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RURAL DEVELOPMENT STATISTICS IN SELECTED ECE COUNTRIES**

Invited paper submitted by UNECE Secretariat

Summary

The project on rural development statistics undertaken by UNECE is in its early stages. The current report represents a progress report and is to be regarded as a first draft rather than a finished report. The reasons for initiating the project are discussed. The results of a questionnaire that was sent to selected UNECE countries are summarised. Finally, future work is outlined.

* Due to the late submission of this paper, it could neither be translated nor reproduced.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The need for a new set of statistics or for more detailed information on a specific area generally arises from a shift in policy focus. Rural development statistics are no exception. Over recent years, rural development has become an important policy issue in many countries in the UNECE area. Rural areas have suffered employment and population losses as employment in other sectors did not increase fast enough to make up for the losses of employment in agriculture. The migration from the country to the towns gave rise to new economic and social problems in rural areas which are not directly related to agriculture any more. Especially in countries where agriculture only accounts for a small percentage of both production and employment in rural areas, policy focus has started to move away from a rural policy mainly focussed policy to a policy targeting the wider rural economy and population.

2. This led to shift in policy focus which has been recognised in some countries in the name of the departments/ministries. Examples are the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries in Portugal, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Israel and the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development in Hungary. In other countries, the issues of rural development have been added to the responsibility of the ministry that deals with agricultural policy without a change in name. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture covers rural development issues. In other countries, rural development is more closely linked to policy areas other than agriculture.

3. In recent years, international organisations have also taken up work in the area of rural development and its related statistics. Eurostat have recently set up a unit working on rural development statistics within the directorate that also covers agricultural, food and environmental statistics. In OECD rural development statistics are covered by the territorial indicators group. Within FAO, rural development falls mainly within the responsibility of the Sustainable Development Section. Regardless of where the responsibilities lie, it has been widely recognised that rural development statistics need to look far beyond core agriculture. Rural development statistics have to cover not only the wider economic conditions in rural areas but also social and environmental conditions (see for example Hill, 2002). Getting this wider coverage of rural development statistics right is one of the challenges for statisticians working on the creation of a system of rural development statistics.

4. The first step when looking at rural development statistics should be to get an understanding of the policy issues from which the need for statistics arises in order to make sure that the statistical system that is set up satisfies the needs of users. Three main statistical issues then arise in the area of rural development statistics.

- (a) The (statistical) definition of 'rural'.
- (b) The general topic areas that need to be covered by the rural statistics system
- (c) The specification of variable and the issue of their measurement

II. UNECE ACTIVITIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT STATISTICS

5. The Intersecretariat Working Group on Agricultural Statistics of the UNECE, OECD, FAO and Eurostat intends to set up a Task Force on Rural Development Statistics. It is expected that the Task Force will start its work in autumn 2003. In the meantime, the UNECE has started a project on rural development statistics in spring this year. The project started with work on compiling an inventory of available information on rural development statistics. After initial research on the internet, a questionnaire was sent out to 12 countries (Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States). These 12 countries were chosen to get a first picture of the rural development statistics used in UNECE member states.

6. The survey included all those countries that were known to have established or are in the process of establishing a system of rural development statistics. Thus, the selected countries were not meant to paint an unbiased picture of the state of development of rural statistics. Other countries were chosen to give us an idea of what data are available in countries that have not yet established comprehensive rural development statistics.

7. To date, replies from 11 countries have been received. The aim of the questionnaire was to find out which organisations are responsible for rural development policy, what the aims of the rural development policies are as well as which organisation(s) are responsible for statistics on rural development, how rural is defined and what kind of statistics are available. The question of which specific indicators could be used to satisfy the need of rural development statistics users has not yet been addressed by the UNECE project. However, both Eurostat and OECD have carried out work in this area (see for example OECD 1994, and Hay, 2002).

8. It is intended that this first questionnaire is followed by a second stage questionnaire sent out to a more comprehensive sample of countries. At present, the details of the second stage have not been determined yet. The following chapters present the results of the questionnaire in three sections: rural development policy, the definition of rural and current availability of rural development statistics.

III. RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY

9. Rural development policy has emerged as a policy area alongside agricultural policy over recent years. In different countries, rural development is under the responsibility of different ministries/departments. In 6 of the 11 countries, rural development policy and agriculture mainly fall within the responsibility of the same ministry but in 4 countries they fall in the area of other ministries such as the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communication in Sweden, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in Ireland, The Ministry for the Interior and Health in Denmark and the Ministry for Regional Development and Regional Authorities in the Czech Republic. In Canada, a federal Rural Secretariat has the task of coordinating rural development policy because all departments have policies that affect rural areas.

10. Even from this small sample it is clear that rural development, even though connected to agricultural policy and often emerging from it, has a much wider scope. Agriculture plays a part in rural development but in some countries only a small and declining part. Hence, rural development policy does not necessarily need to fall within the responsibility of the same organisation as agricultural policy.

11. The questionnaire also included a question about the objectives of rural development policy. Of the 10 countries that answered this question, four have objectives that are explicitly directed at agriculture and the agri-food sector. In six countries, rural development objectives do not specifically mention agriculture but generally aim at improving the quality of life in rural areas by improving the economic, environmental and social conditions in rural areas. In order to decide on the scope and the focus of rural development statistics, it is important to understand the aims of rural development policy. The focus will be different if the policy is mainly addressed at the agricultural community or generally at the rural community.

12. In order to determine which general topic areas should be covered by rural development statistics, a question was included about the main themes and policies of rural development policy. The answers generally fall within the following main areas:

- 1) Economic/employment
(in some cases with special stress of agriculture)
- 2) Service provision/Infrastructure
- 3) Environment
- 4) Preservation or renewal of rural communities and tradition

13. The information supplied on rural development policy leads to the conclusion that rural development covers the whole range of factors that influence the life of people living in rural areas – economic, social and environmental. The importance attributed to agriculture differs greatly between countries – ranging from it being a main focus to it only playing a minor part.

IV. THE DEFINITION OF RURAL

14. For statisticians working on rural development statistics, one of the first questions to ask is ‘what exactly is rural?’. This might seem a trivial question at first but if it turns out to be anything but easy to define. The responses to the UNECE questionnaire showed that there is a large variety of definitions of ‘rural’ both within the countries and between the countries with different variables used to distinguish rural from non-rural and with different thresholds.

15. There are two main definition types. One is based on variables applied to administrative areas such as communes/municipalities or larger areas for example Kreise in Germany or counties in the UK. The second type is a settlement based definitions which looks at built up areas irrespective of administrative boundaries. The first type is more commonly used than the second type.

16. In order to get meaningful indicators based on a settlement basis, statistics must be available for fairly small geographic areas otherwise it will not be possible to find indicators

for the thus defined rural areas. If the smallest geographical units for which most economic, social and environmental variables are available are communes or even larger geographical units, a system based on settlement patterns will be of limited usefulness.

17. Both these basic types of definition then use specific variables to distinguish rural and non-rural areas. It is difficult to classify the different definitions. Below is a rough summary of the responses to the questionnaire. However, before a more detailed summary can be given, these definitions need to be looked at in more detail.

18. Most definitions in use are a combination of two or more variables such as population level and population density or commuting intensity. The variable 'population level' and 'population density' are used most frequently - mainly at commune/municipality level (see Annex 1).

19. The differences do not end here. Even when similar variables are used to distinguish rural and non-rural, the thresholds applied can be very different. For the population level for communes, for example, this threshold ranges from 200 to 2000. For settlement based definitions, a threshold of 10,000 inhabitants seems to be most commonly used.

20. The above excludes the definitions currently found United Kingdom. At present, various different definitions are used in official statistics of the United Kingdom. However, a group of experts from different departments and agency are working on a standard definition that will be based on settlement patterns which is hoped to be used across England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland have different approaches to defining rural.

21. The next question to be addressed is whether there is a need for a definition that distinguishes degrees of rurality. The responses to the questionnaire seem to suggest that there is a need for such a sub-division as only 2 out of the 11 countries reported that they do not use any subdivision of rural areas. The same problems as mentioned above will have to be faced when trying to define these subgroups. The variables used do not necessarily have to be the same as for the basic definition of rural e.g. the rural non-rural definition could be based on population level, whereas the subdivision could be based on distance to an urban centre of a certain size.

V. CURRENT AVAILABILITY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT STATISTICS

22. In most countries more than one organisation produce statistics on rural development reflecting the large scope of rural development policies and statistics. Therefore, it will be not as straightforward as in some other areas to compile an inventory of available statistics.

23. To the question of whether there is a core/standard set of indicators to monitor rural development, only Romania and the Czech Republic stated that such a set exists. In Hungary and France such a set of indicators is under construction. In Germany, a set of indicators is collected in the framework of the EU rural development plan. The other countries did not report to have an official core/standard set of indicators to monitor rural development.

24. Seven countries indicated that statistics on rural development are at present available on the internet. In several cases the data available are fairly limited. In others, the data available cannot be found on one but on different websites. In the UK, a site dedicated to rural development statistics is under construction (Annex 2 gives all websites mentioned in the questionnaire responses).

25. The questionnaire also asked for data on the percentage of the population living in rural areas and the percentage of land that is classified as rural. Table 1 shows these data for the 11 countries that responded to the question.

These figures are based on the national definitions of 'rural' and therefore the comparability is very limited. At the moment, these data are used as they are for international comparison (e.g. in the World Urbanization Prospects published by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations).

Table 1 Rural population and rural land

	Percentage of population living in rural areas	Percentage of land in rural areas
Canada	22-38	95-100
Czech Republic	27	74
Denmark	15	-
France	24	82
Germany	13	30
Hungary	47	88
Romania	45	89
Sweden	35-40	>95
England		
Urban settlement definition	20	93
Administrative Area definition (wards)	28	87
USA		
Census Bureau definition	21	97
ERS definition	20	81

Source: UNECE rural questionnaire

26. Table 1 shows the effect that the definition can have on the numbers when looking at the data available for England and the United States which both have two commonly used definitions. For England, the population living in rural areas is either 20 per cent or 28 per cent depending on the definition used. The land in rural areas is 87 per cent or 93 per cent. For the US, the difference between the two definitions is larger for the land area than for the population. It can be seen that the different type of definitions can have a large impact on both the population classed as living in rural areas and the land area covered. In addition, the overlap between the definitions is smaller than could be assumed from looking at these figures. Not all of the 20 per cent of the population classed as rural in the English urban settlement definition are also included in the 28 per cent classed as rural according to the administrative area definition.

27. Another point worth mentioning is the low figure for land in rural areas in Germany. The reason for the comparatively low figure is that the smallest geographic unit used in the classification is a 'Kreis', an administrative area consisting of several communes. All other

countries in this sample base their definition on smaller geographic units. Generally, the smaller the basic geographic unit used in the classification, the higher the percentage of land classified as rural.

28. Due to the lack of comparability of the data, it is difficult to draw any other conclusions from the data presented in the table. The same will be true for every indicator for rural development – whether economic, social or environmental.

VI. NEXT STEPS

29. The next step of the UNECE project is a more detailed analysis of the responses to questionnaire especially as to the definitions of rural and their comparison. In the questionnaires sources of information were indicated by respondents. The information available on the internet will be analysed.

30. As mentioned before, it is planned to have a second round of the survey to both cover more countries and to include issues that have come up and will come up in the course of the project (and the work of the Task Force on Statistics on Rural Development).

References

Hay, K (2002). "Rural Indicators and Rural Development, Final Report", Eurostat.

Hill, B. (2002). "Rural Statistics Project: Determining Defra's Rural Statistics", London. (http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/temp_rural/berkeley.pdf)

OECD (1994). "Creating Rural Indicators for Shaping Territorial Policy", Paris.

United Nations (2002). "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2001 Revision", New York.

ANNEX 1

Summary of definitions of rural

Country	Variables used	Smallest geographic unit	Subdivisions
Canada	population level, population density, communiting intensity	census sub-division, census consolidated subdivision	Yes (3)
Czech Republic	number of permanent residents	municipality	-
Denmark	number of inhabitants	address	No
France	outside built-up areas of more than 2000 inhabitants, commuting intensity	commune (NUTS 5)	Yes (3)
Germany	population density, size of urban centres	Kreis (NUTS III)	Yes (2)
Hungary	population density, residential population	NUTS IV subregion	Yes (3)
Ireland	population size	District Electoral Division	No
Romania	rural areas defined by law without taking into account the demographic size or population density	village	Yes
Sweden	density of buildings and inhabitants	geographical coordinates	Yes (2)
England*	settlement size	address	Yes
United States	socio-economic variables population density size of the population nucleus, social and economic intregation	NUTS 5 sub-county areas county	Yes (2) - Yes

Source: UNECE rural development questionnaire

* Work is under way to replace these defintions by a new urban/rural standard based on settlement patterns

ANNEX 2

Rural development statistics on the internet reported by respondents to the questionnaire

Canada

Canadian Rural Partnership:

www.rural.gc.ca

Rural and Small Town Canada Analysis Bulletin:

www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/21-006-XIE/free.htm

Statistics Canada – community profiles:

www12.statcan.ca/english/profil01/PlaceSearchForm1.cfm

Statistics Canada - Definition of Rural:

www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/listpub.cgi?catno=21-601-MIE

Denmark

Statbank Denmark:

www.statistikbanken.dk/

France

INSEE:

www.insee.fr (rubrique ‘territoire’)

Germany

Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung

www.bbr.bund.de/

Statistisches Bundesamt

www.destatis.de/themen/d/thm_regional.htm

Hungary

Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Development

www.fvm.hu/english/annex2.pdf

United Kingdom

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

www.defra.gov.uk/esg/work_htm/publications/cs/ruralinfo_web/default.asp

National Statistics

www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/

United States

United States Census Bureau

www.census.gov/

Bureau of Labor Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov>

Bureau of Economic Analysis

<http://www.bea.gov>

Economic Research Service

www.ers.usda.gov/

National Agricultural Statistics Service

www.nass.usda.gov/