on dating, are concerned with power relationships between one partner and other people who may or may not be in the same household (e.g. parents or other family members). As for partnership dissolution, while intra-couple relationships are more likely to play a role in the decision-making, it is hard to conceptualize how this could be investigated by asking a person in a current partnership. It would either have to be in reference to a previous, already-dissolved partnership (which would not correspond well to the other areas of investigation which are all about current partnerships), or it would have to be hypothetical (‘who would decide, or who would have the final say’?), which would be very hard for respondents to understand and answer. Finally, the qualitative testing in Canada revealed that where a question asked about decision-making on something that most people considered to be entirely personal, they were either confused or even offended at being asked. All of these points will be articulated in the text under dimension 1 (union formation, sexual and reproductive decisions) to explain with greater clarity why this sub-dimension was not pursued in the current work.

## **E. Chapter V – Selected test analyses of existing data**

43. The value of this chapter in illustrating the possibilities and limitations of existing data was noted by responding countries. Croatia described the chapter as “very concrete, detailed, comprehensive and interesting”, while Mexico felt that the chapter is complete and strengthens the overall work. Colombia welcomed the contribution to understanding the topic offered by this chapter.

44. Chile and Canada called for inclusion of more detail about the information presented in the graphs, including specifying data sources, survey years, question response options, sample sizes and response rates.

45. Colombia noted that the test analyses show that the greatest potential comes from interviewing both partners in a couple, but that this is challenging and expensive, as discussed in the document.

46. Finland suggested that analyses broken down by socioeconomic and demographic characteristics would be interesting.

47. Hungary and Canada proposed moving all or part of this chapter to an annex, with Canada proposing to keep only the “observations and conclusions” section within the main body of the Guidance.

***Responses and changes proposed by the Task Force***

48. The need for additional detail about the survey data presented is well noted. The Task Force will provide links in footnotes at the start of each country section in this chapter to guide the reader to the full technical documentation about the surveys in question.

49. The inclusion of these analyses in the main body of the document is essential for demonstrating both the possibilities and the limitations of analysis of already-collected data, and supports the argument made in the document that more detailed analyses would require more data. The content will therefore remain in the main text rather than being moved to an annex.

**F. Chapter VI – Qualitative testing of selected survey questions**

50. This chapter, describing a small-scale test conducted in Canada, was welcomed as a valuable addition to the work. Colombia, noting that the experiences described in the chapter offer many important lessons learned to aid other countries, described the chapter as “a great contribution for NSOs”. Croatia, Belarus and Finland echoed this sentiment, stating that the Canadian experience is “promising” (Finland) and that it can be used “as an orientation for cognitive testing” (Croatia).

51. Finland added that it would be interesting to compare the results with testing in other countries, and the importance of taking into account cross-national variation in cultural norms.

52. Mexico pointed out the small number of respondents in the testing (38).

***Responses and changes proposed by the Task Force***

53. The Task Force will reiterate that the testing on 38 respondents should be viewed only as a first step, and that further testing would be required to refine questions and protocols.

54. The importance of considering cross-cultural variation is indeed essential and is well noted in the chapter itself as well as in the concluding recommendations.

**G. Chapter VII – Recommendations and further work**

55. The list of areas suggested for future work, as well as the organizing structure used to present these proposals, was broadly welcomed. Croatia stated that the chapter is “very clear and informative”, while Chile noted that it offers “very good recommendations for evaluating in what type of survey we could measure power and decision-making”. Italy, Mexico, Serbia and Colombia, all of which were represented on the Task Force, agreed that the recommendations and areas proposed for future work are comprehensive.

56. The importance of continued international collaboration to further develop this topic area, as called for in the Guidance, was underscored by Ukraine, Chile and Colombia.

57. Colombia stressed the need for continued efforts to reach standardized concepts to permit greater comparability in the future. Relatedly, Chile, Colombia, Italy and Lithuania called for the chapter to emphasize more strongly the need for additional and internationally-coordinated qualitative testing.

58. Colombia called for future work to strengthen the links between this topic area and that of measuring asset ownership, given the influence that asset ownership may have on the threat points for leaving situations of unequal bargaining power.

59. Finland suggested that this chapter could emphasize more strongly the need to consider this topic within the context of intersectionality and ‘leaving no-one behind’. Similarly, Turkey proposed highlighting the need to look at interactions between gender, age and intergenerational relationships.

60. Hungary called for a broadening of the perspective of the work, to include women’s roles in economic and political life and civil society.

61. Colombia, Serbia, Canada and Italy all expressed an intention to conduct further work on this topic while Slovakia mentioned that in future they may consider doing so within existing surveys. Lithuania suggested that if any country undertakes to begin measurement of intra-household power and decision-making, or conducts any new qualitative research, their experiences and lessons learned could be shared internationally as part of any future work.

#### **Responses and changes proposed by the Task Force**

62. The section ‘Overarching Recommendations’ states that “international comparability should be one of the aims of producing indicators on this topic, and as such countries are encouraged to use broadly similar formulations to aid cross-country comparisons”. The Task Force will add, “An important area for follow-up work is therefore for an internationally-convened group of countries to undertake joint qualitative testing with a view to developing questions that could be applied cross-nationally”.

63. Strengthening links with work on measuring asset ownership, such as that conducted by UNSD, will be added to the areas for future work.

64. Further emphasis and detail will be added to the recommendation on intersectionality and multiple disadvantage, including making explicit the link to ‘leaving no-one behind’.

65. The Guidance developed by the Task Force is specifically focused on intra-household power and decision-making, as this was an area identified by the international gender statistics community as being underdeveloped and in need of guidance. This is reflected in the terms of reference for this work as approved by CES. While women’s roles in political and civil society and equity in the economy are undoubtedly important, they are not within the scope of the present Guidance. The section ‘Importance and Policy relevance’ in the Introductory chapter notes that measurement of gender equality in these more public spheres of life is already more commonplace whereas the present work is taking steps towards filling a gap where measures are largely absent. Text will be added in the introduction to clarify this point further.

## **IV. Conclusion**

66. Thirty-six countries and organizations explicitly supported endorsement of the Guidance, subject to the amendments presented in this document. No country opposed such endorsement.

## **V. Proposal to the Conference**

67. In view of the support received from countries and organizations in response to the consultation, the Conference is invited to endorse the *Guidance for Measuring Intra-household Power and Decision-making*, subject to the amendments outlined in this document.