

Reflection on Development of Social Statistics

New Challenges for Social Statistics
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Introduction

- Last 10 years as Director of Social and Demographic statistics, with previous involvement with Census and labour market
- Social Statistics programme in Ireland has expanded rapidly over period in response to both escalating national and EU demands
- Development has been extensive but somewhat unstructured - EU influence but many solutions tailored to prevailing circumstances
- Many challenges on the horizon as society becomes more complex and global

Outline

- Development phases of Social Statistics in Ireland
 - ▶ pre-EEC - very basic system
 - ▶ EEC to EU - slow development with focus on labour market
 - ▶ current situation - rapid expansion in an evidence informed policy making environment
- Reflection on development and challenges ahead
- International co-operation

Ireland in 1970

- Population of less than 3 million - slightly above the historic low of 2.8 million recorded in the 1961 census
- emigration a major concern with 10% of the population having left in the 1950s alone
- agriculture still dominant with over one quarter of the workforce engaged in the sector
- less than 4% of population born outside State - 9 out of every 10 of these in the UK or US (probably with Irish connections)
- focus on economic development with social policy relatively under-developed - e.g. Churches played a major role in delivery of social services, particularly education and health

Basic Social Statistics System

- Social Statistics system had the following features:
 - ▶ Census of Population every five years
 - ▶ quarterly and annual vital statistics
 - ▶ weekly summary of registered unemployed
 - ▶ annual estimates of population, migration and labour force (calibrated and linked to the Census)
 - ▶ Household Budget Survey every seven years
 - ▶ limited range of summary administrative data (e.g. education and health)
- Development of social statistics not seen as a first order priority in review of official statistics published in 1974

Census at the core

- Ireland has never had a population registration system and hence the focus on regular censuses
- frequency increased to every five years in the 1950s with principal objective of measuring the extent of emigration (open frontier with UK precluded others means)
- 1971 census had 18 individual and 10 household questions
 - ▶ 8 on demography (incl. 2 on birthplace and migration)
 - ▶ 2 on female fertility
 - ▶ 3 on labour force
 - ▶ 2 on education and scientific qualifications
 - ▶ 1 on Irish language, religion and means of transport to work/school

Limited development 1970/1980s

- EEC/EU statistical programme the dominant influence on Irish system - social issues not high on the agenda as largely outside Community competence
- the introduction of the Community Labour Force Survey in 1975 was a significant exception!
- The LFS in Ireland initially involved an annual sample of 3-4% of all households - very expensive
- the adoption of the ILO standard for measuring employment and unemployment was extremely important (particularly in an era of high unemployment)
- the annual LFS provided a substantially improved basis for the inter-censal estimates of population, migration and labour force

Ireland - the “Celtic Tiger” years

- Ireland has been transformed, both economically and socially, over the past 10-15 years
- GDP/GNP has risen at an average rate of over 7% p.a. since 1995 while the numbers at work has almost doubled over the past 20 years
- agriculture now accounts for just over 5% of the labour force while female participation has jumped from 35% in 1991 to 55%% in 2007
- immigration, rather than emigration, is now a major feature with over 15% of the population born outside Ireland - the overall population is now 50% higher than the low point recorded in 1961
- birth rates fell rapidly in the 1980s and early 1990s but have stabilised in the range 1.9-2.0 for the TFR over the past decade
- births outside marriage now account for around 1/3 of total (2% in 1980) while marriage breakdown is also increasing rapidly

Demand for Social Statistics

- Increasing policy focus on social and environmental issues - examples include: equality legislation and national anti-poverty strategies
- EU competence now includes most areas of social policy and co-ordinated monitoring now essential in a more integrated and expanded Union
- Target driven National Partnership Agreements between Government and the Social Partners are now the norm:
 - ▶ **Towards 2016**, adopted in 2006, has a 10 year time frame and has a “life cycle” approach (children, persons of working age, persons with a long term disability and the elderly) in setting targets and monitoring progress
- Evidence Informed Policy Making now generally accepted as preferred approach

Milestones in social statistics

- Modernisation of Census since 1996 to improve timeliness and to include a greater range of topics
- LFS upgraded to a continuous quarterly survey in 1997 and re-named as the Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS) to reflect its coverage of a wide variety of social issues
- Report of Steering Group on Social and Equality Statistics (2003) - recommendation for greater social reporting, increased use of administrative data and greater integration of sources
- development of new household surveys, exploitation of administrative sources and introduction of new thematic reports (2003-2007)

2006 Census

- Timeliness of results addressed as a top priority:
 - ▶ preliminary head count results published within 3 months
 - ▶ dissemination programme fully completed within 19 months
- 2006 Census had 30 individual and 11 household questions
 - ▶ 9 on demography
 - ▶ 2 on nationality and ethnicity
 - ▶ 2 on disability
 - ▶ 2 on caring and volunteerism
 - ▶ 3 on travel to work
 - ▶ 3 on educational qualifications
 - ▶ 6 on labour force
 - ▶ 1 on each of female fertility, ability to speak Irish and religion

QNHS - Social modules

- precision of labour force estimates determines sample size - 30-35,000 households (2-3% of total) surveyed each quarter
- relatively high field costs prompted decision to optimise statistical output through the incorporation of a programme of social modules
- subjects chosen following canvass of users and agreement of National Statistics Board (NSB)
- topics covered have included: *Crime and Victimisation; Health; Childcare; Pensions; ICT; Disability and the Labour Force; Life long Learning; Voter Participation; Housing; Travel to Work, Recycling; Participation in Sport; and Discrimination*
- the QNHS is now valued as a comprehensive source of good quality information on a wide range of social and demographic issues

Recent developments

- Major programmes are being pursued to develop the use of administrative data
- New household surveys have been launched or are in the course of development:
 - ▶ EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions
 - ▶ National Employment Survey (linked to enterprises)
 - ▶ National Disability Survey linked to 2006 Census
 - ▶ Large-scale longitudinal surveys on children and the elderly
- A new continuous household survey is being designed to meet miscellaneous national and EU needs (e.g. time use, travel, life long learning, health status, crime...)
- Consolidated and thematic reports are now produced on a regular basis (*Measuring Ireland's Progress, Women and Men in Ireland, Ageing in Ireland...*)

Reflection on development

- Social statistics are relatively expensive to provide - hence development linked to **both** the availability of resources and the sophistication of policy making environment
- **basic system** built around core demographic and labour market issues - **a regular census (based on traditional method or administrative sources) is essential**
- Ireland, a late developer, has benefited from experience elsewhere (EU influence crucial) but tailored solution required
 - ▶ uniqueness of source mix
 - ▶ 'local' focus of needs significant
- availability of international standards have been important in supporting statistical system (e.g. ILO guidelines)

Reflection on challenges ahead

- Need for:
 - ▶ **greater integration**, both within social domain and between social, economic and environmental domains
 - ▶ **increased efficiency** in the production of social statistics, particularly in realising the potential of administrative data
 - ▶ **development of new concepts and methods** (and revision of existing approaches) to address changing circumstances and requirements
 - ▶ **improved comparability and harmonisation** between countries
 - ▶ **greater engagement** with users
 - ▶ **closer collaboration** with research community to exploit social datasets to the maximum extent

Greater integration

- The development of an over-arching conceptual framework for social statistics (i.e a Social ‘SNA’) is not realistic(or necessary?)
- Focus should be on the development of suitable conceptual frameworks in sub-domains (e.g. labour, education, disability...) but need to guard against “silo” effect through development of appropriate linkages
 - ▶ development of Core variables for survey modules/sources?
- Further development of work to link social, economic and environmental domains
 - ▶ examples: Labour and Social Accounts in the framework of SNA
 - ▶ development of methods to link inputs, outputs and outcomes (e.g. measurement of Health Sector productivity)
 - ▶ implications for social statistics of developing measures of Sustainable Development

Increased efficiency

- Direct collection and focus on small areas and sub-populations make social statistics relatively expensive
- Potential of administrative data must be fully exploited but:
 - ▶ wide variation between countries
 - ▶ data protection issues
 - ▶ data limitations
- Improved survey methods, data matching and other statistical techniques such as small area estimation must be pursued

New methods and concepts

- Society continues to change at a rapid pace - smaller families, marital breakdown, labour market flexibility, mobility and travel...
- Focus of social statistics must adapt accordingly
 - ▶ development of new concepts such as Social Capital
 - ▶ re-assess some fundamental concepts such as usual residence, household composition and typologies, migration
 - ▶ greater focus on the use of time in surveys
 - ▶ development of measures to monitor “new” areas such as lifelong learning, disability and pension coverage
 - ▶ develop techniques to survey sensitive areas such as domestic violence, discrimination

Improved comparability

- Increasing focus on international benchmarking but can we rely on comparability of social data?
- Important to distinguish between **absolute** comparability and **broad** comparability - latter is normally sufficient and fit for purpose
- Some measures are particularly problematic when used across countries e.g. income inequality, when used as a proxy for poverty.
- Greater use of summary social indicators adds to the problem as contextual information often missing - link between social indicators and social statistics system needs to be reinforced

Harmonisation

- **Output** harmonisation - most common traditional method but has obvious limitations, availability of metadata essential
- **Input** harmonisation - ideal solution in theory but success not guaranteed in practice
- **Example:** Ireland “borrowed” US Census 2000 questions on disability for its 2002 Census, both involved self enumeration by householders - Irish disability rates less than half those in US (even after adjustment for age effects!).
- **Ex ante output** harmonisation - mixture of output and input harmonisation, increasingly used in EU
- **Ex post analysis** to validate comparability - greater role for statisticians and researchers

Engagement with users

- Evidence Informed Policy Making environment implies in particular a wide range of users of social statistics - from policy makers to researchers to citizens
 - ▶ often leads to a lack of focus in the articulation of statistical needs
- Statisticians must be pro-active in engaging with users in order to prioritise needs and ensure the relevance of their statistical outputs
- the accessibility of statistical outputs is a key issue in promoting effective contact with users
- Statistical Offices must aim to position themselves optimally on the *statistics-knowledge-policy continuum*

Collaboration with researchers

- Social statisticians are the custodians of very rich data sources but their information potential not fully exploited
- Risk of disclosure in making these sources available to researchers usually much lower than for other sources (e.g. data on enterprises)
- Data Protection issues often overstated or misunderstood but cannot be ignored
- Facilitating access on the basis of robust risk management procedures the key

International Co-operation

- Many international agencies involved in the development of social statistics - UN; ILO; WHO; UNESCO...
- Valuable work being undertaken in the individual domains but a sense that effective co-ordination is missing
- Clearly a role for UNSO and inter-agency co-ordinating committee but countries must also be involved
- UNSC has an obvious function in setting direction and priorities but is it too far removed? - EU experience would suggest that it is!

Way Forward

- At a minimum there is a strong case for the strategic development of social statistics with a primary focus on:
 - ▶ greater integration
 - ▶ prioritisation
 - ▶ development of new concepts and frameworks
 - ▶ international comparability

- Expert Group on Social Statistics (2003) proposed the establishment of a Forum and a more pro-active mandate for the Siena Group of Directors of Social Statistics
 - ▶ Forum has not appeared and Siena Group is disbanded - do we need to re-consider and fill the vacuum?

Thank You !