

2015-12-10

Improved statistics on children and their families in Sweden

Anna Nyman, Statistics Sweden
Karin Lundström, Statistics Sweden

Introduction and background

Statistics Sweden publish yearly statistics on children and their families. The statistics is based on a register with information on all children and young persons 21 years and below. The register data is generally of high quality, but the number of children who have a single parent is overestimated while the number of children who are living in a stepfamily (with one of their parents and his/her partner) is underestimated. This is due to cohabiting couples who are not married and who do not have children together not being connected in the registers.

The last years there has been a change in the registration system in Sweden, to enable register based censuses. Previously people were registered on a building, but now a dwelling register has been developed and people are registered on a dwelling unit. When persons are registered on a dwelling unit, for example an apartment, it is possible to identify persons registered in the same dwelling unit and consequently to connect for example cohabiting couples even if they are not married and do not have children together. This new register information gives the opportunity to improve the quality in the register on children and young persons, with a higher share of all children having a correct family type in the register.

Having the correct information on children's family type is important, not only to describe the number of children living in different types of families but also because the family type affects different aspects of children's living conditions. For example the economic conditions differs between different family types –18 percent of children living with a single parent have a low economic standard compared to 6 percent of children living with two parents (Lundberg & Nyman 2014).

Data and methods

For each child the information in the register on children is compared with the information on which persons that are registered in the same dwelling unit as the child. If both sources show the same information it is assumed that this information is correct. If the sources hold different information it is determined which information that best describes the child's family type.

Results

For 92 percent of children and young persons 0–21 years we have the same information about family type in the existing register and from the information on persons registered in the same dwelling unit as the child. Another 3 percent of all children are not registered in a specific dwelling unit. That leads to a total of

95 percent of all children where the information in the current register is the best possible. For the remaining 5 percent there might be a change of family type.

Of these 5 percent the most common case is that the existing register shows that the child has a single parent but information on all persons registered in the dwelling unit shows that the parent have a cohabitant. In these cases the family type will be changed from single parent to cohabiting parents (stepfamily). This applies to 3 percent of all children. There is a corresponding situation with young adults who according to the existing register lives in one person-households but where there is another person registered in the same dwelling unit. These persons, 1 percent of the children/young adults in the register, will be changed from single to cohabiting.

There are also cases where the family type according to the existing register is cohabiting parents, but where the parents are registered in different dwelling units in the same building. These 0,4 percent of all children will be changed from children with cohabiting parents to children with single parents.

A small number of children, 0,1 percent of children in the register, have incorrect registration. These are children who are still registered in the dwelling unit where their family used to live, either because of a child custody case or because the parents forgot to change the registration for the child when the family moved. This type of errors are corrected after some time. In the existing register these children are categorized as registration errors and this information is kept. Using the information on which persons that are registered in the same dwelling unit as the child would be misleading since the child in this case would be connected to the persons now living in the dwelling unit that the child used to live.

Another 0,25 percent of all children have other combinations of family type in the register and information on which persons are registered in the same dwelling unit as the child. Different combinations on family type in the register and information on which persons that are registered in the same dwelling unit will be handled differently, depending on which information that seems to be most correct for each group.

Share and number of children in the register who will keep respectively change information on family type, 2012

	Share of children	Number of children
Same family type according to register and information on persons registered in the same dwelling unit	92,11	2 251 800
Not registered in a specific dwelling unit	2,72	66 600
Family type single parent changed to cohabiting parents	3,11	76 100
Family type single changed to cohabiting	1,27	31 200
Family type cohabiting parents changed to single parent	0,42	10 300
Children with incorrect registration, no change in family type	0,10	2 500
Other combinations of family type according to register and information on persons registered in the same dwelling unit	0,25	6 200
Total	100	2 444 500

To sum up the changes in the register will lead to:

- Improved information about family type for about 120 000 children, or 5 percent of all children and young adults
- The share of children living with a single parent is "reduced" from 21 percent to 18 percent
- The share of young persons not living with their parents who have a cohabitant "increases" from 6 percent to 31 percent

A higher share of children having correct information on their family type will lead to higher quality in the statistics.

References

Lundberg, Petter & Nyman, Anna (2014). *Ökade skillnader i barnfamiljers inkomststandard*. Published at www.scb.se 2014-01-15