

comparison with PAU's 1990s project - instead of rectangular, the new datasets will use two level hierarchical format compatible with the one used by the IPUMS project (the files will include separate household and individual records; any geographical or dwelling-level information will be replicated on the household record). Finally, the sampling design will be simplified compared to the one used for the 1990s censuses, and high-density simple random samples will be used.

National statistical offices, which were approached as part of the preparations for the project, emphasized the importance that they attach to confidentiality and requested assurances that sufficient safeguards are envisaged for the microdata. In response to these requests, two strategies to safeguard confidentiality will be used, identical to those designed for the IPUMS International project: administrative and institutional controls, mostly in the form of confidentiality agreements, and various anonymization procedures (suppression of unique identifiers and various forms of "broad-banding", such as top and bottom coding, suppression of geographic details, etc.). Used in combination, these strategies minimize the risk of disclosure without seriously compromising the scientific value of the data.

Access to the database will be provided through the web-based system developed for the IPUMS International project, which will allow researchers to obtain adequately documented custom extracts, tailored to their research needs. For the needs of the ICM Europe initiative the web-based access system will be mirrored at a European site (most probably the Centre for Demographic Studies of Barcelona's Autonomous University).

PAU has already secured partial funding from the NIA for its participation in the project. MPC is also about to secure a research grant from the US National Institutes of Health, which will cover many of the harmonization of integration costs. Further funding will be sought from the European Commission within the 6th Framework Programme for research and technological development.

CONCLUSIONS Ensuring that anonymized and harmonized census microdata are available for as many European countries as possible will open new possibilities for comparative research. PAU's Census Microdata Samples Project, which was one of the pioneering efforts in this field, proved the feasibility of such an undertaking. The new and more ambitious project will even further facilitate cross-national comparative research and will allow European social sciences the bridge the gap that now exists in comparison with North America. The hope of PAU's staff is that national statistical offices of UNECE member countries will find the project sufficiently important and interesting and will join it.

In press - 6th October 2004.