

Households

Social surveys on households

In 1983, ISTAT launched a sample survey of household structure and behaviour, with the aim of offering as clear a description as possible on the structural features of Italian households and of analysing the main social phenomena (participation in training and the job market, the use of certain social and healthcare services, leisure time, relations between households and reproductive behaviour), also with reference to the context of the household itself.

Particular attention was paid to finding the best possible definition of household. On the basis of the conclusions of a specific study committee, the household as recorded in the population register was abandoned as a unit of measurement in favour of the de facto household, i.e. the household as it appears at the time of the survey, regardless of its administrative features. The survey thereby offered the possibility of capturing a more varied reality with new forms of household. The de facto household has gradually become the unit of measurement for all ISTAT household surveys, in the place of the civil records household.

28,408 households were interviewed for the survey on household structure and behaviour, for a total of 91,458 people. The questionnaire used was divided into three parts: a general form, with essential information outlining the characteristics of the household, an individual form containing information on the individual household members, and a household form for information relating to the household as a whole. This layout formed the prototype for the following surveys that were to become part of the multipurpose survey system.

The first multipurpose survey of households was conducted in the period between 1987-1991. The overall design included six cycles of face-to-face interviews performed using PAPI (Paper and pencil interview) techniques, i.e. interviews conducted by a surveyor using a paper questionnaire. Each cycle lasted for six months and covered different thematic areas (the same areas that would later be the subject of surveys in the multipurpose system), with the exception of health conditions which were always present. Each single cycle required a sample of approximately 23,000 households from approximately 1,300 municipalities. As part of the survey, there was always a series of questions on the composition of the household.

In 1993 the multipurpose survey system on households was launched, divided into seven different social surveys: the annual "Aspects of Daily Life" survey, the quarterly survey on travel and holidays and five surveys conducted by rotation every five years, dedicated to the most important social themes: Health conditions and reliance of health services, Citizens and leisure time, Citizens and safety, Household and social subjects and Use of time. All the surveys cover de facto households resident in Italy and the individuals that compose them, excluding permanent cohabitation members.

The "Household and social subjects", one of the five surveys conducted every five years, is the main source of statistics for studying changes in the household and analysing the most important aspects of demographic and social behaviour. Some of the main contents include: household structure and commuters, networks of relations, information support networks, conjugal life and marriage, leaving the household of origin, working careers and social mobility. The survey relies on a two-phase sample with stratification in the first stage (municipalities). The "Household and social subjects" survey was conducted for the first time in 1998. In 2003, for the second edition, the total number of households reached 19,227, for a total of 49,541 individuals. The surveys were conducted using paper questionnaires in face-to-face interviews and paper questionnaires to be compiled independently by respondents.

The annual multipurpose survey "Aspects of Daily Life" provides each year a set of basic indicators

on theme areas which are then in-deep developed in the five-year surveys. Among other things, the survey provides important information on the structure and main changes in household life. The sample used is formed of two stages: the first stage is formed by municipalities, layered according to demographic size, while the second layer is made up of households, extracted randomly from municipal registries. The survey involves a sample of almost 24,000 households every year (for a total of approximately 54,000 individuals) distributed in approximately 850 municipalities. From 1993 to 2003 the survey was conducted in November, while from 2005 it was performed in the January-February period. In 2004 the survey was not performed due to the variation in the survey calendar. All household members extracted were required to respond to part of the questions in a direct interview and the remaining questions in a self administered questionnaire. In special circumstances where the individual was not available for interview, the information could be provided by another member of their household. The tables in this section present the figures relating to some of the new household structures from the early 1980s onwards.