

Σ SIGMA

THE BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN STATISTICS

People count

Focus on
demography statistics



Editorial



It is safe to say that population and migration issues will be a dominating factor in the development of the European political agenda for decades to come. One of the most serious problems facing our continent over the next 25 years or so is an ageing population. This will have huge consequences for our societies — in particular, the funding of pensions, social structures and migration flows.

In order to take specific, long-term steps, it is crucial to establish accurate numbers of inhabitants across the continent. The preparations for the coordinated population census to take place across much of Europe in 2011 are well under way. We talk to the experts in gathering and evaluating these vital statistics, both at Eurostat and in Germany, Ireland, France and Sweden. Each of these four countries has a different way of organising the census and all of them are confident that the results will help plan and further develop joint policies in the field.

In this issue, we also meet the specialists in projection statistics and demographic research from Eurostat, the Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute in the Netherlands and the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau.

One of the ways to boost dwindling population numbers is through controlled immigration. Immigrants provide our labour markets and ageing societies with the much-needed 'youthfulness' factor. Complex problems surrounding the collection of migration statistics are highlighted in our interviews with experts from the British ONS, Spanish INE, Danish Immigration Service and the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium.

As many of you will know, the European Union is aiming to harmonise its asylum procedures. We include an article presenting the hard work done by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the area of data collection and analysis of asylum-seekers in Europe and worldwide.

The statistics on population, migration and asylum-seeker are used on a daily basis by an army of policymakers and their advisory bodies. We talk to end-users of these data from the European Commission Directorates-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Economic and Financial Affairs; and Justice, Freedom and Security.

Hervé Carré
Director-General, Eurostat

Editorial



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SIGMA

THE BULLETIN OF EUROPEAN STATISTICS

Produced by Eurostat

Editor-in-chief: Philippe Bautier

Editorial team: Lukasz Augustyniak,

Beatriz Fernández Nebreda, Annika

Östergren Pofantis, Johan Wullt.

Published by: Office for Official

Publications of the European

Communities, Luxembourg, 2008

ISSN 1018-5739

© European Communities, 2008

Graphic design by Fitolito 38, Italy

© Cover photos: rramirez125@

istockphoto.com, European Commission,

Phovoir and Pixelio.de.

Printed in Belgium

Printed on white chlorine-free paper

Sigma is available free of charge from:

Eurostat, Communication Unit,

Bech A4/112, L-2920 Luxembourg.

Fax: (352) 4301 35349.

E-mail: eurostat-pressoffice@ec.europa.eu

All issues of *Sigma* can be consulted

online at Eurostat's website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>

We would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of *Sigma*:

Tim Allen, Christine Ardillac, Henri Bogaert, Åke Bruhn, Giuseppe Carone, Tarek Abou Chabake, Roma Chappell, Jean-Louis De Brouwer, Khassoum Diallo, Ignacio Duque, Konstantinos Giannakouris, Peter Goldblatt, Poul Mose Hansen, Ana Jurado, Gregor Kyi, Giampaolo Lanzieri, Olivier Lefebvre, Jordi Garcia Martínez, Thomas Mortensen, Michel Poulain, Aidan Punch, Stefan Schweinert-Albinus, Michail Skaliotis, David Thorogood, Paolo Valente, Jérôme Vignon and Frans Willekens.

The views expressed in *Sigma* are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission or the organisations to which the authors belong.

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The census laboratory

Censuses are probably the oldest statistical exercise on earth — and today they are still among the most complex ones. The next round of population and housing censuses in the EU Member States will be in 2011. For the first time they will be conducted in the framework of European legislation that will clarify roles and responsibilities of the participating countries, guarantee quality and help identify best practices — a showcase example of statistical cooperation between Eurostat and its partners in the Member States.



The new census law will ensure high-quality data. Michail Skaliotis, Head of the Demographic and Migrations Statistics Unit at Eurostat, together with Gregor Kyi, responsible for the 2011 census, and Giampaolo Lanzieri, Head of the Demography, Census and Projections Section. Photo: C. Ardillac.

‘**The** first EU regulation on census data will be adopted in 2008. It has an output-oriented design and focuses on the fact that we want comparable, high-quality data’, says Michail Skaliotis former Head of the Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit in Eurostat (see box on page 7).

The most important reason why Eurostat decided to have a legal basis for future rounds of population and housing censuses relates to the need to ensure a high level of quality and comparability of demographic statistics. Actually, high-quality and comparable population data are required to help formulate objectives, allocate funds and evaluate progress in almost every policy area in which the EU is active, be it economic, social or environmental.

‘A huge number of everyday political decisions at EU level — including the qualified majority voting in the European Council — are based on demographic statistics’, says Giampaolo Lanzieri, Head of the Demography, Census and Projections Section.

‘The paradox is that several decisions are based on statistics which are *not* subject to EU legislation, but are collected on the basis of gentlemen’s agreements’, says Mr Skaliotis.

Apart from improved quality, the regulation will ensure a unique reference year: 2011. This is a major improvement as the reference dates were spread over a period of 39 months for the previous census. This spread caused a major



The qualified majority voting in the European Council is based on demographic statistics. Jose Sócrates, Portuguese Prime Minister and President of the European Council in 2007, together with José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, at the European Council in December 2007. Photo: EU Council.

delay in the publication of the results — 44 months after the end of the reference year — which will now be significantly reduced.

Diverse collection systems — comparable output

The European legislation on population censuses is the first 'legal' recognition at an international level that the different approaches to census taking are valid (see overleaf). The Member States can use the sources and the census-taking method of their choice, such as a conventional approach or a register-based method. However, the condition is that the output must meet quality requirements.

'This helps to increase efficiency and keep the burden involved in census taking to an appropriate level, be this burden financial, the response burden to the citizens or the workload in the statistical institutes. At the same time, quality and, in particular, comparability will be improved. The

legislation will outline the quality reporting of the Member States and help identify best practices, says Gregor Kyi, who is responsible for the 2011 census at Eurostat.

'The European statistical system will play a central role in the future development of census methodology. In a way we are building a unique international census laboratory, which aims to achieve the best possible census results by using alternative census-taking approaches', says Mr Skaliotis.

Each Member State can use different sources and approaches for the different topics the census will report on. This is reflected in the work of the national statistical institutes which evaluate the situation topic by topic. One example: for employment-related topics, the data sources might be different to those for migration-related topics, and the situation is completely different again when the aim is to collect data on housing. The list combining the possible methodologies that might be used reveals the diversity of the operation — as well as the immense challenge to produce an accurate and consistent overall image of the population and of housing.

Census types

- Conventional census, for example Ireland and the United Kingdom (see article on page 8).
- Register-based census, for example Sweden (see article on page 10).
- Combination of conventional census and sample survey.
- Combination of register-based census and sample survey, for example Austria.
- Combination of register-based census and conventional census.
- Combination of register-based census, conventional census and sample survey, for example Germany (see article on page 12).
- Rolling census, for example France (see article on page 14).

Objective: a potent data source on the EU's population

The census team is working closely with experts from the national statistical institutes (NSIs) in a task force to define the detailed breakdowns of the topics. Both the topics and the breakdowns follow the Conference of European Statisticians' recommendations, prepared by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in cooperation with Eurostat and many experts from NSIs (see article on page 16). The task force adapts the breakdowns to the reality of the EU Member States and makes them technically more concrete, where needed. It takes into consideration user requirements as well as what is possible for Member States to provide, depending on which method of census-taking they use.

Another challenge facing the task force is the sheer volume of work. The census covers many topics, some of them in rather great detail. This is why the task force thinks very hard about which information is useful for users, and what the NSIs are able to provide.



Following the 2011 census, and for the first time in history, researchers will be able to study detailed census data that are comparable between EU regions. Photo: EPA Photo/K. Christodoulou.

'Each combination and each hypercube demands a delicate trade-off between technical feasibility on the one hand and the value added of the obtained information on the other. The work is ongoing, but the end in view is a modern design for dissemination that offers comparable census data for all regions of the EU', explains Mr Kyi.

The access to the hypercubes is the objective of the European Census Hub project, which is still in its infant state. The idea is to have a single entry point for data requests which will be located at Eurostat. The user requests should be guided by interfaces that offer the contents of the hypercubes. The hub will translate the overall request into separate requests to the Member States and dispatch them. The extraction will be made from a database located at the NSIs. The NSIs would have to guarantee that the results are statistically significant and safe with respect to confidentiality. The extraction from the Member States would be sent back to Eurostat, assembled and finally dispatched to the user. The presentation of the hub will underline that the censuses are a common exercise within the European statistical system.

'The European Census Hub is not just a step, but a stride forward. In previous censuses, data were provided in simple tables that hid a lot of valuable information. After 2011, for the first time in census history, researchers will be able to consult a sophisticated set of hypercubes, go down in detail and study census data that are comparable between the regions of the EU', says Mr Kyi.

Quality is the top priority

Member States will also have to submit quality reports and report on the extent to which they comply with quality criteria. The quality reports will, for example, include metadata in order to assess the degree of comparability.

Why a census in 2011 and not in 2010?

The United Nations recommends that countries conduct a census at least once every decade. The last census was held in 2000 in Europe, so why will the next census not be held in 2010? The answer is quite simple. The European Union Member States are conducting an agricultural census in 2010 and because the resources and budget devoted to a population and housing census are high, it was decided to push it one year later to 2011.

New Head of the Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit

On 1 January Bettina Knauth became the Head of the Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit. Mr Skaliotis is now the Head of Eurostat's Information Society and Tourism Statistics Unit.



'We take quality management of the census data very seriously. The quality reports will make it possible for us to observe what is going on and enable us to give advice, and they will be the basis of a platform where Member States can exchange information on challenging topics', says Mr Lanzieri.

'The census is the backbone of demography statistics and therefore used in many policy areas for decision-making or for funds. The new census law will ensure that we have high-quality data and finally end the paradox that we have suffered from until now', says Mr Skaliotis.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

For further information:
Gregor Kyi: gregor.kyi@ec.europa.eu

Ireland counts



In 2011, the Irish statistical office plans to give households the opportunity of answering questions online and is examining the implications of allowing householders to post back their census forms by regular mail. 'This will be challenging,' says Census Director Aidan Punch, 'but is the only way forward.' Photo: C. Ardillac

The census is by far the largest statistical operation undertaken by the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The field operation involves visits by 4 400 enumerators to all 1.8 million Irish households. Each enumerator is responsible for around 350 households. The actual field operation starts five weeks before and ends five weeks after Census Night.

'Everyone is counted on the basis of where they spend Census Night. If you happen to be on a business trip or visiting someone in another part of the country, you are asked about your "usual residence"', says Census Director Aidan Punch. 'Yet 96 % of people are enumerated where they usually live.'

The census is an important instrument to support politics as the data are the basis for the definition of the constituencies for elections at local and national level. It also gives a comprehensive, detailed picture of social and living conditions. The results are essential tools for effective policy, planning and decision-making at local, regional and national levels.

'The greatest strength of the census are the detailed population figures at local level. These help to identify likely demand for schools and hospitals, areas of high unemployment, the best location for new shops, etc,' says Mr Punch.

In Ireland, census-taking is carried out every five years. The reason for holding the census twice as often as in most other EU countries is the large number of people moving in and out of Ireland, both historically and today, as well as the importance of migration as a component of population change. In 1841, when the first census was held, 6.5 million people lived in what is today the Republic of Ireland; 120 years later there were only 2.8 million and today Ireland has 4.2 million citizens.

'Be part of the bigger picture'

As with all census methods, the main challenge for the Irish census is coverage. In order to reach all households in Ireland, the country is divided and mapped into areas containing around 350 households each. An enumerator contacts all households in the district and hands over and collects all forms. The policy has been not to drop off forms without making contact with the householders on the door step.

'The quality of the field operation is really the quality of the census,' says Mr Punch.

To raise awareness about Census Night, the CSO engages in an intensive multimedia campaign embracing TV, radio, the printed press and outdoor posters. In 2006, it was conducted during the month leading up to Census Night.

'The purpose of the campaign was to encourage and remind people to fill in their census forms and to "be part of



'The greatest strength of the census are the detailed population figures at local level,' says Mr Punch. Pictured is the warehouse where all the census forms from the 2006 census are stored. Photo: CSO.



In Ireland a census is carried out every five years. Pictured is the room where the census forms are scanned.
Photo: CSO.



The Irish census is by far the largest statistical operation undertaken by the Central Statistics Office. Here CSO staff are working on preparing scanned images and coding census information. Photo: CSO.

the bigger picture". The post-Census Night advertising was to remind people to have their completed forms ready for collection', says Mr Punch.

The CSO also prepared education packs for schools, information about the census in 16 foreign languages and a leaflet about the census itself, which was given to all households.

Moving online

In 2011, the CSO plans to give households the opportunity to answer the questions online and is examining the implications for coverage of allowing householders to post back their census forms by normal mail.

'The challenge with this system will be to keep track of where the posted forms are and to avoid everyone logging in at the same time on the Internet to fill out their forms. To this end we are developing a tracking system for forms and studying the experience of online questionnaires in Australia and New Zealand', says Mr. Punch.

'Bringing to an end the system where all forms are collected by enumerators will certainly create some problems, but it is the way forward. We have to simplify the procedure for respondents.'

In Ireland, registers are not used for census taking. The reason is that there are no well-established registers because

they have not been an important part of Irish administration. Despite this, the CSO is looking into how it can make better use of existing data sources for census or other statistical operations.

'Given our situation, "traditional census taking" gives the best value for money, despite the expense. It is cost-effective, efficient and a quick way to get the data. This view is supported by the administrative system in Ireland,' Mr Punch concludes.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

Facts about the Irish census

- The first major census, using a household form, was carried out in 1841.
- The public are obliged by law to complete a census form in Ireland.
- Some 4 800 field staff are employed for the census exercise; 4 400 of those are census enumerators.
- The country is divided and mapped into 4 400 areas, each of which contains around 350 households.
- The forms used for Census 2006 weighed about 230 tonnes in total.

The end of a 250-year-old Swedish tradition: a new dwellings register to replace population and housing censuses

After 250 years of population and housing censuses, it is time for a fundamental change in Sweden. There will be no more mass mailing of questionnaires to the whole population. Instead, information will be collected in registers that will be able to deliver up-to-date statistics rapidly but for a fraction of the cost of previous surveys.



Åke Bruhn, project manager at Statistics Sweden, says a new dwellings register will facilitate access to household and housing statistics and replace the traditional population and housing census. Photo: Statistics Sweden.

lation register. The priests entered data in their parish registers on, for example, births, marriages, deaths and emigration, and these were then compiled into statistics and sent to the then equivalent of Statistics Sweden. Since the 1970 population and housing census, Statistics Sweden has used a register which covers the entire population and is administered by *Skatteverket* (the National Tax Board).

The 1990 population and housing census was a turning point

Demographic data had long been available in registers. On the other hand, there were no registers with information on people's living conditions. This information was instead collected through population and housing censuses, which worked well until 1990. During the 1990 census, however, the drawbacks of the questionnaire format became apparent, hence the need for change.

'There were two issues which proved decisive after the last population and housing census in 1990 — quality and money. The response rate was poor in certain areas of central Stockholm, with non-responses constituting 10 %. We felt that this was not an isolated incident, but rather the start of a trend which would spread and have a negative impact on the quality of future censuses. In addition, that last census cost SEK 250 million (EUR 27 million). When the registers are up and running, it will cost around SEK 5 million (EUR 540 000) to compile the statistics. The future register-based surveys will therefore represent significant savings for us,' says Åke Bruhn, a project manager at Statistics Sweden.

It was for these reasons that the Swedish Parliament decided, in 1995, to set up a new register for dwelling and household data to complement the existing population register and to replace future population and housing censuses. *Lantmäteriverket* (the Swedish Land Survey Board) was assigned the task of setting up the new dwellings register, which is to be ready by 2010.

Swedish population statistics have one of the longest histories in the world. As early as 1749, the Swedish authorities began counting the number of people living in the country. *Tabellverket* (the Office of Tables), one of the predecessors of Statistics Sweden, reported that the population totalled 1 764 724 people. Population censuses were initially carried out every 10 years and, since 1930, every five years. When the last population census was carried out in 1990, after 240 years of regularly counting the population, the total had increased by nearly 7 million to 8 590 630 people.

In Sweden, it was not necessary for officials to visit every household in the country to collect population data. That was taken care of by the priests. From 1749 until around 1900, church parishes were responsible for keeping a popu-

In order to discover any potential problems or weaknesses with a register-based system, Statistics Sweden and other competent authorities organised a pilot project in both Gävle and Stockholm at the end of the 1990s. The results were below expectations. Since property owners did not risk being penalised for not submitting data, a number of them did not provide any data at all.

'The trial was not particularly successful. The problem was that the legislators had not set out the duty of property owners in a sufficiently clear manner. Many neither established a list of the dwellings they owned nor numbered the dwellings in their buildings. But with clearer legislation there will be no problem with obtaining data from property owners,' says Mr Bruhn.

Setting up and updating the registers

It is property owners who will contribute the necessary data to the dwellings register. They will number all the dwellings they own. Each dwelling must have a number so that it can be linked to one or more specific people from the population register. In addition, property owners will provide data concerning each dwelling, such as the living area, the number of rooms and the type of kitchen, as well as comprehensive information concerning each individual property, such as the year of construction. At a later date, the dwellings register will be combined with the property register, which contains data on all the single-family houses in the country.

It is, of course, important that property owners provide comprehensive information about their dwellings to begin with, but it is at least as important that the register is continually updated. It will quickly become worthless if property owners do not continually provide information on changes in their property portfolio. This can be done in connection with the property owner applying for a building permit, for example for the extension of existing properties or for new construction.

The population register is the other important part of the new population and housing census and also constitutes the basis for the Swedish social security system. This is one of the reasons why Swedes are generally quick to provide details of any changes to their personal data. In turn, this means that the high quality of the population register will be maintained in the future. For example, Mr Bruhn estimates that there are only 40 000 people included in the population register who do not actually live in Sweden, which corresponds to a margin of error of less than half of 1 % of the population.

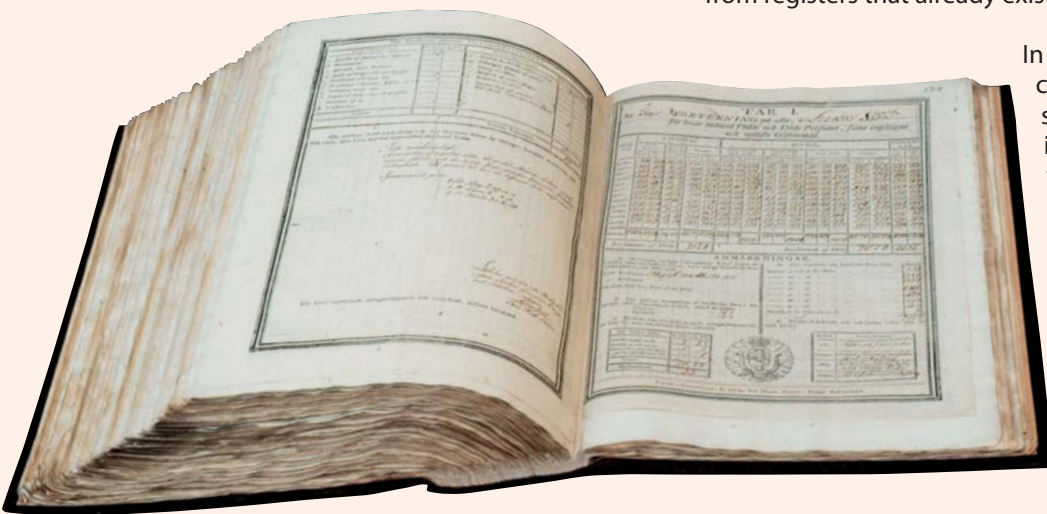
'Since all the registers that are part of the survey will also be used for other administrative purposes, they are of high quality — perhaps even higher than a more traditional population census,' he says.

Registers more rigid than surveys

The only downside to the new system, as Mr Bruhn sees it, is that it is more rigid. It is considerably harder to simply add a new variable or question to a register than to a questionnaire. Information on the journey to work and on heating systems in blocks of flats, which has been included in earlier surveys, will be missing from the new registers. It will also be difficult to determine the nationality of people whose home country has changed since they immigrated, for example immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union.

'Our principle is that we will use the country that they gave during their initial registration. Even if the country has changed its name or its structure, we will use the original name,' says Mr Bruhn.

During 2010, all people living in apartments will provide information concerning their new apartment number to the population register, thereby assisting in making the necessary link for the two registers to be able to work together and replace the old surveys. This information will then be combined with data on employment, education and occupation from registers that already exist.



As early as 1749, Swedish authorities began counting the number of people living in the country. Marriages, births and deaths were recorded by priests. Photo: Statistics Sweden.

In 2011, Statistics Sweden will carry out the first housing census based on the new dwellings register. One year later, the material will be sent to Eurostat to be included in the population census for the EU Member States. From then on Statistics Sweden will produce a compendium of household and housing statistics each year instead of every five years as has been the case up to now.

By Johan Wullt, Eurostat
Communication Unit

‘The majority will not be involved’ — Germany finds a new way to conduct the population and housing census

In 2011, Germany will be the only country in Europe to use a combination of different statistical methods to conduct its next population and housing census. The new system, tested by large-scale surveys in the years 2001 to 2003 and currently being further developed by a number of consultative bodies and working groups, will become fully operational within the next three years. It will be the first-ever population census to be held in the unified Germany and the statistical offices of the Federation and the Federal States are working hard to make it a success. *Sigma* spoke to Stefan Schweinert-Albinus from the German Federal Statistical Office to find out more about the challenges lying ahead.



Stefan Schweinert-Albinus from the German Federal Statistical Office is confident that a combination of different statistical methods to be used for the next population census in 2011 will yield reliable results. Photo: C. Ardillac.

The last full population census was held in West Germany in 1987. Initially, the census was scheduled for 1981. However the project sparked nationwide protests and calls for boycott, as the fears connected with the issues of privacy and the security of the census data were picked up by the media. Many pro-

testers claimed that the population census was a first step towards a Big Brother-style surveillance State. As a result, the census was postponed to 1987.

Because of people's fears and the complications following German unification, it took until 2006 for the German gov-

ernment to decide to participate in the EU-wide population census scheduled for 2011. Unlike 1987, the census takers will not have to visit each of the country's 82 million residents. Instead, they will evaluate the data from the existing administrative registers (population registers and the Federal Employment Agency (FEA) register), send detailed questionnaires to 17.5 million owners of buildings and dwellings, and conduct a sample survey of a maximum of 10 % of all residents.

'The system that evolved in recent years was given parliamentary approval in November 2007', said Mr Schweinert-Albinus. 'We urgently needed it, 20 years after the last full census in West Germany; East Germany held its last census in 1981. To give you an example, some statisticians reckon there might actually be up to 1.3 million fewer Germans today than the official calculations predict.'

No central population register

Unlike many other countries, today's Germany does not possess a central population register. The task of keeping population registers lies with the local authorities.

'There are approximately 13 500 local authorities across the country', said Mr Schweinert-Albinus. 'Each communal population register includes, among others, the names, sex, date and place of birth, marital status, citizenship, place of residence and address of each person. Everyone is required by law to register with the local authority. The main register features have been standardised across the country.'

The FEA in Nuremberg possesses a unified register based on the social insurance files of employees and other 'wage earners' subject to social insurance contributions. It contains names, dates of birth, sex and addresses and covers about 85 % of all persons engaged in economic activities in the Federal Republic. It does not, however, include, for example, the self-employed.

'There are no nationwide registers for buildings and dwellings in Germany', said Mr Schweinert-Albinus. 'This means that in order to collect these data, we need to send a questionnaire to property owners. We ask them to provide us with information on the age, size and the inner equipment of their property. Additionally, they provide us with the names of tenants or owner-occupiers.'

However, even the combination of the above data does not reveal the answers to all of the statisticians' questions. What are left out are, for example, the questions relating to education and training or concerning the country's self-employed

workers. These data will come from a population sample of a maximum of 10 % of all residents.

'The sampling procedure is challenging and therefore subject to an external research project. Simply put, about 550 addresses will be selected in each community with more than 10 000 inhabitants', continued Mr Schweinert-Albinus.

'In communities with less than 10 000 inhabitants, a proportion of inhabitants in the community will be sampled. A set of additional sampling procedures will complement the scheme. The second target of the sample survey is the amendment of the population register by estimating over- and undercounts.'

Information on households will not be available by using register data or by questionnaire but by generating households. That means all described data sources will be used to link persons with (private) households in a complex, multi-stage process, the so-called household generating procedure.

Full population census not planned

'A full survey was not planned for a number of reasons. The main reason is to unburden the population of statistical surveys. Another important consideration is the cost factor — a register-based survey is much cheaper to conduct, so the cost for the taxpayer will be significantly lower. The current estimate of the cost of the 2011 census is only about a third of what a traditional census would cost', said Mr Schweinert-Albinus.

'The fact that only a cross-section of the population will be interviewed means a smaller burden for the inhabitants. Unlike 1987, this time the majority of the population won't be involved at all. And we are confident that the new census will provide us with results that are just as reliable as would a traditional one.'

By Lukasz Augustyniak, Eurostat Communication Unit

France's rolling census provides fresher data and spreads costs



Why was the rolling census method introduced?

There were two main reasons for the change in methodology. The first was the fact that the interval between two censuses was increasing towards 10 years. This meant it was more and more difficult to keep track of changes in France's population, be it shifts in society and the family, trends in green belt settlement, or urban developments. At the same time, the local authorities, who gained in power in the 1980s, requested fresher data to conduct their policies. Municipalities are, for example, now responsible for urban transport. The departments are in charge of social welfare, help for the elderly and managing schools, and the regions are involved in areas such as vocational training, urban planning and managing high schools.

The new methodology also helped spread the financial and human costs of the census and improve the organisation and supervision.

In 2004, France abandoned general censuses and introduced the 'rolling census' as a new method of census taking. One reason for this change was demands for more up-to-date data by users of the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) — especially local communities. The advantage of the new method is that it helps spread the costs of the census, eases the burden on respondents and leads to better control of quality. Olivier Lefebvre, Head of the Census Unit, explains the intrinsic details of the French rolling census.

'In France, the responsibility for the census lies with INSEE, which organises and controls the exercise, but the surveys are prepared and carried out by the municipalities', says Olivier Lefebvre, Head of the Census Unit. Photo: INSEE France.

How is a rolling census carried out?

The basic principle of this method is that data collection is spread over a five-year cycle, generating information each year relating to the median year of that cycle.

The second principle is the use of sampling in the biggest municipalities, which have a sufficiently large population for a sampling survey to yield robust information. Sampling was introduced to relieve the burden that the census puts on INSEE, municipalities and census respondents. Sampling also contributes to an improved quality control of the collection process and in particular fewer omissions — always a bigger problem in large towns.

The 35 750 municipalities with populations of under 10 000 — which account for half the population of France — have been divided into five groups. Every year, each of the municipalities in one such group is exhaustively surveyed. The municipalities in the first group are surveyed again five years later, and so on.

The 900 municipalities with populations of 10 000 or more conduct census surveys every year, but only a part of their population is involved. Each year's survey covers 8 % of dwellings, selected from across the municipality. Thus, by the end of the first five years, 40 % of the population will have been surveyed: this is enough to guarantee robust information on the municipality and its neighbourhoods.

The sampling frame in each large municipality is a building register (*Répertoire d'immeubles localisés* — RIL). This is a list of all buildings, whether residential, administrative, industrial or commercial premises. The RIL was originally compiled for the 1999 general census, but has been kept up to date since then using administrative data such as building permits and local tax records, and postal records such as post office address lists. It is checked by the municipalities every year before final validation by INSEE.

Given the wide spread of the dates when persons are enumerated in a rolling census, how do you estimate the population at a given point in time?

Information gathered in different years is adjusted to apply to a single date at the mid-point of the five-year cycle. For the bigger municipalities, the average of the five samples is taken, and then rounded off to match the number of dwellings given in the RIL for the median year. For smaller municipalities, the method used is an interpolation or extrapolation between the census survey and the population reference date. Extrapolations are consolidated with the help of data from housing-tax registers, which give an indication of changes in the housing stock from year to year. With a five-year cycle, there is no need for interpolation/extrapolation over more than two years, so the figures are quite robust.

Would you recommend the rolling census method to other countries?

Each country must adapt its census to the local context: availability of registers for a statistical use, use of geographical information system, ease or difficulty of conducting general surveys, and budget constraints. The rolling census was the way chosen to renovate the census in France, but each country must build its own solution.

A far-reaching change of approach such as this depends on a number of technical and methodological factors and on collaboration with data users and census partners.

Technically, a high-quality sampling base is important: administrative files must be available to update the base and instruc-

'The census is useful for all of us. Think about it as of 18 January!' Poster from INSEE France.

tions on their use must be drawn up. The partnership with municipalities is of great importance, as it means that the contents of these files can be properly checked at the local level, which is very valuable because their knowledge of actual conditions is much better. Without administrative files, updating the sampling base is a slow and onerous process, requiring officials to be sent to the relevant places to identify dwellings (still the case in France's overseas departments).



Another key factor for the success of the operation is the availability of administrative sources allowing the sampling base to be updated and survey results to be 'nudged' if necessary.

High-level methodological expertise in surveying and modelling is also essential to be able to optimise samples, extrapolate survey results and produce synchronised statistics regardless of data collection date. A good knowledge of the balanced-sample technique and its operation is vital for sample optimisation and hence for budgeting the census and for the quality of the estimates.

There must be an adequate, constant budget: all in all, a rolling census does not reduce census costs, it simply helps to spread them over time and secure a better 'yield' since information is produced every year. The annual cost of the census in France, for example, is around one seventh of the cost of a general census. Once under way, the operation cannot be interrupted, for the cost of recovering one lost year would be much higher than the budget for a normal year.

How do you see the new EU regulation on census taking?

It gives a framework for the censuses, and this framework is output oriented: it is a guarantee of comparability, and also a guarantee of quality because each country can define its method according to local constraints.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

UNECE and Eurostat set standards for 2011 population census round

Every 10 years, the United Nations promotes a World Population and Housing Census Programme and urges all countries to conduct a population and a housing census. On the world level, the UN Statistics Division based in New York develops global census recommendations and collects and publishes census data. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) based in Geneva is in charge of developing recommendations for the ECE region, which includes member countries in Europe, North America and the Commonwealth of Independent States. *Sigma* met Paolo Valente, statistician at the UNECE Statistical Division, to find out more about the work accomplished and challenges ahead.

UNECE works closely together with Eurostat and its member countries to make recommendations for the 2011 population and housing census. Paolo Valente is a statistician at the UNECE Statistical Division. Photo: C. Ardillac.

UNECE has worked closely with Eurostat and the 56 UNECE member countries to make recommendations for the 2011 population and housing census. The resulting set of recommendations was adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) in June 2006 and published as a handbook.

'The main objective of the recommendations is to provide guidance and assistance for countries when they plan and conduct their census. It also aims at improving the output data and making them more comparable,' says Mr Valente.

'We have selected a set of core topics we recommend all countries to collect data on and we have harmonised definitions and classifications,' he continues.

Customised to European needs

The process which led to the CES recommendations was conducted in parallel to the revision of the worldwide census recommendations adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in 2007. However, the CES recommendations are more specific in the use of some definitions and classifications and are adapted to the reality of the UNECE region. This means that some topics and breakdowns differ at the world and European levels.

'Type of toilet is one example where the breakdowns differ between the two groups. On a world level one has to take into account the realities of the developing countries. Arrangements like a pit latrine or dug pits are common in many developing countries but are not common in the UNECE region,' says Mr Valente.

A steering group consisting of some of the member countries as well as Eurostat and UNECE led the work. In addition,



11 task forces worked on topics ranging from census methodology and technology to migration, families and housing.

'The experts in the task forces evaluated the previous census round and discussed which topics were still needed and which should be added or taken away, as perhaps a census is no longer the best way to obtain the data. The groups also decided how the breakdowns and definitions should be made,' says Mr Valente.

The recommendations proposed by the different task forces were discussed by all member countries and adopted by the Conference of European Statisticians in 2006.



The CES recommendations are more specific in the use of some definitions and classifications than the world-level ones. They are also better adapted to the realities of the UNECE region. Photo: EPA Photo/CTK/ M. Dolezal.

Evidently, it is efficient to have wide-ranging technical consistency between the CES recommendations and the EU census law. Eurostat participated actively in the preparation of the recommendations and brought the viewpoint of the European Commission into the experts' debate at an early stage. The good cooperation between UNECE and Eurostat has borne fruit and today the European statistical system has a well-elaborated and consistent framework for census taking. Subsequently, some topics and breakdowns have been tailored even further to fit specific information requirements of the European Union as well as the reporting situation in the EU Member States. Another advantage of Eurostat and the Member States being involved in the UN process is that the burden has been kept to a minimum and duplications are avoided.

Technical assistance

UNECE also provides technical assistance to the central Asian member countries. There have been three regional training workshops in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. These workshops focused on census management, design of questionnaires and census technology.

'The participants' feedback is very positive, but countries need more help with special requests — which we provide. Tajikistan, for example, asked for expert help on census evaluation and Turkmenistan needed assistance on how to use the geographical information system for mapping before the census,' says Mr Valente.

UNECE also offers training programmes to countries of south-eastern Europe.

'We train census managers and develop training tools so that they can train others on a national and regional level,' he adds.

The future

The CES recommendations, as well as the EU census law, are output oriented, which is the way to go in the future, believes Mr Valente.

'Census taking makes sense, as there will always be a need for a census as a benchmark count of the population to be used as a base for many other statistics. Countries are already now using different approaches for census taking depending on their situation and priorities. As census taking is an expensive exercise, many countries are trying to find more cost-efficient methods to use. I think we will see more countries using registers in combination with other methods in the future, but this is not a problem, as we and Eurostat use an output-oriented approach. The bottom line is that the final data should meet the users' needs, be comparable and of high quality,' says Mr Valente.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

UNECE

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) was set up in 1947 by the UN Economic and Social Council. It has 56 Member States, most of them from Europe (both members and non-members of the EU), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Canada and the United States. The UNECE is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations. The others cover Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and western Asia.

UNECE's aim is to promote pan-European economic integration. It also sets out norms, standards and conventions to facilitate international cooperation within and outside the region.

The area of expertise of the UNECE covers such sectors as economic cooperation and integration, energy, environment, housing and land management, population, statistics, timber, trade and transport.

Towards common migration and asylum data

Eurostat's Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit produces statistics on a range of issues related to migration and asylum. Data are supplied on a monthly and annual basis by national statistical institutes and ministries of the interior and justice. From 2008, the data collection will benefit from harmonised definitions of migration thanks to a new EU regulation passed in 2007 — a much-needed step to improve the quality of EU statistics in this increasingly important field.



One of the difficulties when measuring migration is that Member States have used different definitions. A new regulation was adopted in 2007, which will increase the quality of the data.

David Thorogood is Head of Eurostat's Migration and Asylum Team.

Photo: C. Ardillac.

Measuring migration — a key challenge

Measuring migration is not easy and in some cases is becoming even more challenging, as David Thorogood, Head of Eurostat's Migration and Asylum Team, explains.

Not all Member States have been able to supply certain key statistics on immigration

Migration statistics are a well-established annual data collection, dating back to the 1980s. They include statistics on migration flows and origins in and out of the European Union (EU), foreign population stock (disaggregated by country of origin), acquisition of citizenship and some aspects of labour migration.

'The annual migration data collection is organised together with the United Nations Statistical Division in New York, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva and the International Labour Organisation. This helps to reduce the burden on the respondent countries and ensure all organisations are publishing comparable figures. Eurostat is responsible for treating data for the EU-27, EFTA and the candidate countries', says Michail Skaliotis, former Head of Eurostat's Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit (see box on page 7).

and emigration flows. Even where data are available, differences in definition mean that EU aggregates may be potentially misleading. Member States differ as to who is counted as a migrant in the statistics. The definition used by Eurostat — based on a United Nations recommendation — is that 'a migrant is somebody who changes their country of residence for 12 months or more'. However, many countries use different time periods or even base the statistics on the reasons for the migration, sometimes excluding those who do not work, for instance students. There are also differences in the main data sources used. In some countries, migration statistics are based on population registers, as in Sweden, while others use data from the administration of residence permits or survey-based data.

'It's not always easy for us to find out who is responsible for the provision of data in the Member States. There are often

several parts of the administration involved: the national statistical offices, the ministries of justice and the interior, the police, immigration and border authorities or employment offices', he says.

'Unfortunately, measures designed to make it easier for EU citizens to travel around Europe and to live and work in other Member States can actually make it harder to produce good statistics. With far fewer restrictions and controls, there are less administrative data available. An increasing number of people also have second homes. One example is retired citizens from the north of Europe who choose to spend much of the year in Spain, retaining their home in the country of

origin. It can be difficult to define whether these people live in Spain or are simply visitors. More generally, people tend to move more now — both on a short-term and long-term basis, to study, work or travel abroad. This makes defining and counting migration more complicated.'

Ad hoc statistics to meet users' needs

Other data collections were initially developed in the late 1990s specifically by Eurostat on a pilot basis to meet the needs of our users — mainly working groups of the Council,



Eurostat collects data on the number of asylum applications in the EU and the types of decisions that follow the application. Pictured are boat people drinking water onboard a coastguard vessel near Lampedusa island, Italy. Photo: UNHCR/A. Di Loreto.

and the European Commission's Directorates-General for Justice, Freedom and Security and Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. At this time, particularly following the Treaty of Amsterdam, there was a great increase in the pace of development of European-level policies and legislation on immigration and asylum — and a corresponding increase in the demands for European statistics on these subjects. Over time, these rather ad hoc data collections have become properly established and now aim to meet the needs of all users.

'Statistics on asylum, on measures against illegal migration and on residence permits have been developed to meet the needs of statisticians preparing and monitoring European policies on migration and asylum', says Mr Thorogood.

As far as asylum statistics are concerned, Eurostat collects data on the number of asylum applications in the European Union and on the types of positive and negative decisions following the application of asylum procedures. The Justice, Freedom and Security DG is still the main user of these statistics, although anyone may access these data on Eurostat's database.

'Concerning the measures against illegal migration, statistics are collected on the number of people who have been refused entry on the border, people caught in an illegal immigration situation or the number of people deported. Again, the main users of these statistics are Justice, Freedom and Security DG and national immigration authorities, although we have expanded the availability of these data on Eurostat's database during 2007. This data collection has been moved from a monthly to an annual basis in 2007, with an emphasis on producing reliable reference statistics rather than on the rapid dissemination of operational-type data, as was previously the case', he continues.

Statistics on residence permits issued to EU citizens living in other Member States are being used by the Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG to monitor the effects of the transitional measures restricting labour migration from the new Member States.

Using statistics for the allocation of funds

'The statistics are notably used to monitor the implementation of the EU common asylum system and harmonised immigration policies. These statistics are also now being used to allocate money to Member States to support migration and asylum-related projects. This type of use began several

years ago with the European Refugee Fund under which money for projects dealing with the reception of asylum applicants and the integration of refugees was allocated to Member States according to the numbers of asylum applications and positive asylum decisions in the Eurostat statistics', says Mr Thorogood.

'The Justice, Freedom and Security DG's "solidarity and management of migration flows" multiannual programme sees a renewed European Refugee Fund and the establishment of three new funds — the Integration Fund for the integration of immigrants, the Return Fund for measures related to the return of unauthorised migrants, and the External Borders Fund, designed to support more effective border control measures. Together, from 2007 to 2013, these four funds are expected to distribute over EUR 4 billion to Member States for co-financed projects. The use of the statistics in the allocation of these funds has increased the attention being paid at all levels to the data completeness and comparability. Over time, this will have a strong positive effect on the quality of the statistics for all users.'

Finally harmonised definitions

The situation is set to improve thanks to a brand-new EU regulation covering all migration and asylum statistics which came into force in August 2007. The regulation provides harmonised definitions on terms such as 'immigrant', 'immigration' and 'place of usual residence', which will allow migration to be compared across countries, and notably improve the quality of statistics on migration and asylum in the European Union.

'At the moment, we are sometimes unable to answer basic questions such as how many people migrated to the EU last year, simply because some countries don't have these data and others use different definitions for migration. This regulation provides a proper legal base for the collection of migration statistics. Definitions are largely based on existing UN definitions and EU legislation on immigration and asylum. Combined with other factors — such as the pressure to improve data quality for the better allocation of funds — this new legislation will provide part of the framework for the long-term improvement of these statistics', says Mr Skaliotis.

By Beatriz Fernández Nebreda, Eurostat Communication Unit

Population statistics in the ONS — responsibility at a time of migration debate



Peter Goldblatt, Deputy Director, and his colleagues at the British ONS Centre for Demography find themselves working at a time of widespread public debate on immigration issues. Photo: ONS.

The United Kingdom population is growing at the fastest rate since the post-war period. Twenty-five years from now, the UK population is projected to exceed 70 million people, an increase of over 10 million, according to recent figures released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), based on new assumptions about future levels of migration and fertility. The figures show that nearly 70 % of the UK's population rise in this period will be directly or indirectly attributable to the assumption of positive net migration. With the topic generating newspaper headlines and keen political interest, ONS products and work in this area have suddenly fallen under the spotlight. As the UK does not possess a unified population register, *Sigma* met Peter Goldblatt and Roma Chappell, from the ONS Centre for Demography, to find out more about the sources of data and the methods applied in their daily work.

‘It may be true’, said Mr Goldblatt, ‘that we do not have a unified population register; however, we have many registers that each provide partial coverage of the population. For this reason, our system of estimating the population in this country is based on a combination of sources. The main registration sources currently used by us are the vital events registers of births and deaths and National Health Service (NHS) registers. Other registers have the potential to be useful and the ONS is investigating their use to improve population statistics — particularly at local area level. These other registers include the national insurance number (NINo) register.’

NHS registers hold demographic information about patients registered with doctors. ‘They are reasonably comprehensive but not perfect for two reasons’, said Ms Chappell.

‘Firstly, while a patient needs to register with a surgery to visit a doctor, there is no mandatory requirement to notify a change of address. So names of people who have registered for NHS services but have since moved away often remain in the system at the original address until they re-register at their new address. Secondly, the register does not record most people who decide to leave the country. Although there is a requirement to inform your doctor when you do so, very few people actually follow it.’

In this context, Ms Chappell pointed to list inflation on local NHS registers and some, due to emigration, on the NHS Central Register.

‘A similar issue affects the use of the NINo register’, added Mr Goldblatt. ‘Those born in the UK are assigned a number at birth, which is issued to them at age 16; those who come to the UK from abroad, register if they require a number for work or benefit purposes. But people leaving Britain retain their number and so their names remain on the register.’

Passenger surveys to estimate migration

As in many European countries, it is the population census that forms a base for the ONS population estimates. In the years between censuses, other sources of population information are required.

‘The UK possesses a very good system of registering births and deaths that occur here’, said Mr Goldblatt. ‘However, when it comes to estimating long-term international migration to and from the UK, we rely heavily on the findings of the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This is complemented by special arrangements with Ireland (which shares the UK's only land border) and the use of separate statistics on asylum-seekers.’

The IPS is a voluntary sample survey of passengers entering and leaving the UK by air, sea or train. Over a quarter of a million face-to-face interviews, representing about three in every 1 000 passengers, are conducted each year at 16 major airports, 12 sea ports and the Channel Tunnel.



Roma Chappell, Head of Population Statistics Research and Development at the ONS Centre for Demography: 'Producing population statistics has become a much more high-profile job these days.' Photo: ONS.

'Travellers on the surveyed routes make up around 90 % of all travellers entering and leaving the UK,' said Ms Chappell. 'Figures are grossed up using separately available data on total passenger movements.'

As well as providing data on international migration, the IPS aims to collect data to measure travel expenditure and how it impacts on the UK balance of payments. It provides detailed information about overseas visitors to the UK for tourism policy and collects travel information on passenger routes as an aid to aviation and shipping authorities.

The majority of interviews are carried out within the UK terminal; however, at some locations, interviews take place on board the ferry, train or at the quayside overseas. The interview usually takes three to five minutes and contains questions about the passenger's country of residence (for overseas residents) or the country of visit (for UK residents), the reason for their visit, and details of their expenditure and fares. There are additional questions for passengers migrating to or from the UK. Only a small proportion of those sampled are migrants — in 2006, there were 3 005 interviews with migrants coming to the UK and 789 with those migrating from the UK. The sampling error of national level estimates from the IPS was around 4 % for in-migration and 5 % for out-migration.

Steps to improve data quality and timeliness

In a period of significant population change and individual mobility, the issue of migration has become increasingly im-

portant. It has become more difficult to produce figures that adequately meet the growing range of user needs.

'The government needs our figures to plan its fiscal policy. So does the Bank of England, which needs to judge the country's economic prospects,' said Ms Chappell. 'We have 376 local authorities in the UK, which rely on funding from central government in areas such as health, education and housing. Without the relevant data, those responsible for local services could argue that the government's financing decisions do not reflect the needs of their populations.'

In this context, ONS has recognised the necessity to improve the accuracy of its estimates. Following a review of migration data quality in 2003, a number of improvements have been made. For the IPS, this included introducing new questions in 2004 on changes in intended length of stay. In 2007, the number of interviews with out-migrants was increased to give similar confidence levels to estimates as that achieved for immigration estimates. The hours at which interviews take place were also extended at one of the Heathrow airport terminals so as to sample passengers arriving from Hong Kong at 5 a.m.

In 2007, improvements were also made to the methods of estimating international migration. At a national level, this involved improved estimation of the numbers of people who change their intentions about the length of their stay. A number of improvements were also made to the distribution of international migration at local level. For example, ONS now makes use of migrant estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), a quarterly sample survey of 60 000 households living at private addresses in United Kingdom. Its purpose is to provide information on the UK labour market.



Photo: Pixelio.



When it comes to estimating long-term international migration to and from the UK, the ONS relies on the findings of the International Passenger Survey. It is a voluntary sample survey of passengers entering and leaving the UK by air, sea or train. Photo: Pixelio.

An interdepartmental task force on international migration statistics was set up by the National Statistician (Director of the ONS) in 2006 to identify a programme of work that would deliver more comprehensive and timely information on international migration. While recognising that no easy, single solution is available, the task force recommended a number of steps to improve and expand the range and quality of statistics on migration. They include having more information regarding migrants entering and leaving the country through greater access to new administrative systems at the UK's borders and by improved port surveys; an improvement in the level of information about migrants living in the UK, including surveying people living in communal establishments, currently not covered by ONS household surveys; making more use of information on migrants collected across government and investigating what useful data may be available from local authorities, employers or agencies providing work for migrants.

Another recommendation was to link the official data sources relating migrants' intentions at entry to the UK to subsequent events, such as employment, having a child and the date of leaving the country. An enhancement of the migration and population estimates through a better use of statistical and demographic models would lead to more adequate key indicators of migrant numbers and trends.

Finally, the task force suggested the creation of an expert committee on migration statistics reporting to the National Statistician, to provide an up-to-date interpretation of cur-

rent UK migration statistics, and the publication of all statistics on migration and migrants, collected across government departments, in a single UK-wide report, which would provide a more coherent picture than is available today.

High-profile task

'Producing population statistics has become a much more high-profile job these days,' said Ms Chappell.

'In April 2008, ONS will become independent. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 provides for the creation of a new, fully independent body — the Statistics Board. The board, established as a non-ministerial department reporting directly to Parliament, will have a remit covering the whole UK statistical system,' explained Mr Goldblatt. 'The overall objective is "to promote and safeguard the quality of official statistics that serve the public good". ONS will become the executive office of the Board.'

The act includes provision for establishing legal gateways that permit sharing of data for statistical purposes, subject to agreement by the departments concerned and other conditions. Data sets for which permission might be sought include those bringing together information using NINOs, information from school censuses and student data. This would open a new era in the production of migration statistics.

By Lukasz Augustyniak, Eurostat Communication Unit

Keeping up with migration in Spain

Ignacio Duque, Population and Immigration Director, and Ana Jurado, Census and Register Director at INE Spain, aim to improve international migration statistics by using existing registers, developing new projects and putting quality checks into practice. Photo: INSEE Spain.

International migration to and from Spain is impressive, both in absolute figures and in relative terms within the EU. In the period between 2000 and 2006, the number of immigrants to Spain grew from 517 000 to 840 000 new permanent residents per year. Today, Spain's net migration represents over one third of the European Union total, says Ignacio Duque, Population and Immigration Director at the National Statistical Institute (INE) in Spain.



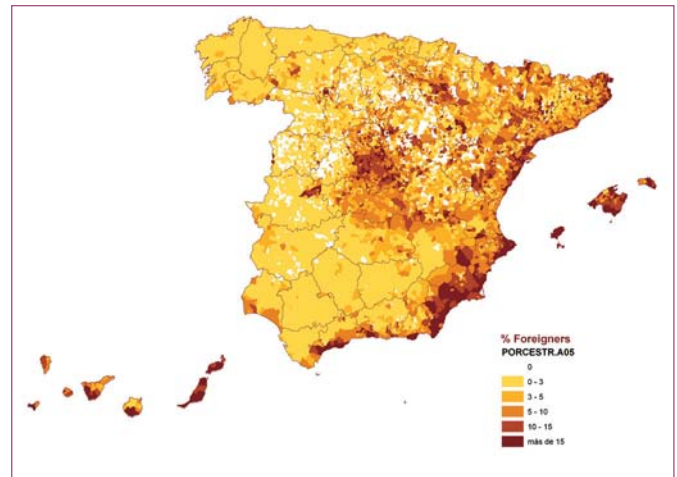
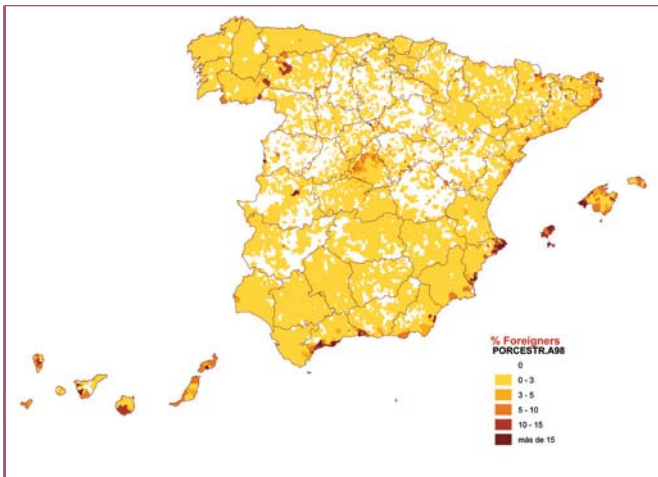
During the 1980s, the trends in a number of 'emigrant' countries such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain reversed. They became net attractors of migrants. However, ahead of the immigration boom, which started around the year 2000 in Spain, the Spanish statistical system had improved the municipal population registers, which record all international migrants.

'We had reinforced the role of INE, which coordinates and produces an important part of the statistical international migration figures, introducing mechanisms to improve communication and to avoid duplications and inconsistencies', says Ana Jurado, Census and Register Director at INE.

'One of the best population registers in the EU'

A new system called *Padrón Continuo* or Continuous Population Register, because of its monthly updating, was introduced. It provides rich, up-to-date and territorially detailed information on migratory movements. It was implemented in 1996 and introduced new and powerful features in the 2001 population census.

'The *Padrón Continuo* was a fundamental step towards raising the quality and consistency of information and better using the administrative data available. Spanish statisticians



Foreign nationals registered with the Spanish population register (*Padrón*) by municipality, in 1998 and 2005. Source: INE Spain

can be legitimately proud of this progress, which we believe is making our population data system one of the best in the EU', says Ms Jurado.

The core system of population statistics is based on the *Padrón*, the Population Register, from which INE produces figures on migration flows, including data on the country of origin or destination. The Population Register is complemented by the Population Census. Both form an integral part of the Spanish statistical system.

INE also estimates usual resident population by nationality and country of birth. In addition, official bodies such as some ministries and the Spanish courts provide statistics on administrative and judicial procedures and processes related to immigration, granting of residence, citizenship and asylum as well as on illegal immigration.

'Additional figures on trends and characteristics of recent immigrants are drawn from the Spanish administrative registers such as the social security and the healthcare registers. The picture is completed with vital statistics — births, marriages and deaths of non-nationals or people born abroad — and data from national surveys such as the Labour Force Survey', explains Ms Jurado.

Survey on immigrants' backgrounds

'It is important to underline the variety of international migrants to and from Spain. The largest part of our immigrants are certainly associated with the demand for workers in the fast-growing Spanish economy. In addition, there are favourable conditions for integration, thanks to a generous access to social services, education and health in Spain', says Mr Duque.

Spain is, and will probably remain, a country of destination for two important types of migrants: retired people and students. Senior people broadly populate Mediterranean prov-

inces and Spanish islands, and the Spanish universities and branches of the new economy are very attractive for European students and young professionals.

'Nevertheless, understanding the aims of migrants is a complicated task. The residence permit, the common source for statistical data on reasons for migration, only labels the official reason on the first application form, which varies significantly during the migrant's life. We are also conducting the first big statistical study on immigrants' backgrounds, careers and social integration, the National Immigrants Survey', he says.

A much-needed EU regulation

In 2007, a new EU regulation which provides harmonised definitions on terms related to migration entered into force.

'This will make work in the field easier, as it is difficult to produce harmonised figures between countries of origin and destination. The statistical definition of international migrants, the data collection sources, their coverage and quality, the method for producing updated and reliable statistics as well as the approach to foreigners are different from country to country', says Mr Duque.

The main challenge posed by the implementation of the regulation will be to take advantage of the existing Spanish register and recorded information. 'We also need to develop a broader cooperation with Eurostat and European countries for harmonisation purposes. Close collaboration between Spanish producers and quick dissemination are key aspects for providing to Spanish and international users the information they need', he says.

Moving forward

'International migration has become a very important subject on the political agenda and probably its role will be greater in the future. The debate reflects the importance of immigrants in the labour market, their role in the growth of



'Reliable figures are very important in the discussion about the size and trends of international migration', says Mr Duque. Pictured is a Spanish coastguard vessel intercepting a fishing boat laden with migrants near Tenerife. Photo: UNHCR/A. Rodríguez.

the Spanish economy and their impact on future pensions and social or public services', says Mr Duque.

'Reliable figures are very important in the discussion about the size and trends of international migration — the demographic, educational and social characteristics of migrants and the integration process of new permanent residents. We know the international migration statistics will be in high demand from our users and this poses an important challenge for the Spanish statistical system.'

To this end, INE aims at improving the use of existing statistical data, mainly from administrative sources. Secondly, the Spanish Statistical Office will develop projects to combine information from various statistical sources. Finally, they will try to improve the comparison of international statistics by producing quality checks of the main sources, and by reinforcing international cooperation.

'In any case, we have a system with high-quality outcomes and the main challenges are associated with a more broad exploitation and integration of sources', says Mr Duque.

'We also plan to further enhance the effectiveness of the continuous population register as an integrated register, with greater online functionalities for documenting residency, making quality and non-duplication checks easier and incorporating a repertory of territorial units and dwellings linked to the geographic information systems representing streets and postal address, cadastral properties and statistical units. This set of projects comes under the name 'Moving forward with the population register' (*Avanza Local Padrón*); explains Ms Jurado.

'Another new and ambitious INE project is the demographic longitudinal study. It aims to relate all migration-related information at micro-data level using the *Padrón* as linchpin, from the 2001 census onwards. It will compile in a consistent and continually updated way all previous information for every decennial census operation, independently of the type of census used. In particular, it will contain all relevant information to decide, on a person by person basis, who must be counted or not in the population statistical figures and why', she says.

By Beatriz Fernández Nebreda, Eurostat Communication Unit

For further information:

Ana Jurado: ajurado@ine.es

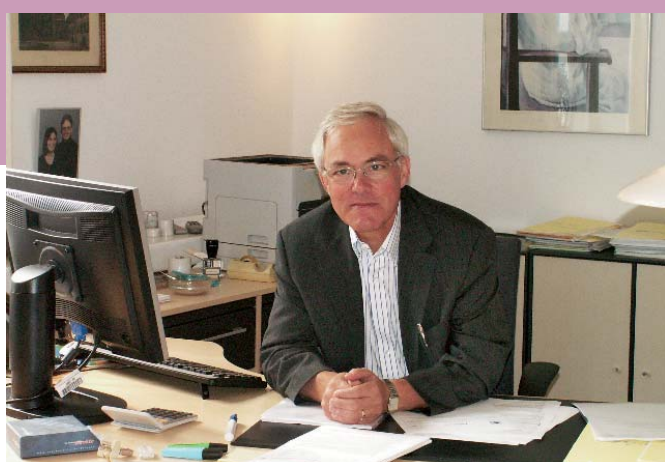
Ignacio Duque: iduque@ine.es

INE data base on demography and population statistics:

http://www.ine.es/en/inebmenu/menu2_dem_en.htm#4

‘Managed migration’ high on the agenda in Denmark

The Danish Immigration Service (DIS), part of the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, is responsible for processing, compiling and publishing figures on migration and asylum statistics. ‘Our aim is to give politicians comprehensive and timely statistical background information on which to take decisions. It is important to produce reliable statistics, but there is more to it than that. It is about being focused: knowing how to interpret the data and how to react to it’, says Poul Mose Hansen, Deputy Director General of the DIS.



Poul Mose Hansen, Deputy Director-General of the Danish Immigration Service, believes that the issue of ‘managed migration’ will soon gain in importance. Accurate migration statistics are crucial. Photo: B. Fernández-Nebreda.

files and there is always someone who will try to challenge the system’, Mr Hansen continues.

Comprehensive statistics

The Danish Immigration Service publishes key figures on migration and asylum in an annual *Statistical overview*. This publication compiles Danish statistics on migration and asylum applications and decisions available from all Danish authorities working in this field (ministries, the refugee board, embassies, police, etc.) and thus provides a whole-of-government picture on migratory trends in Denmark.

‘This unique set of data and the methodological notes on the interpretation of the data are very important. We are the only provider of comprehensive statistics in this field in Denmark. This enables us to compare the figures and to follow the changes over time’, says Mr Hansen.

A much-needed EU regulation

In 2007, an EU regulation covering all migration and asylum statistics came into force. It will improve the quality of statistics in this domain and allow for comparisons across countries.

‘We really needed a new EU regulation. One of the challenges for collecting data in the Member States today is the need for closer cooperation and sharing of information between competent authorities. The new regulation will help Member States to get an overall national picture of their migration situation. Some see the regulation as a way of ensuring resources for collecting data, others as a tool to ensure clarity and direction on the basic statistical indicators to be exchanged at European level to support effective migration management. However, in Denmark, most of the information is already available’, says Thomas Mortensen, Head of Division at the DIS.

The Danish Immigration Service deals with first-time applications for residence permits (work and study), family reunification cases and asylum. The challenge the office now faces is how to cope with the need for foreign labour while introducing the necessary mechanisms to control ‘managed migration’.

‘We have to focus on how to attract highly skilled migrants to our country. I believe the issue of managed migration will be more and more on the migration agenda in the coming years’, Mr Hansen says.

‘The need to provide statistics on managed migration influences the way we work. We need to adapt the procedures and to “invent” new effective, service-oriented ones to support this need in a globalised world.’

Today, the DIS has a proactive approach towards the cases it handles. The objectives are: to ease procedures, to focus on a better service and shorter processing times, to take into account the expectations of the customers and to prevent fraud and abuse of the immigration service when procedures are eased.

‘In other words, we want to make procedures as smooth and uncomplicated as possible, while at the same time keeping an eye on risk control, including spot checks on issued residence permits. We know there are some risky areas and pro-



'We have to focus on how to attract highly skilled migrants to our country', says Poul Mose Hansen. Photo: Danish Immigration Service.

association is not to compete with the EU approach, but rather to discuss the patterns and similarities of the trends in our region, and to draw on the experiences of our neighbouring countries.'

'For instance, we have good and comprehensive asylum data, whereas for residence permits, the implementation of a common typology, such as different categories on migration, is yet to be proposed', says Mr Mortensen. 'More specifically, a good example is the shortage of labour in our region, which will result in an increasing need for statistical information across countries in this area. Again, this is an important argument for working together to establish a regular data collection in this field.'

'Policies will be made with or without supporting data. We prefer to have accurate and detailed figures to support political decisions. We need to have a long-term perspective but start our work with whatever data are available. We then refine this information along the way. Our advice is to start as simply as possible and take it from there', say Mr Hansen and Mr Mortensen.

*By Beatriz Fernández Nebreda and Lukasz Augustyniak,
Eurostat Communication Unit*

Cooperation within the Baltic Sea area

The countries of the Baltic Sea area, which includes the Nordic countries, the Baltic States and Poland, started to meet five years ago. 'At first it was difficult to find the national focal points', says Mr Hansen. 'Today we discuss refugee statistics and share positions on statistical issues. More and more the focus is turning towards migration trends where there is a huge demand for making available and sharing basic statistical indicators. We cooperate on other issues, for example the practical aspects of the implementation of the EU regulation.'

'We believe there is added value in working together both on a regional and a European level. The aim of our regional

The Danish Immigration Service

The Danish Immigration Service (DIS) is an institution within the Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs.

The DIS administrates the Danish Aliens Act. In other words, it handles applications for work, study, family reunification and asylum permits and some visa cases. In addition, the DIS is engaged in a wide range of other duties relating to the immigration and asylum area, including the task of accommodating asylum-seekers.

For further information:

Poul Mose Hansen (Deputy Director General): pmh@us.dk
Thomas Mortensen (Head of Division, Financial and Consortium Statistical Division): tmo@us.dk

The UN Refugee Agency — global provider of asylum data

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the leading provider of global refugee and asylum-seeker statistics. Since its creation in 1950, it has compiled statistics and reports on the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers all over the world. Its statistics are used both internally and by external partners to monitor progress and as a basis for fundraising and evidence-based decision-making.



UNHCR provides information about the magnitude and scope of conflict-generated forced displacement. Pictured is a UNHCR staff member comforting a child found among a group of boat people intercepted at sea by Italian coastguards. Photo: UNHCR/A. Di Loreto.

As part of its mandate to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and other uprooted people, UNHCR provides information to the international community about the magnitude and scope of conflict-generated forced displacement. UNHCR statistics on refugees and asylum-seekers help monitor progress and identify emerging patterns and trends, such as the recent influx of Iraqi asylum-seekers into selected European countries,' says Khassoum Diallo, Senior Statistician in the Division of Operational Services at UNHCR.

UNHCR's field offices are located in more than 120 countries around the world. It uses asylum statistics to monitor levels, flows, trends and characteristics of asylum-seekers worldwide, as well as to plan, implement and monitor protection, assistance and advocacy.

External partners such as governments, other UN agencies, NGOs, donors, media and researchers use UNHCR's data to support their own operations, funding and research activities.



Refugees and migrants risk their lives travelling from Africa to Europe in overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels to escape persecution and violence or simply to find a better life. Photo: UNHCR/A. Rodríguez.

UNHCR offers different forms of assistance, for example providing shelter and food, conducting refugee status determination, providing legal advice and granting assistance packages. Its level of involvement depends on the operational context and country. In general, the level of assistance provided to refugees tends to be high where UNHCR is operationally active, i.e. primarily in developing countries. In fact, many refugees in developed countries do not require assistance from UNHCR, since they are considered as already locally integrated or have reached a minimum level of self-sufficiency.

Global monitoring system

By the end of 2006, UNHCR was assisting about 4.5 million refugees out of an estimated 9.9 million who fall under the UNHCR mandate. It is important to highlight that the 4.4 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are not included in UNHCR statistics. In addition, UNHCR was also assisting some 144 000 individuals who have applied for asylum or refugee status and whose claim had not yet been adjudicated by the end of 2006. Overall, an estimated 744 000 asylum claims were globally still pending at any level of the asylum procedure.

'For European policymakers, for instance, our monitoring system of monthly asylum applications is probably the most important one. Currently, our system includes 36 industrialised countries of which 31 are European. We are in the process of expanding our monitoring system and hope to be able to include the Balkan countries and Italy in the near future', says Mr Diallo.

'In addition, we regularly receive requests by researchers analysing our asylum data. They want to know, in partic-

ular, whether the fall in the number of asylum-seekers in Europe is the effect of more restrictive asylum policies or of improved conditions in some of the major countries of origin. UNHCR fully supports this kind of research, since it also provides a good source of background information for us. To facilitate data exchange with our external data users, we have launched the UNHCR statistical online population database, where all the asylum and refugee data are available', he adds.

A unique refugee database

UNHCR collects data on its persons of concern i.e. refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and stateless persons. The data collection includes information on country of origin and of asylum, sex, age and location or settlement such as camp or centre. Furthermore, information about protection and living conditions is also gathered with variables such as education, health, nutrition as well as information regarding sexual and gender-based violence. Apart from the total number in the different categories and country of origin and asylum, much of the remaining information is partial.

'The collection and analysis activities contribute to filling existing information gaps on these topics. These activities include the standards and indicators data collection pro-

gramme, the health and nutrition information system (HNIS) which monitors, among others, the nutrition status of refugees in selected camps in Africa, surveys on the millennium development goals indicators for refugees and IDPs and the extensive use of the UNHCR ProGres (profile global registration system) database, a unique database on refugee and asylum-seeker data in developing countries. So far, the software has been rolled out in 55 countries and the database has over 2.5 million individual records', says Tarek Abou Chabake, data analyst in the Division of Operational Services at UNHCR.

Challenges of global collection

Several factors make it difficult for UNHCR to collect and compare data on a global level. According to Mr Abou Chabake, some countries do not apply harmonised definitions and measurement criteria even though they have signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

'The translation of the principles and definitions contained in the convention into national law is not always done in a systematic and harmonised way. This is the case in many developed countries, in particular in Europe, where the asylum procedure has become extremely complex in recent years. This makes the counting of asylum applications a cumbersome undertaking', explains Mr Abou Chabake.

For example, counting the number of individuals submitting an asylum application for the first time is not as easy as it sounds. Some European immigration offices categorise individuals submitting a second application or who are requesting the reopening of an already closed asylum claim as 'new asylum-seekers'. In some countries, the national statistical systems do not

For European policymakers the UNHCR monitoring system of monthly asylum applications is important. The system currently includes 31 European countries. Pictured are some refugees being transferred to new accommodation in Italy. Photo: UNHCR / A. Di Loreto.



permit the distinction of new claims from other types of asylum claims. The result is inflated asylum figures, which has been the case in several countries for the past decade.

Other factors that make the collection and comparability of data difficult are differences in quality and periodicity. In some countries, data are good and reliable, in others of poorer quality and, in the worst case, simply unavailable.

'When talking about international asylum statistics, one should first differentiate between refugee status determination (RSD) carried out by UNHCR in contrast to RSD carried out by a government. Where the latter does not conduct RSD, or no fair and efficient asylum procedure exists, then UNHCR steps in. For statistical purposes, this distinction is important because UNHCR data are collected in a systematic

way based on the same definitions, which leads to detailed and comparable figures', Mr Abou Chabake says.

'Another issue is the fact that some individuals tend to apply for asylum in more than one country, in particular in Europe, to increase their chances of obtaining refugee status. With the introduction of the Eurodac system (see box), double or even multiple applications can be detected. However, in statistical terms, these multiple applications submitted by one individual lead to a double count of applications. Unfortunately, we cannot estimate the magnitude of this phenomenon, but we believe it to be distorting the real picture significantly', he adds.

Building networks for data sharing

In an attempt to improve the data collection on asylum-seekers and refugees and to share best practices, a thematic meeting was organised in Geneva in December 2006. The two co-organisers were UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. Experts from 14 countries, 7 intergovernmental organisations, Eurostat and the UN Economic Commission for Europe attended the meeting.

'An example of best practices in the field of international data collection is the European–Asian programme on forced displacement and migration, a regional network that aims to collect and exchange data on asylum and migration using common indicators and methodologies', says Mr Diallo.

Finally, he says that the upcoming new round of national censuses is an excellent opportunity to improve international data collection.

'We believe that the new round of censuses coming up soon (2008–10) might be a golden opportunity to identify the total number of individuals residing in a country for asylum or refugee-related reasons. We also recommend the use of UN recommendations on international migration statistics.'

*By Beatriz Fernández Nebreda and Johan Wullt,
Eurostat Communication Unit*

UNHCR

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly. The agency's mandate is to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. Today, more than 140 countries have signed the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, under which they must provide UNHCR with information concerning the number and condition of refugees.

Eurodac

The Eurodac system enables EU Member States to identify asylum applicants and persons who have been apprehended while unlawfully crossing an external frontier of the Community. By comparing fingerprints, Member States can determine whether an asylum applicant or a foreign national found illegally present within a Member State has previously claimed asylum in another Member State or whether an asylum applicant entered the Union territory unlawfully.

For further information:

Khassoum Diallo: diallokh@unhcr.org
Tarek Abou Chabake: abouchab@unhcr.org

The UNHCR statistical online population database: www.unhcr.org/statistics/populationdatabase

Migration statistics — now and then

Professor Michel Poulain: 'The key in this field is cooperation. Statisticians and administrative bodies need to put together their respective skills, work together, trust each other and agree on one unique figure.' Photo: C. Ardillac.

The role of migration statistics has undergone significant change over the last two decades. They have become increasingly important as they are now the basis for political and EU funding decisions. *Sigma* met Michel Poulain, Professor at the University of Louvain and researcher at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, an expert in international migration statistics, to find out what the current challenges are in producing reliable and comparable international statistics on migration.



The European Union's first efforts to harmonise migration statistics started in 1989. Spain and Portugal's entry into the EU a couple of years earlier had sparked the EU's interest on its impact on the migration inflows in the 'old' EU Member States. Migration data available at the time were not at all sufficient, and so the first project to assess the state of play was launched by the Head of Eurostat's Demographic Unit at the time, Bernard Langevin, who was in charge of international migration statistics.

Michel Poulain was involved with Eurostat in this initiative of harmonising international migration statistics in the EU from the very beginning. Since then, he has visited many countries in and outside of Europe, in order to analyse the differ-

ent data collections and methodologies used in gathering reliable migration statistics.

Historic overview

'I organised a visit to assess the reliability and comparability of existing data in the then 12 EU Member States. These first results were presented in 1990. Data were either not available, if available not necessarily reliable, and if reliable not necessarily comparable', says Mr Poulain.

Mr Poulain's country analysis was extended within and beyond the EU in the following years. First came the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Austria, Denmark,



In 1997 the Treaty of Amsterdam brought migration and asylum policies under the umbrella of the EU and European policymakers started to request better statistical data to support and develop these policies. Pictured are people standing in a queue for a police check after being intercepted at sea. Photo: UNHCR/A. Rodríguez.

try. The two types of partners dealing in migration statistics — statisticians and administrative bodies, such as the ministries of the interior or police departments — did not usually work together. I was often meeting with people in uniform. Generally, the area of migration was closely linked to security, the police and sometimes the army', he says. As international migration was not yet a topic discussed at EU level it was part of national security matters.

At the same time, from 1993 onwards, Eurostat was strongly involved in the revision of the United Nations recommendations on international migration statistics. Despite Eurostat's involvement in the process, the result was rather disappointing from a European point of view as not many of the EU's proposals were taken on board.

Amsterdam, a turning point

Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) in 1992 at their own request. He then visited the central European countries, and also Russia and Turkey, on behalf of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in Geneva and the World Bank. Under the EU Phare programme's chapter on statistical harmonisation, Eurostat started in 1994 to organise meetings involving the eastern European countries (but excluding the former USSR: Belarus, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Baltic States and States in the Caucasus region).

'In general, all these countries had similar issues to the EU-12, even if the players involved changed from country to coun-

The big change came with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. Migration and asylum policies were brought under the umbrella of the EU. For the first time, European policymakers started explicitly to request better statistical data to support and develop these policies. A new directorate-general (DG) was created to this end, today called the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security. Eurostat's work on migration was redirected to meet the DG's policy needs for better data.

After assessing the poor quality of statistics available, it became clear that real improvement of international migration

statistics would not be possible on the basis of a gentlemen's agreement, which actually led to non-comparable or non-available data. The only way to improve the situation was to adopt an EU regulation on the collection of national statistics for the EU. Preparations for such a regulation started in 2003. After four years of work, the regulation was adopted in July 2007, by both the Council and Parliament.

'It is very good news to have a regulation on migration statistics. Unfortunately, it was necessary to introduce some limitations to the regulation in order to avoid an excessive response burden on Member States. For example, data will not be provided by every single country, because some countries do not have individual reporting. Clearly, the level of detail could be greater, but at least we have a common starting point,' says Mr Poulain.

Cooperation is key

In 2003, within the EU's, sixth framework programme for research, a call for proposals to gather better statistics on migration to and within the EU was launched. Mr Poulain put together a team of researchers in this area in several countries and their 'Thesim' project (Towards harmonised European statistics on international migration) was selected.

'Thesim was a really wonderful project. First, we had full cooperation between the researchers. Second, in Member States we brought together, often for the first time, all parties involved in migration at national level. This acted as a

catalyst for further networking between statisticians and administrative bodies. Within 18 months, we produced 25 country reports and several synthesis reports and published a book with the project findings. The book can be considered a real concrete support for the implementation of the EU regulation. What is clear is that the regulation is only a precondition for success. The full and correct implementation of the regulation is now the key challenge,' he says.

'Success in this field will come through cooperation; without this nothing will work. My message is always the same: statisticians and administrative bodies need to put together their respective skills, work together, trust each other and agree on only one unique figure and appropriate metadata,' he adds.

The same applies to cooperation between pairs of countries as international migration flows always imply two countries measuring the same flow either at the departure or at the destination place.

Validation of EU data

Mr Poulain explains that the availability of data is not the most prominent problem. Improvements in the reliability and comparability of data will require even more attention, effort and time.

'If a country does not have a population register, as is the case in France or the UK, you need to find alternative solutions to replace missing data sources. To improve reliability, we need first to understand people's behaviour, as statistics in this field are based on individual behaviour and self-declaration. People will tend to maximise the advantages linked to their place of registration and their country of usual residence that may ultimately distort the data,' Mr Poulain says.

As for improving comparability, the regulation provides a common set of definitions so that the national statistics should be comparable at EU level. It also introduces a new challenge for Eurostat: the ability to validate the reliability and comparability of national data.

*By Beatriz Fernández Nebreda,
Eurostat Communication Unit*



Pictured are refugee children being taught at government-run reception centre near Teplice in the Czech Republic. Photo: European Commission.

For further information:

Thesim report: <http://www.uclouvain.be/en-12321.html>

Migration and population statistics — crucial for justice, freedom and security policies in the EU

The Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security is one of the European Commission's departments. It is responsible, together with EU Member States, for making legislative proposals in the area of justice, freedom and security and is in charge of immigration, asylum and borders. To find out how migration and population statistics are used by the directorate, *Sigma* met its Director Jean-Louis De Brouwer and Jordi Garcia Martínez, the official responsible for migration statistics.



The action plan on migration statistics from 2003 listed a number of initiatives aimed at improving the availability, reliability and comparability of European migration data. Photo: European Commission.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of migration and asylum statistics for our work', began Mr De Brouwer.

'We use them on many levels while developing our policies. Firstly, we need them before we can launch any initia-

tive to assess the scope and size of the issue to be tackled. For instance, if the Commission intends to present, as it has recently done, a proposal for a directive to facilitate the admission and stay of highly skilled migrants, it must know how many of these migrants are needed by the European economy, how many are already in the EU or how many of

them are planning to move to other regions, such as North America or Australia.'

'Secondly, reliable data are needed to monitor the impact of EU measures. Continuing with the example of the directive on highly skilled migrants, if this proposal becomes adopted legislation, in a few years' time, the Commission will have to report to the Council and the European Parliament on the effects it is having, i.e. how many migrants have benefited from it, which Member States have received the highly-skilled migrants etc.' he added.

The Directorate-General (DG) for Justice, Freedom and Security also uses statistics to prepare for news conferences, lectures, speeches and presentations, explained Mr Garcia Martínez, as they illustrate specific problems in an objective, clear and transparent way. 'The press are regularly asking us for the latest figures and we try to provide them with the most accurate ones we have.'

Fruitful cooperation with Eurostat

The Justice, Freedom and Security DG and Eurostat launched an informal process of consultation and cooperation with the national data providers which led to many significant improvements.

'Even before the adoption in 2007 of the migration statistics regulation, the situation was getting much better', said Mr Garcia Martínez.

'A defining point in this process was the adoption by the Commission of an action plan on migration statistics in 2003, which listed a number of initiatives aimed at improving the availability, reliability and comparability of European migration statistics. They included the publication of annual reports, new legislation, new data collections and better dissemination of figures. All the work carried out for the implementation of the 2003 action plan had, in fact, prepared the ground for the negotiations on the migration statistics regulation.'

Both Mr De Brouwer and Mr Garcia Martínez agreed that the regulation, adopted in summer 2007 by the European Council and Parliament, was a ground-breaking step towards the achievement of EU-wide harmonised statistics.

'Many aspects of the migration, asylum and border policies are today dealt with at EU level', said Mr De Brouwer. 'I can mostly see very positive aspects of the new regulation, although I am also aware of the fact that not all the statistical information needed by my directorate is covered by it.'

'Our focus today must primarily be on the proper implementation of the regulation', he explained. 'We must concentrate on the details regarding the precise data collections, such as data formats, quality measures or the definition of certain groups (age, citizenship). This will be done together with the Member States, according to the comitology procedure.'

Mr Garcia Martínez added that only in 2009 will Eurostat start to receive the bulk of the data covered by the regulation.

The creation of the European Migration Network (EMN) has also been of great help in the daily work of the Justice, Freedom and Security DG.

'The network has existed since 2003', said Mr De Brouwer. 'It is now going to be formalised through the adoption of a Council decision. The EMN will be composed of national contact points whose objective will be to provide up-to-date and reliable information on asylum and migration issues. One of the main tasks of the EMN will be to analyse the existing statistics and to propose improvements to them. Once a year, it will publish an annual statistical report with an in-depth analysis of national and EU migration data.'

Funding through a new financial programme

The newly established 'Solidarity and management of migration flows' programme is meant to support the Member States in their efforts to implement migration, asylum and border policies in the period 2007–13. It consists of the newly created Integration Fund, Return Fund, External Borders Fund and Refugee Fund (the latter existed since 2000 but has been revised).

'From a statistical perspective, the programme is extremely interesting', said Mr De Brouwer. 'The distribution of available resources among the Member States is done in accordance with a pre-established distribution key based on a number of statistics. For instance, the Refugee Fund uses data dealing with asylum applications — the Member States which receive more asylum-seekers and which host more refugees will also get more money. Because there is so much money involved (the programme's foreseen budget is EUR 4 billion) we must ensure that the data used are accurate and comparable.'

The new funds contribute, among other things, to a better infrastructure and more efficient border controls, co-finance integration programmes for legal migrants or help fund better facilities for asylum-seekers. 'The Justice, Freedom and Security DG and Eurostat worked very closely together on the preparation and implementation of statistics for the new funds', explained Mr Garcia Martínez.

'In fact, the programme would not be operational today without the solid basis of Eurostat's figures.'

'The funds are an additional incentive for the Member States to try and improve the accuracy of their migration data', added Mr De Brouwer. 'If a particular EU Member State does not supply us with the required data, it will be penalised in the distribution of resources and this could be very painful!'

A glance at the future

Most often statistics refer to the past, but Eurostat's Population Projection Team looks far into the future — up to 2060 — when it produces its data. The projections are important for European policies, both at the EU and Member State level, as the ageing society touches on both economic and social policies and affects all citizens. Michail Skaliotis, former Head of the Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit, Giampaolo Lanzieri, Head of the Demography, Census and Population Projections Section, and Konstantinos Giannakouris, from the same section, reveal the ins and outs of the population projections.



The next population projections, *Europop2008*, will be published in spring 2008. Michail Skaliotis (in the middle), former Head of the Demographic and Migration Statistics Unit (see box on page 7), together with Giampaolo Lanzieri, Head of the Demography, Census and Population Projections Section, and Konstantinos Giannakouris from the same section. Photo: C. Ardillac.

Eurostat first published national and regional population projections in 1980. Since 2004, they have been produced in-house every three years and on the request of the Ageing Working Group of the Economic Policy Committee (EPC).

The population projections have over the years increased in political importance. In 2003, the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (Ecofin) gave a mandate to the EPC to present a new set of age-related public expenditure projections for all Member States covering pensions, healthcare, long-term care, education, unemployment transfers and, where possible, contributions to pensions/social security systems. The projections were made on the basis of population projec-

tions provided by Eurostat and agreed assumptions on key economic variables (see articles on pages 44 and 47).

For the following round of projections, the Ecofin Council invited the EPC to update and further deepen its common projection exercise of age-related expenditure by autumn 2009 on the basis of a new population projection to be provided by Eurostat. The mandate for Eurostat was to elaborate a new set of European Union-wide consistent national population projections by March 2008.

'Contemporary society is undergoing important demographic changes, characterised by low fertility and increasing longevity leading to an ageing population. Therefore, population

projections are of great importance due to the future impact of the ageing society. They are used for political decisions in a wide range of areas, such as public finances, pensions and health systems, employment, education, as well as a basic input in energy consumption or consumption of other products. The private sector, for example insurance companies, is also interested in the data,' says Mr Skaliotis.

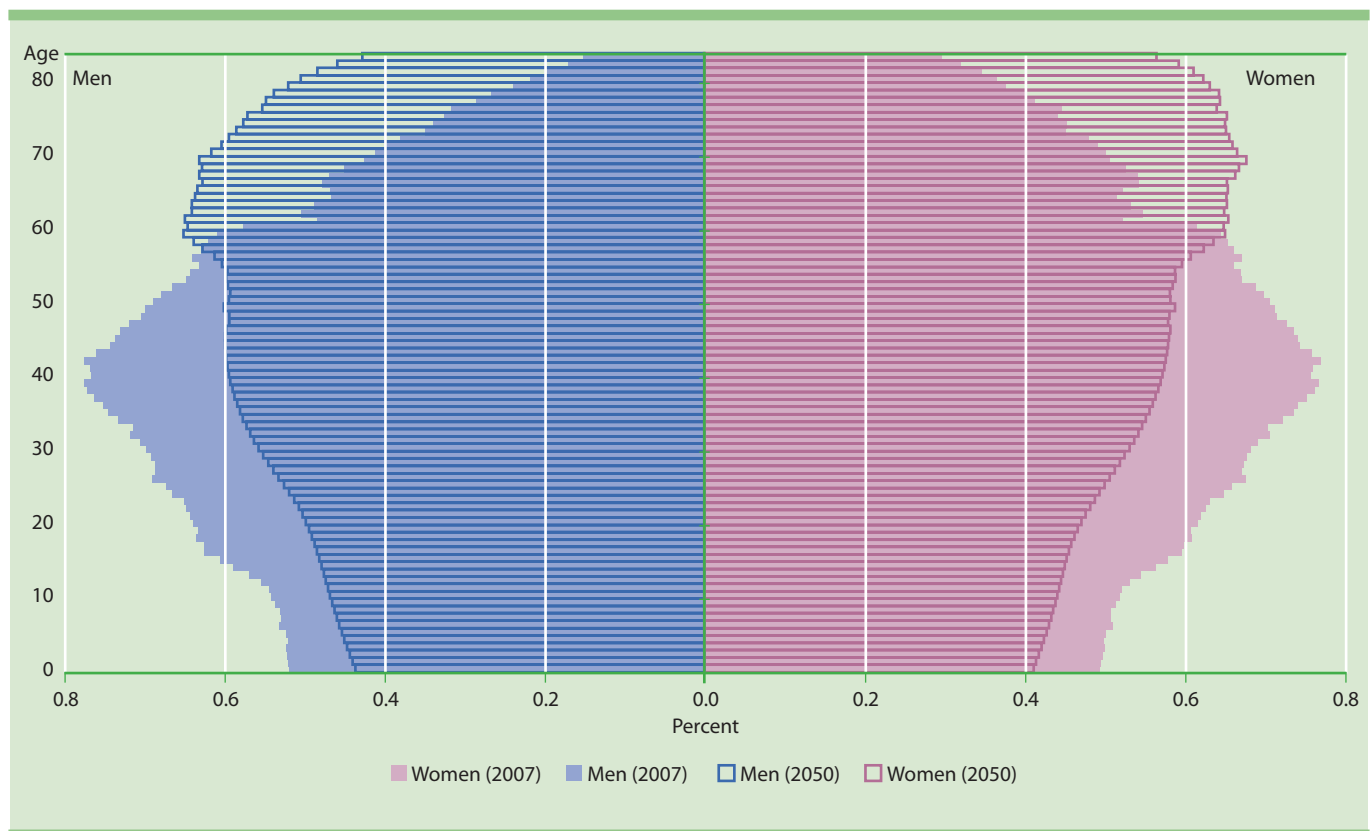
'Member States, research institutes and the United Nations also produce population projections, but the advantage of Eurostat's data is that we are the only international body that disseminates comparable projections at detailed level — by sex and single year of age until 2060,' he continues.

Projections versus forecasts

Population **projections** are calculations which show the future development of a population when certain assumptions are made about the future course of fertility, mortality and migration. They are 'what if' scenarios.

Population **forecasts** are calculations in which the assumptions are considered to generate a realistic picture of the probable future development of a population.

Age pyramid for the EU-27 — 2007 and 2050



Age pyramid for the EU-27, 2007 and 2050. Eurostat is the only international body that disseminates comparable projections at detailed level — by sex and single year of age until 2060. (Open-end age class has not been included for presentation purposes.)
Source: Eurostat, Europop 2004.

Fertility, the demographic engine

Population projections at national level are computed based on a set of assumptions for the future development of three demographic components: fertility, mortality and international migration. These three components interact, and the final result depends on their future path, and the start-

ing population. The idea is to identify their possible evolution in the different Member States, while applying a common methodology in order to guarantee the consistency and comparability of the results.

The average number of children per woman has been falling since the 1970s, and the future is uncertain. There are several



The proportion of childless women and one-child families has increased substantially over recent years. However, recent trends indicate a small upturn in the total fertility rate as a result of women having children later in life. Photo: EC.

reasons for the decline: increased number of women choosing to work, introduction of mass contraception, pending issues concerning gender equity, more widespread secondary and tertiary education, changing 'opportunity costs' of parenthood, etc. The proportions of childless women and one-child families have increased substantially over recent years. However, recent trends indicate a sign of a small upturn in the total fertility rate as women who delayed childbearing until later in life begin to have children.

In 2006, the total fertility rate (i.e. the average number of children a woman would have in her lifetime) in the EU-27 was 1.5. France recorded the highest rate (2.0) and Slovakia the lowest (1.2).

Although there are marked differences in the fertility patterns of the individual Member States, it is almost certain that the so called 'replacement fertility' (i.e. slightly more than two children per woman at current mortality rates) will not be reached in the near future.

Life expectancy, an improving factor

In order to determine the possible evolution of the mortality component, the projection team analyses the behaviour of age-specific mortality rates and the corresponding life expectancy. Over the past few years, life expectancy in Europe has seen significant increases. Tremendous progress with respect to infant mortality has contributed the most to increases in life expectancy at birth. Mortality rates for elderly people also decreased and contributed significantly to the increase in life expectancy. Although life expectancy overall continued to increase for men and women, men are gaining on women. As a result, the difference between female and male life expectancy has become smaller. These trends are assumed to persist in the coming years.

'Taking into account the past evolution, we can expect a further decline in mortality. Moreover, due to the current

population structure of all Member States, increases in life expectancy will have an impact on the age structure of the EU population. The proportion of adults and young people will decrease while the share of elderly people will rise considerably', says Mr Giannakouris.

In 2060, 31 % of the EU population will be aged 65 or more, compared to 17 % in 2007, and the proportion of people aged 80 or more will triple.

Migration, an unpredictable component

Migration flows are influenced by a variety of economic, political and social factors in both the origin and the destination countries. Migration is the most unpredictable component, and its evolution the most difficult to predict.

From the 1990s, the EU has been a net receiver of migration flows. However, it cannot be assumed that migration flows will counterbalance the natural decrease in the population (number of deaths exceeding the number of live births) in all Member States.

Moreover, while a decline in the population is only a possibility, the ageing of the population is certain. Indeed, assuming higher levels of fertility, life expectancy and migration in the future, the EU population would still continue to increase in 2060. However, the root cause of the ageing population is the steadily falling fertility that followed the baby-boom period in the EU Member States.

Scenarios

The next population projections, *Europop2008*, will be published in spring 2008 with the base year 2007. There will be two 'scenarios'. The first, the 'convergence scenario', will be based on the assumption that the socioeconomic and cultural differences between the Member States of the European Union will fade in the long run. The second, the 'trend scenario', will show what would happen in the future if current trends continue. Each scenario has different 'variants' which depend on different combinations of the three components: fertility, mortality and migration.

The scenario is the general framework, and the variants depict the different possibilities inside the framework. For example, the combination of assumptions of future higher levels of fertility, life expectancy and migration leads to a variant of higher future population while lower levels of the three components lead in the direction of a shrinking population.

In the trend scenario, assumptions are based on past trends, analysis of driving forces and expert opinion and they can be modified according to what is believed to be the reaction at policy level.

The right time is now

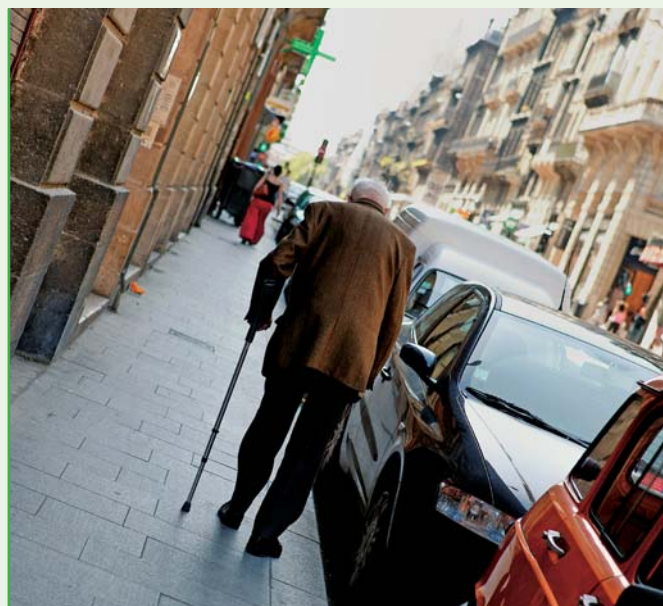
Future challenges in the field lie in developing the methodology.

'We have a close link with researchers in the field and take part in projects, such as the MicMac project (see article on page 42), which tries to link our type of macro projections with individual 'micro' projections', says Mr Skaliotis.

'We also have to follow the debate on issues, such as the biological limit to a person's age. Then there is need for more detailed data, on for example the 'oldest old'. We need to produce data not only for 80+, but also single years, as people live longer', he adds.

'All this boils down to our main challenge, which is to remain the reference as far as EU projections are concerned in the future as well!', he concludes.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit



Over the past few years, the overall life expectancy has increased for both men and women. In 2060, 31 % of the EU population will be aged 65 or more, compared to 17 % in 2007, and the proportion of people aged 80 or more will triple.

Photo: Phovoir

Life processes in the spotlight for future population projections



Future population projections will use a combination of micro and macro perspectives, predicts Frans Willekens, Director of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and Professor of Demography at University of Groningen. This means statisticians and researchers will look more at a micro level on how people live their lives in order to more accurately predict what happens 20 or 30 years down the line.

Frans Willekens, Director of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and Professor of Demography at University of Groningen, predicts that in the future we will see statisticians and policymakers using virtual worlds based on real statistical information. Photo: Wim de Jonge.

One example of the 'future' in population projections is a pan-European research project called MicMac. It is led by NIDI and aims to develop a methodology and software that builds a bridge between current projections and projections of the life course of individual people. The model is expected to produce a methodology for detailed demographic projections by 2009. The bottom line is that better projection models will provide a better basis for the development of sustainable healthcare and pension systems for an ageing population.

In a 'normal' population projection, statisticians project the populations by age and sex. MicMac projects biographies of individuals and groups of individuals, for example those born in 1945 or 1980. The data come from registers or longitudinal studies. In those studies, a sample of the population is followed over time and interviewed on a regular basis, for example every two years. Should such data be unavailable they are estimated from census and other sources.

'Biographic projections describe life in more detail than is done in traditional demographic projections,' says Mr Willekens. 'For example, we consider why fertility rates are low. Is it because women don't want to have children, or because couples feel they can't afford a child? Do the people have problems balancing work and family life, or are they unable to have children? This is important because if you want people to have more babies you have to respond with the right policy,' he says.

In order to develop effective policies, policymakers have to understand how people behave and what determines major events in life such as childbirth, migration and retirement. Often these events are outcomes of processes that take years to unfold. Our aim is to understand and model these processes. Mr Willekens argues that retirement is a life process which is heavily influenced by attitudes about work and your own health as well as that of your partner.

'If your partner's health deteriorates, it is very likely that you will retire earlier than predicted. If you believe that life is better without work, you will retire earlier. People who enjoy work and the social contacts at the workplace retire later. And many who are given the possibility to work and retire on a part-time basis would take it,' he says.

'In the MicMac project individual biographies are combined into cohort biographies and cohorts combine into populations. The methodology thus complements demographic projections with projections of people's life course. The result we hope will be a methodology and software that more accurately forecasts the future,' says Mr Willekens.



'Biographic projections describe life in more detail than is done in traditional demographic projections,' says Mr Willekens. Photo: EC

Virtual reality

Mr Willekens also predicts that, in the future, we will see statisticians and policymakers using virtual worlds based on real statistical information, be it census data, survey data or administrative records. A virtual population consists of synthetic individuals with life paths that closely resemble the life histories of real people. In these virtual worlds, policymakers can test policies and see how the virtually constructed persons react. The virtual worlds will constitute the evidence on which policies may be based. This might sound like something from science fiction, but Statistics Canada has already developed 4 million synthetic Canadians for policy impact assessment.

'Today, the European statistical system focuses on the production of macroeconomic, social and demographic indicators — unemployment, inflation, GDP, life expectancy, total fertility rate. In the future, I think detailed statistical descriptions of the lives Europeans live will be just as important for policymaking. The statistical system of the future is a virtual reality that incorporates scientific knowledge on behavioural and social change and that accurately simulates real-world processes,' says Mr Willekens.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

MicMac

MicMac, 'Bridging the micro-macro gap in population forecasting', is a research project funded by the European Commission under the sixth framework programme. The project is lead by NIDI, which cooperates closely with seven other European research institutes.

NIDI

Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) is the national demographic institute of the Netherlands. It was founded in 1970 by Dutch universities and became an independent institute funded by the Dutch government in 1987. In 2003, NIDI became a part of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. Its mission is to conduct research into population issues. The institute studies past, present and future population trends as well as the background to these trends and their social consequences. NIDI carries out national, European and international research. Around 60 people work in the institute.

For further information:

www.nidi.knaw.nl
www.micmac-projections.org

Projections foster policy changes

Demographic projections have, in the last decades, raised concerns about the consequences of an ageing population. The fact that life expectancy is increasing, fertility rates are falling and the baby boom generation is starting to retire has led to a debate on how European countries will cope with the changed age structure and its impact on public finances, employment and economic growth. *Sigma* met Henri Bogaert, Commissioner for the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau and Chairman of the European Working Group on Ageing, to learn what impact demographic projections have had on policies in the EU countries.



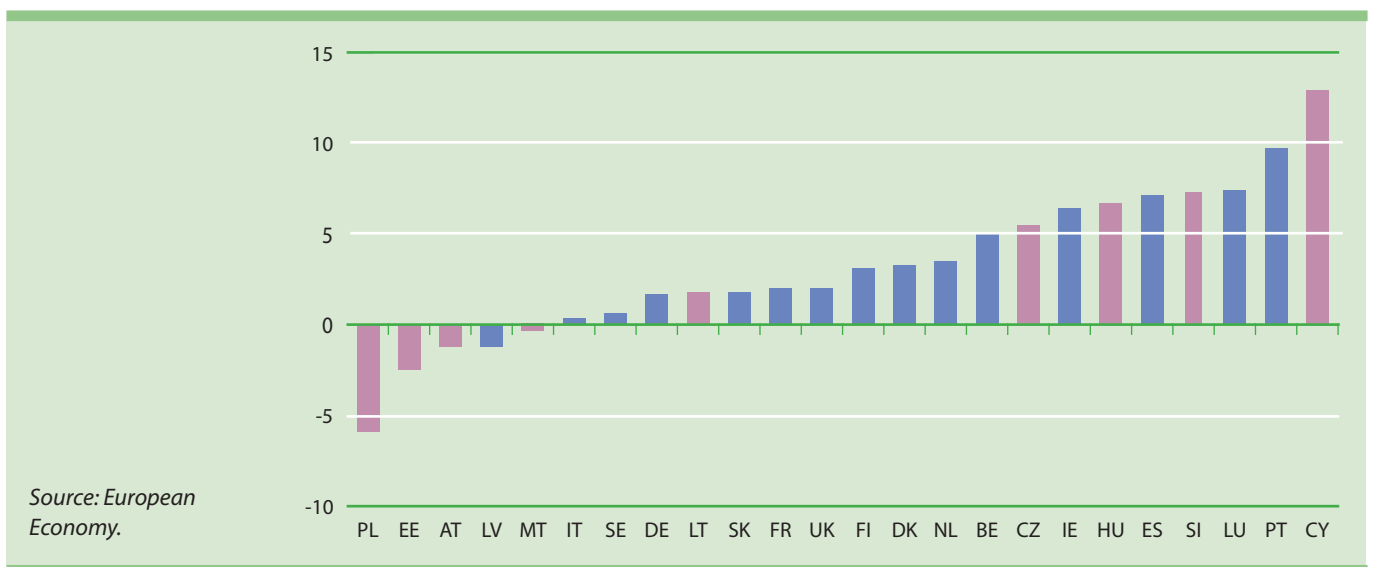
'The long-term age-related expenditure projections, while still very imperfect, have had a powerful impact on policies in the Member States,' says Henri Bogaert, Commissioner for the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau and Chairman of the European Working Group on Ageing. Photo: H. Bogaert

The Ageing Working Group (see box on page 46), which is linked to the European Economic and Financial Affairs Council, has, together with the EU Member States, made projections of social expenditure since the late 1990s, based on Eurostat's demographic projections. The expenditure projections showed that sustainability of public finance, employment and growth were affected negatively in the long term by the ageing population.

The ageing population and the age-related expenditure projections served as a wake-up call for the European Union and its Member States.

'The first consequence was that the increase we saw in welfare for elderly people from the 1950s to the 1980s slowed down significantly or, at least, is now managed more cautiously,' says Mr Bogaert.

Projected changes in public pension expenditure between 2004 and 2050 (in % of GDP)



The EU has since then launched several processes to encourage Member States to take preventive actions against the negative consequences of the prospective demographic developments.

Some radical reforms of pension systems

Mr Bogaert mentions radical reforms of the pension systems in some countries as particularly impressive. Noteworthy are those which have switched to a private system (such as Poland) and those which have a system which relates pensions to the life expectancy of an age group (like Sweden and Italy). However, many other countries have undertaken less radical reforms. Some started to index pensions to prices instead of wages, and others increased the number of years you have to contribute to your pension.

'You can clearly see that reforms of the pension systems have paid off. Those seven countries that reformed their systems drastically have reductions or small increases of pension expenditure as a percentage of GDP. Those which didn't reform at all will see large increases in the pension to GDP ratio, which are clearly not financially sustainable over time. Overall, in most countries, the projected changes in the pension expenditure ratio have been significantly reduced since the mid-1990s.

Countries have also been fairly successful in increasing the participation rate of older workers since 1995. The average 'exit age' has risen in many countries and in some countries pensioners can combine part-time work and retirement. This contributes to reduced pension spending.

'Employment rates should improve more and more rapidly over the next 50 years, but reforming the labour markets in order to retire later is quite a challenge for many countries.'



Age-related expenditure projections served as a wake-up call for the European Union. Some countries have reformed their pension systems. Many countries have been successful in increasing the work participation of older people. Photo: EC.

Healthcare expenditure is another area that will see significant rises due to the ageing population, as a larger share of elderly people tends to decrease the average health status of the population.

'The reform process that we have seen for pensions has not at all been observed for healthcare spending and the spending increases of the past years are definitely not sustainable if they are to be pursued in the long run,' says Mr Bogaert.

Sustainability monitored closely

Apart from reforms of the social security systems, countries also need to make surpluses in their budgets to save money for future age-related spending. Finland, for example, is one of the countries which saves some of the surplus in a reserve fund. Front-loading the impact by raising funds or reducing public debt is something the European Commission and the Council are pushing Member States to do.

The sustainability of public finances in the long term is now an important part of the reformed Stability and Growth Pact and each country's progress is assessed on commonly agreed quantitative and qualitative indicators every year by the European Commission and the EU ministers for economic and financial affairs.

The 2006/07 analysis of risk of sustainability of public finances showed that only 8 of the European Union's 25 Member States (Bulgaria and Romania were not included in the analysis) were judged to run a low risk of encountering sustainability problems with their public finances.

Overall classification of risks to the sustainability of public finances in the 2006/07 updates of stability and convergence programmes

Risk category	Country
Low	Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Finland, Sweden
Medium	Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovakia, United Kingdom
High	Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia

Projections have powerful impact

Mr Bogaert concludes that most of the EU Member States have changed policies after the publication of the long-term age-related expenditure projections.

'The expenditure projections, while still imperfect, have had a powerful impact on policies in the Member States. The credibility of the long-term projections on an EU level has been based on a commonly agreed methodology with consistent demographic and macroeconomic assumptions and the Member States pension models. Consequently, results have been comparable and their acceptance by the Member States warranted.'

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

The Ageing Working Group (AWG) is attached to the Economic Policy Committee under the European Economic and Financial Affairs Council. The AWG was set up in 1999 to provide projections on age-related spending (pensions, healthcare, long-term care, education and unemployment benefits). The first report was published in 2001 covering the then 15 EU Member States. The latest report from 2005 covers the EU-25. Data and analysis for Bulgaria and Romania will be published in 2009. The AWG works together with the EU Member States to project total age-related spending in each Member State. These projections form the basis for an annual assessment by the EU economic and finance ministers, as required by the Stability and Growth Pact since 2005.

The Belgian Federal Planning Bureau provides projections and forecasts for economic policy analyses for the Belgian government.

For further information:

Economic Policy Committee Ageing Working Group:
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/epc/epc_sustainability_ageing_en.htm

Belgian Federal Planning Bureau: <http://www.plan.be>

Henri Bogaert: hjb@plan.be

Population projections: a key input to assess Member States' public finances

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (DG Ecfm) analyses the impact of ageing populations on public expenditure. More precisely, the DG makes projections of different categories of public expenditure which are affected by the ageing of populations, such as pensions, healthcare and long-term care. The projections are a key input for the assessment of the long-term sustainability of public finances across Member States. Giuseppe Carone, Head of Unit at DG Ecfm explains.

'The European Commission Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs makes public expenditure projections which are comparable across countries. These are used to analyse the sustainability of Member States' public finances,' says Giuseppe Carone, Head of Unit at the Economic and Financial Affairs DG. Photo: Economic and Financial Affairs DG.

The Economic and Financial Affairs DG works together with the Working Group on Ageing Populations of the Economic Policy Committee. The projections provide a comparable, transparent and robust basis for assessing the potential economic impact and the timing and scale of economic and budgetary implications of demographic change. They are a major instrument for the reformed Stability and Growth Pact's strong emphasis on incorporating longer-term sustainability concerns into the medium-term budgetary policymaking process.

'Our starting point is the Eurostat population projection, to make labour force projections which we then combine with assumptions on labour and total factor productivity to project potential GDP growth. Finally, this set of macro-economic projections is used to make projections for public expenditure on pensions, healthcare, long-term care, education and unemployment transfers for all EU Member States. The last projections cover the period between 2004 and 2050 and a new round of projections, to be finalised by early 2009, should reach the year 2060,' says Mr Carone.

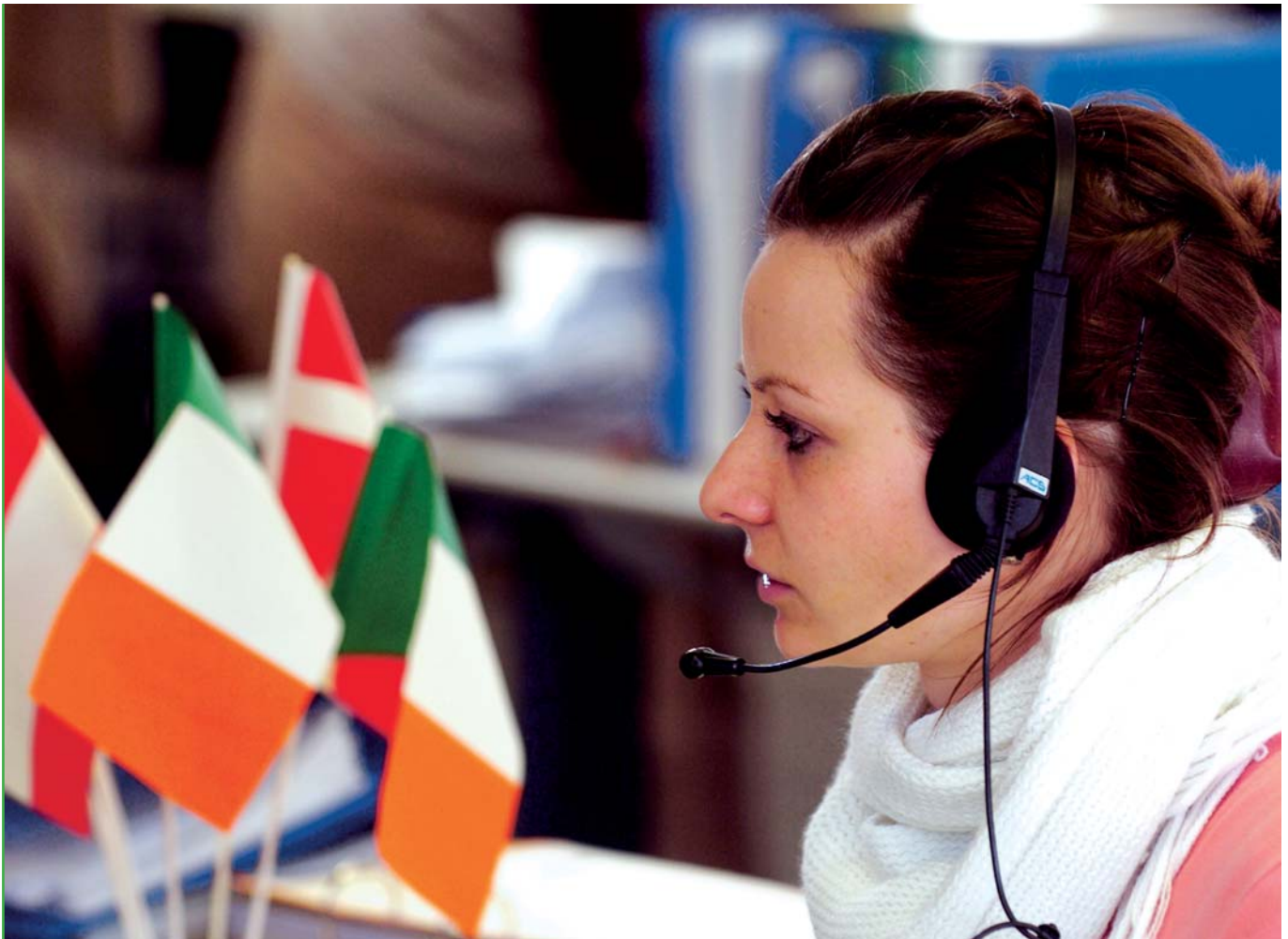
Cross-country comparability is important

The main strength of the population projections provided by Eurostat is that the methodology is common to all Member States, which allows meaningful cross-country comparisons. Starting with the Eurostat population projection, the Economic and Financial Affairs DG's budgetary projections are prepared on assumptions and methodologies commonly agreed in the Working Group on Ageing Populations. This makes the projections comparable across coun-



tries. Member States accept that the results are used for the EU analysis of the sustainability of public finances, where countries are classified according to different categories of sustainability risks.

'If, for example, we used national population projections, the results across Member States would not be comparable. It would be very difficult to disentangle the role of differences in population trends due to different assumptions and methodologies to calculate future trends in fertility rates, mortality rates or net migration rates across Member States from the effect of, say, pension systems arrangements. The analysis of the sustainability of public finances by the Commission, as well as the political acceptance by Member States, would be undermined. A common and consistent projection is necessary to ensure equal treatment across Member States and the pact lays down that the common projections form the basis for the assessment of sustainability.'



Despite the fact that the employment rate for women will increase from today's level of 55 % to 65 % in 2015, mobilising the workforce remains a challenge. Photo: EC.

Economic growth set to decline

'Most people know that Europe's ageing population poses a significant challenge to the sustainability of public finances in most EU Member States. However, while the budgetary challenges posed by population ageing are well known, less attention has been paid to the economic impact. The first impact materialises in the labour market and the decline in the working-age population in coming years will act as a substantial drag on our economic growth, unless it can be offset by a rise in labour productivity', says Mr Carone.

According to the labour force projection, the EU's overall employment rate will rise from 63 % in 2003 to 67 %

in 2010, reaching the target of 70 % set by the Lisbon agenda, but not before 2015. The increase will be mainly due to higher female employment rates, so that in 20 years, younger women entering the labour market will push the proportion of women in work up from today's level of 55 % to 65 %. Even more striking is the increasing rate at which older workers are expected to stay in the labour force instead of taking retirement: at present 40 % of people aged between 55 and 64 stay on in work but by 2025 that is expected to rise to 59 %.

However, notwithstanding these workers who will enter or remain longer in the labour force, Europe's potential for economic growth is set to decline in the decades ahead as the working-age population shrinks. For the EU-15 Member

States, the present annual average potential GDP growth rate of 2.3 % will fall after 2010, averaging only 1.8 % a year during the subsequent 20 years. After that, it will drop even further, to 1.3 %, between 2031 and 2050. An even steeper decline is projected in the EU-10, from 4.3 % today to a still robust 3 % during the period 2011–30, but then falling steeply to only 0.9 % over the period 2031–50.

Productivity key to economic growth

The sources of economic growth are also due to alter dramatically. The extra 20 million people coming into the workforce before 2017 will make a positive contribution to growth up to 2010–15. But, as Europe's working age population progressively declines, productivity will become the dominant (and in some countries the only) source of economic growth, as the contribution from employment growth will become negative due to the projected reduction in the working age population.

'These projections point to pressing economic and budgetary challenges in the decades to come, though living standards, as measured by GDP per capita, should hold up better than is suggested by the trend in headline GDP growth rates. Moreover, these challenges are not insurmountable, and it is worth remembering that the ageing of populations is essentially a 'good news' story because it means we are living longer', says Mr Carone.

Mobilising the workforce remains a challenge

'Policy changes have already happened in a number of Member States and the projections illustrate the effects of successful reforms, notably to pension systems. Pension reforms already introduced in various Member States are projected to generate an increase of 10 percentage points in the employment rate of older workers, to levels well above the Lisbon agenda's target of 50 %, although this is expected to happen beyond 2010.'

The projections confirm the validity of the Lisbon strategy and the need to vigorously pursue measures that raise labour supply/utilisation and enhance productivity.

'More investment, both in physical and in human capital, together with efforts to strengthen innovation and R & D activities, could yield substantial long-term productivity gains. In many countries, substantial benefits could be reaped by reducing structural unemployment further. Even if the EU reaches the 70 % Lisbon employment target as projected, although later than envisaged, significant pools of unused labour will remain. Challenges remain in mobilising the labour supply and increasing employment', says Mr Carone.

'However, higher levels of employment do not lead per se to lower public spending on pensions since they lead to the accumulation of additional pension entitlements. Nonetheless, raising employment is unequivocally welfare enhancing. It strengthens the financial sustainability of pension systems, delays the start of expenditure rises, increases contributions to pension schemes, and can generate additional budgetary savings, if higher employment results from lower unemployment and less early retirement. In addition, the projections indicate that pension reforms linking retirement age and pension benefits to life expectancy can reduce pension spending significantly.'

Longer lives mean later retirement

Life expectancy is projected to continue lengthening. Recent estimates suggest that the average age at which people leave the labour market and can take up a pension (around 61.5 years in 2003 and estimated at present to increase to 62.4 years in 2050) would need to rise by an additional two years between 2003 and 2050, simply to keep the share of adult life spent in retirement constant at present levels.

'Extending Europeans' working lives, however, requires the overhaul of tax and benefit and wage systems so as to give people incentives to remain economically active, and to facilitate job opportunities for older people, which entails pursuing policies to tackle age-discrimination and promoting life-long learning', Mr Carone concludes.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

For further information:

Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs:
http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/index_en.htm

Influencing Europe's demographic future

The European Union is facing unprecedented demographic changes that will have a major impact on the whole of society. The issues are much broader than older workers and pension reforms. The ageing society will affect almost every aspect of our lives, from consumption patterns, business and family life to public policy and voting behaviour. Bearing in mind Eurostat's population projections, the European Commission has identified five main areas where Member States and the Community need to act in the coming years to meet these challenges.



'It is clear that the next decade constitutes a window of opportunity as employment can continue to grow thanks to rising labour force participation. This period should be used to prepare for the next phase of accelerated ageing', says Jérôme Vignon, Director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. Photo: J. Vignon.

touch on the need to increase the flexibility of labour markets, lifelong learning and active labour market and social security policies. 'Active ageing' is a keyword.

'Longer working lives for men and women will require far-reaching reforms to remove incentives for early exit from the labour market, on the one hand, and to encourage the employment of senior citizens on the other hand', says Mr Vignon.

The first area focuses on how to prevent demographic decline from happening and how to react to falling birth rates.

'In fact, studies show that Europeans would like to have more children, but choose not to. Although this is a very complex issue, the decline in birth rates is not only due to individual preferences, but also to socioeconomic developments. Therefore, the Commission advocates more family-friendly policies, providing better possibilities to balance work and family life, and that Member States promote more actively equal opportunities between men and women', says Jérôme Vignon, Director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The Commission also recognises that attitudes have to change in society, as expressed by the Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunity, Vladmír Špidla: 'Policies alone cannot solve the problem. They have to go hand in hand with a picture of society that does not stamp women who re-enter the labour market after maternity leave as "bad mothers" and men who take care of their children as "softies".'

Active ageing

The second area addresses the issues of increasing the participation of young people, those over 55 and women in the workforce. Both the first and second area are closely linked to the EU's Lisbon strategy to promote growth and jobs and

In this area, the Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG has requested Eurostat and the European statistical system to develop more detailed statistics on life expectancy and health according to social status and education. 'We need to be able to see the different life expectancy at different ages depending on living conditions and social groups', adds Mr Vignon.

A more productive Europe

Improving productivity in the EU is the third response to the demographic challenge. The Commission is very active in this area as it is an integral part of the Lisbon strategy, as well as of a well-functioning internal market.

'Contrary to what many believe, it does not seem that productivity necessarily decreases with age if appropriate training is provided during the working life. Therefore, lifelong learning possibilities are crucial. There are also studies which look at organisational productivity and they show that a group of people which has good opportunities to balance family and working lives is more productive than a group with the same age composition, but without this balance. Consequently, the quality of organisations is important', Mr Vignon adds.

The ageing population also represents a good opportunity to enhance the competitiveness of the European economy as it adapts to new markets for goods and services.



Mr Vignon predicts that society will need to respond to the needs of an ageing population. The local corner shop might, for example, rise in popularity, at the expense of big supermarkets outside the cities. Photo: Pixelio.

'With new kinds of products and services — transport systems, housing, health services, infrastructure, and access to the information society — we will respond to the needs of a population that has more and more elderly persons. The local corner shop might, for example, rise in popularity, at the expense of big supermarkets outside the cities,' says Mr Vignon.

More immigrants needed

Over the next 15 to 20 years, the EU will require a significant number of immigrants to meet the needs of the labour market, due to the reduction of the active population. The EU not only needs to attract qualified people, but the need for unskilled labour from outside the EU will also remain high. In autumn 2007 the EU launched a proposal to establish a 'Blue card', similar to the US 'Green card', which aims at making it easier for highly qualified migrants to come and work in the EU.

On this matter, the Commission Vice-President Franco Frattini, responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security, says that 'Europe's ability to attract highly skilled migrants is a measure of its international strength. We want Europe to become at least as attractive as other favourite migration destinations, such as Australia, Canada and the USA. We have to make highly skilled workers change their perceptions of Europe's labour market, governed as they are by inconsistent admission procedures.'

Sustainable public finances

In most Member States, public finances are not sustainable under current policies (see also articles on page 44 and 47). Therefore the European Commission now analyses the long-term sustainability of public finances, based on Eurostat population projections up to 2050 and on the financial strategies presented by the Member states on a yearly basis.

Window of opportunity

Despite more immigrants and higher participation in the labour market, it is clear that the active population will eventually decline.

'However, based on scenarios provided by Eurostat's population projections, it is clear that the next decade constitutes a window of opportunity as employment can continue to grow thanks to rising labour force participation. This period should be used to prepare for the next phase of accelerated ageing,' says Mr Vignon.

'Looking beyond the next 10 years, the Commission also believes that it is possible to influence to some extent Europe's demographic future and mitigate somewhat the effects of the ageing foreseen in Eurostat's population projections,' he concludes.

By Annika Östergren Pofantis, Eurostat Communication Unit

For further information:

Commission communication COM(2006) 571, 'The demographic future of Europe — from challenge to opportunity'.
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/employment_social

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Statistics in focus: This collection provides updated summaries of the main results of surveys, studies and statistical analyses. It is published for all the themes and comprises 4 to 12 pages per issue. More than 200 issues are published per year.

Data in focus: Similar to *Statistics in focus*, although the emphasis is on publishing the latest data as quickly as possible (with no accompanying analyses).

Statistical books: Comprehensive studies, often focusing on a particular subject; usually quite lengthy, providing analyses, tables and graphs from one or more statistical themes.

Pocketbooks: These are pocket-sized publications providing the main indicators for the European Union, the euro area, the Member States and their partners.

Methodologies and working papers: Intended for those who want to consult methodologies, nomenclatures, or specific studies on a particular data set.

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