

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)

Proposed amendment to the Population Statistics Act

1. Aim of paper

The aim of this paper is to seek the views of the Population and Migration Statistics Committee on the proposal to extend the information collected on registration of births and still-births, to cover all births and still-births, rather than only births and still-births to married parents

2. Background

2.1 Consideration of amendments to the Act have come to the fore because the relevant part of the Population (Statistics) Act 1938 will be amended by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill (currently being considered by the UK Parliament), in order to cover "civil partnership" as well as "marriage" and because the status of illegitimacy was abolished in Scotland by the Family Law Act.

2.2 At present, when a birth is registered, the Registrar collects some information for statistical purposes only (which is not included in the Register entry), under the provisions of the Population (Statistics) Acts. The Registrar explains that this information will be treated as confidential, will be used only in the preparation of statistics by the Registrar General, and will not be inserted in the register. As a result, GROS cannot make it available for analysis by others in the same kinds of ways as may be done with other data

Part of this information can be summarised as follows:

IF PARENTS MARRIED TO EACH OTHER:

- Mother married before her marriage to child's father (Y/N)
- Number of mother's previous children by present and by any former husbands:

- (a) number born alive
- (b) number still-born
- (c) total (a)+(b)

2.3 The decision in the 1938 Act to collect the information on numbers of previous born children only from births within marriage resulted from the context of fertility at that time. There was considerable sensitivity about births outside marriage and concerns about implied status of illegitimate children if information on numbers of brothers and sisters of illegitimate children were collected. Times have changed and there is far less sensitivity about births out with marriage. In fact nearly half of all births are to mothers who are not married. Therefore, it is proposed to extend the collection of this information to cover all births in order to enable GROS to produce statistics which set out the position for all mothers, rather than only for those who are married to the fathers.

3. Potential uses of the data

- 3.1 Birth order information can provide two sets of information:
- (a) Births in a year by birth order (first, second births etc).
 - (b) By further calculation, population of women by parity (e.g. population of childless women).
- 3.2 Birth order and parity information would be invaluable
- (a) in understanding fertility trends to improve population projections - in England and Wales, projections are currently made using a birth order model; and
 - (b) potentially in monitoring the impact of policies on first births vs higher order births or on the proportion of women remaining childless.

4. Disadvantages

- 4.1 There is a potential concern that a mother might not want the father of the child being registered, to know how many other births she has had. This could result in inaccurate information being given to Registrars.

5. Conclusion

5.1 We would like your views on the proposal to collect birth information for all mothers, whether married or not.

5.2 We are planning to canvas views from Association of Registrars of Scotland, ISD, Scottish Government Health and Equalities areas, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Equality Network, Scottish Information Commissioner, The Law Society of Scotland, CRUSE Bereavement Care, and SANDS (still-birth and neonatal death society). We would also welcome your views on who else we should consult.