

Inaccurate articles on EU census regulation

A number of articles in European media on planned EU legislation aimed at making national census data comparable between Member States have made inaccurate claims, in particular that the Commission wished to quiz women on their sex lives. These claims are not based on fact and are not correct.

It is true that the European Commission has tabled a Proposal for a regulation which aims to make the results of the population and housing censuses in the European Union more comparable. Given the importance of census data, the Commission believes this is necessary because high quality and comparable population data are indeed needed for policy making. For example, money from EU funds is distributed on the basis of "per capita" data. Major surveys done on the social situation and the employment of EU citizens are based on census data. Even the qualified majority voting procedures in the Council of the EU depend on population data that is comparable between Member States.

However, it is completely untrue that the Commission's legislative proposal wanted women to report "how many live-in partners they had had". These suggestions are totally groundless and are based on crude misinterpretations. The question on whether a woman lives in a marriage or a "consensual union" (an unmarried partnership) was not intended to obtain information on her sexual behaviour. The intention was to have aggregated data that could shed some light on the living and family circumstances of women in general, at a time when unmarried partnerships have become more and more prevalent. In the countries of today's EU, one out of twenty newborn children was born outside marriage in 1960; in 2005 this ratio stood at one out of every three children. This is why topics related to the living arrangements of persons have become established within demographic and social studies. It has never been intended that questions on people's sex lives should be included in the population census.

The European Parliament discussed amendments to the regulation, including the deletion of census topics that the Commission marked as "recommended", as opposed to the compulsory ones, leaving national lawmakers in each Member State the right to choose whether these should be taken up in the national census. The topic on "consensual union" was among those marked as recommended only. The European Parliament is fully entitled to improve EU legislation, and the European Commission appreciates its work.

These inaccurate claims are even more regrettable since co-operation among the institutions of the European Union has served to improve the census legislation, and to help harmonise comparisons between the EU's regions and nations. This will serve the interests of all citizens of the EU.