

The EC Household Panel Newsletter

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Statistics

in focus

POPULATION AND
SOCIAL CONDITIONS

POPULATION AND LIVING
CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 2/1999

EDITORIAL

Again, the Eurostat ECHP team has gone through a busy and challenging period since the last issue of its Newsletter... but it was worth it given the concrete major step forward that has been made! So, welcome to this fifth edition of the EC Household Panel Newsletter, entirely devoted to a key issue that has been in the dreams of many (potential) ECHP users since our survey generated its first EU-12 data-set: the issue of *data availability*.

Latest developments in ECHP data availability have to do with the following two areas:

- **Data anonymisation:** As already mentioned in our last Newsletter, ECHP micro-data contain information considered "confidential" in terms of the EU Council regulation N° 322/97 of 17/2/97 on Community statistics, the so-called EU "Statistical Law". Therefore, direct access to these original data has had to be more restrictive than what is desirable for a full exploitation of the data despite the strong interest expressed by many researchers and other users. Also, the structure of the ECHP "production database" is complex and thus very difficult for use outside as well as inside Eurostat, which increases significantly the risk of errors in using the data.
- **Data dissemination:** In view of this situation and given the growing demand for ECHP data from both inside and outside the Commission, Eurostat decided to construct back in November 1997 a user-friendly "longitudinal users' database" containing "anonymised" ECHP household's and personal micro-data. Rules for disseminating this users' database, and more specifically the access and price policy applied, have now been agreed upon.

These two areas will be covered in detail in the present issue.



DATA ANONYMISATION An harmonised EU agreement

You may remember from our previous Newsletter that the anonymisation of ECHP micro-data has required the definition of "objective anonymisation criteria" to be met by our "users' database" (UDB). By "objective", it is meant that once these criteria are applied to the various ECHP files, there should be no risk that an individual statistical unit could be identified through "all the means that might reasonably be used by a third party to identify the said statistical unit" ("Statistical Law").

Provided that all these criteria are met, ECHP data can thus be considered "non-confidential" in the sense of the Statistical Law and therefore made more widely available, although direct access to such anonymised data needs to be restricted by means of research contracts stipulating the strict conditions of use and access (see below).

It is in this context that at the 1997 ECHP Working Group (Luxembourg, 13-14/11/97), Eurostat proposed to ECHP National Data Collection Units (NDUs - either national statistical institutes or research centres, depending on the country) a first set of such

anonymisation criteria to be applied to the various ECHP files. It also submitted for discussion different rules, contractual requirements that should allow easier access to these "anonymised" data. The objective was therefore to open up access to ECHP micro-data without jeopardising both the necessary conditions of data confidentiality and the value of the data.

Extensive negotiations with all ECHP NDUs concerning the final set of "anonymisation criteria" to be applied to the UDB as well as the rules for accessing this UDB, have been conducted up to November 1998. Apart from some minor differences, all 14 Member States that are taking part in the ECHP have agreed on the same set of criteria and rules, meaning that they have supported both the idea of direct access to anonymised micro-data and the concrete EU harmonised proposal for anonymisation submitted by Eurostat.

Those readers interested may receive a comprehensive list of these criteria from Eurostat; this list also forms part of the documentation that is provided on the CD-ROM containing the UDB.

DATA DISSEMINATION Access and price policy

Eurostat has restricted direct access to the anonymised micro-data contained in the ECHP UDB by means of "ECHP research contracts". These contracts, which are signed with Eurostat, stipulate the strict conditions of data use and access such as:

- (a) The contractor must ensure that the files contained in the UDB are used exclusively for the research purposes clearly specified in the contract, excluding in particular any possible administrative use.
- (b) The contractor will be required to take all the necessary regulatory, administrative, technical and organisational measures to ensure that none of these data are distributed to third parties, and that there will be no attempt to identify nor will the contractor claim to have done so, by any means whatsoever, any individual statistical unit. In particular, the UDB shall not be connected with other data sets from any other source.
- (c) Any ECHP data recipients will be required to provide Eurostat with a copy of all reports (including 'papers'...) they produce using ECHP data.
- (d) For those "ECHP research contracts" allowing it: any research other than the project(s) specifically described in the contract shall require the explicit and unambiguous written consent from Eurostat; etc.

We will not enter into the details of this contractual aspect of the dissemination policy, but rather focus on the various categories of ECHP data users defined by Eurostat and the respective pricing policy applied to these.

Eurostat has decided to apply a dissemination policy for the UDB that would both encourage ECHP research and increase the visibility of the instrument. The specific pricing strategy and accessing/utilisation rules applied to each category of ECHP users have been developed in order to try and achieve these aims. In particular, the pricing strategy makes it possible for those users interested to get a significant reduction in price in exchange for a Eurostat "by-product".

These "by-products"...

- are a possibility, not a 'right', that Eurostat offers to users interested in the case of a common interest of both the institution(s)/organisation(s)/company(ies) concerned and Eurostat;
- are negotiated in detail in terms of content, timing, etc. and must be original, e.g. should not have been published anywhere else in the case of a publication;
- are the property of Eurostat

TYPES OF USERS AND PRICES FOR 1994-1996 WAVES DATA

- A STUDENTS, INDIVIDUAL RESEARCHERS... (THESIS, ETC.)**
There is normally no possibility for individual persons to acquire the CD-ROM directly. Such requests need to come from the institution/organisation where the person interested is studying/working.
PRICE: EUR 12.000
(or EUR 4.000 plus one by-product)
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Possibilities of acquiring the UDB as well as the price and the related data access/use issues, will need to be examined on an ad hoc basis by Eurostat.

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