

***ICT Household Survey
The French project***

Patrice Roussel
INSEE - France

***XVI th Voorburg Group meeting - Örebro (Sweeden)
17 - 21 September 2001***

In October 2001, Insee will launch a survey of the impact of new technologies on French households.

Why such a survey ?

In France as elsewhere, new information and communication technologies (NICT) have already brought about rapid and significant changes in living standards at work and at home, and these changes are continuing apace. Distance is now seen as less of a constraint and personal autonomy is being extended: it is increasingly common for companies to organise themselves in networks; individual life is becoming more personalised and mobile; and work is penetrating home life to a greater extent.

One survey alone is not of course sufficient for the statistical monitoring of such a major phenomenon, and publishing a limited number of indicators showing the increase in use of ICT equipment or electronic means of exchange can only give part of the picture as to the changes currently taking place.

In its consideration of the impact of new technologies on the lives of private individuals, Insee has opted for a two-speed approach, firstly adding specific questions to the annual survey into household living standards, details of which are given later, and secondly launching the specific survey to be carried out in October. The aim of the annual survey is to update simple indicators, whereas the specific survey includes more detailed questions on the whys and wherefores of the relationship between private individuals and new technologies.

Who has requested the survey?

Contrary to what seems to have happened elsewhere, the request for in-depth statistical monitoring of the development and impact of new technologies was not here the subject of a government order which could then lead to the adoption of a specific statistical programme.

It was the National Council for Statistical Information (CNIS: the body which sets the programme of surveys to be carried out by Insee and government statistical departments) which in 1999 established a working group dedicated to “the statistical observation of the development of NICT and their impact on the economy”. Its role was to highlight the work needed to produce effective, comprehensive information which would also be suitable for drawing comparisons with the situation in other countries.

One of its recommendations was that existing surveys be used to produce indicators as to levels of penetration of these new technologies and their use by private individuals, and that additionally a specific series of surveys be developed to study the behavioural changes linked to NICT.

The French mechanism for surveying household living standards

Apart from a monthly telephone survey of approximately 3000 households comprising around ten key questions, most surveys dealing with income, consumption, levels of poverty and other social indicators are carried out on an annual basis or less frequently. The permanent survey of household living standards covers all areas not dealt with by specific surveys in these fields. 8000 households are questioned.

Orders for the survey are constantly increasing: there is no shortage of demand for social indicators, although there is of people prepared to participate in financing the survey.

In order to process as many questions as possible each year, the survey is no longer carried out every four months but has become an annual survey divided into three phases, each phase covering a different area:

the January phase covers “quality of habitat, environment”,

the May phase covers “health, housing, debt”,

the October phase covers “social contacts and participation”.

The annual questions on ICT equipment are included in the May phase.

Various (related) sub-sections are then added on to these main areas:

A “shopping outlet” section was added in May 1998, specifically developed with ICT equipment in mind.

In October 2001, when the survey discussed in these notes will take place, the emphasis will be on the impact of new technologies on households, an area which on the face of it could be equally relevant to household equipment and to social life, the new technologies in question being information and communication technologies. The survey will form part of the third annual phase.

The characteristics of the survey

⇒ The attached document provides an overview of the different sections of the questionnaire.

The survey has been drawn up according to the following principles:

- Comparing the current situation with that of 1998, by means of detailed questions about domestic ICT equipment, training on and use of such equipment.
- Taking into account the request made by the Media Development Directorate which is co-financing the survey.
- Drawing inspiration from the practices of other statistical institutions, especially those in North America.
- Directing questions towards individuals rather than, as in the past, strictly towards the household, as access to and use of ICT equipment are only in part determined by the household as an entity.

The aim of the survey (in brief)

Its aim is to find out about the ICT equipment owned by households, and the uses made of it. The survey will enable an evaluation of households' access to IT, the Internet and mobile phones as well as a measurement of the impact of new technologies on areas of behaviour such as social relations, the changing ways in which people spend their time, etc. It will also consider opinions on NICT in order to help to explain why people do or do not use ICT equipment.

The areas covered

1	Opinions on new technologies	
2	Personal equipment	Mobile phones and bank cards
3	Household equipment	Wired telephone , minitel, audiovisual equipment Personal computer (PC), Internet
4	Knowledge and training	Skills Computer training
5	Domestic use	Minitel, Internet, PC
6	Current and past professional use	//
7	Use at place of study	//
8	Use in public places	//
9	Social relations	Contacts via email, post, telephone
10	Use by the under-fifteens	Mobile phone, Internet, PC

Technical details

The survey will be carried out via face-to-face interviews.

One person will be picked at random from the household members aged 15 or over in October 2001.

The interview should last 50 minutes, of which 20 will be spent on the questionnaire on the impact of new technologies, and 30 on the questionnaire covering the main area (social contacts and participation).

Interviewees will be asked about the equipment they own and their knowledge of ICT as these stand on the day of the survey.

They will be asked about time spent using minitel, the Internet and the computer over the period of the month preceding the survey.

Questions about social relations will take the previous twelve months into account.

Information regarding children and teenagers under the age of 15 will be obtained from the adult interviewed as, by law, 15 is the minimum age at which a person may be interviewed for a statistical survey aimed at adults.

Expected results

The survey will provide an update of the standard indicators about ICT equipment although this is not of course its central purpose. It is primarily expected to highlight and explain changes in behaviour, and the results will enable lessons to be learned in terms of using statistics as a means of observation: level of validity of the household as an entity, consideration of new technologies within the different areas of the survey in relation to social indicators, and so on.

Next time, services to be more in the scope of the survey :

The equipment's use approach immediately excludes questions concerning access to services from the scope of the questionnaire.

It is a fact that some services provided by physical equipment in the past are now more accessible in other ways: for example it is increasingly common in France for telecoms companies to offer an answering service as an optional extra.

The increase in the relative share of services in household consumption and the fact that possession of certain goods (television) is becoming the norm mean that a revision of the ways in which living standards are analysed in France needs to be implemented.