

Status of the Review and Revision of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 Rounds of Population and Housing Censuses

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I Introduction

The Principles and Recommendations for the 2010 rounds of population and housing censuses are being reviewed and revised by the United Nations.

The United Nations recommends that Member Countries conduct a population and housing census around calendar years ending with zero, and since 1958 has been compiling the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (P&R) as guidelines for conducting censuses. The P&R have in principle been revised every ten years, with those for the 2000 rounds published in 1998.

Revision and review of the P&R for the 2010 rounds by an Expert Group consisting of experts in population and housing censuses from member countries and international agencies commenced in 2005, and are now at the final stage of editing and translation by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

This paper presents major issues of discussion at the Expert Group Meeting (EGM), and major changes to the P&R.

II Organization for the review and revision

The P&R for the 2000 and earlier rounds of population and housing censuses were reviewed and compiled primarily by UNSD, but the new P&R have been in the

hands of the EGM.

The EGM is comprised of about 40 countries and international agencies, and has three Working Groups (WGs) as well as a Plenary Session and Drafting Group. Their roles and responsibilities are as follows:

Drafting Group: to prepare the draft text of the revised P&R based on the results of discussions at the WG meetings and the Plenary Session;

WG1: to review census topics to be investigated and census results produced;

WG2: to review census planning and management as well as census methodologies; and

WG3: to review data dissemination and use of census results.

The paper reports primarily on census planning and design as well as census methodologies, since the author presided over the WG2.

III Schedule for the review

The overall schedule for the review has been set out as follows:

April-July 2005: Exchange of views through e-mail and over the Internet mainly to raise issues for review.

22-26 August 2005: The first meeting of the EGM at UN Headquarters, attended by about 50 persons from 25 countries and 16 international agencies.

- Remarks by the Chairs of the WGs concerning key issues, followed by exchange of views.
- Discussions on the key issues by respective WGs concerned.
- Presentation of the results of the discussions of the WGs to the Plenary Session, followed by a general discussion.

September-October 2005: Preparation of the draft text by the WGs concerned based on the results of the first meeting shown above.

November 2005- : Consolidation of the entire draft text by the secretariat (UNSD).

10-14 July 2006: The second meeting of the EGM at the UN Headquarters, attended by about 50 persons from 25 countries and 14 international agencies.

- Remarks made by the Chairs of the WGs about main concerns and tentative conclusions thereon, followed by questions and answers.
- Final discussion by WGs based on the views expressed above.

- Presentation of the results of the discussions of the WGs concerned to the Plenary Session, followed by questions and answers.

July-September 2006: Preparation of the draft text by the WGs concerned and Drafting Group based on the results of the second meeting shown above.

IV Discussions and revisions

1. Objectives and roles of a census

The objectives and roles of a population census have not been clearly stated in earlier versions of the Recommendations. Therefore, it might have happened that although statistics related persons were well aware of the importance of the census, the financial authorities or general public were not. In this revision, a new chapter titled “Essential Roles of the Census” will be added in the first part of the P&R to set out the objectives and roles of the population census clearly so that everybody recognizes its importance.

Specifically, the following four points will be described as the essential roles of the census:

- a. The population census plays an essential role in public administration, that is, the results of a census are used as a critical reference to ensure equity in distribution of wealth, government services, representation, etc.
- b. The population census plays an essential role in all elements of the national statistical system. Census statistics are used as benchmarks for statistical compilation, or as a sampling frame for sample surveys.
- c. The basic feature of the census is to generate statistics on small areas or small population groups with no/minimum sampling errors. Small area statistics are important because they can be used to produce statistics on any geographical unit with arbitrary boundaries.
- d. The census results are used as a benchmark for research and analysis, such as population projections, which are crucial for all segments of public and private sector.

2. Essential features

The “Essential Features” described in the previous version will remain almost unchanged, and the following four points will be presented:

- a. Individual enumeration
- b. Universality within a defined territory
- c. Simultaneity
- d. Defined periodicity

3. Methodological Approaches

In addition to the enumeration method in which the questionnaires are distributed directly to and collected from individual persons or households by the enumerators or by a mailing system, new methods are emerging in the several countries in which the population census is based on the register of residents, or in which successive regional censuses are conducted rotating the enumeration districts (so-called rolling census). Therefore, it has become necessary to address these methods in the new P&R.

The new P&R will define the conventional enumeration method as the "traditional approach", and new methods as "alternative approaches", and then describe the census methodologies mainly based on the traditional approach referring to alternative approaches. Merits and demerits associated with different approaches will be identified as well as conditions in which they can be applied or adopted for census taking.

The description of the approaches is as follows:

a. Traditional approach

This approach was adopted by 196 out of 247 countries and areas which participated in the 2000 rounds of population censuses, and has unrivalled merit in providing a snapshot of the entire population at a specified period and availability of data for small geographic domains. Of course, this approach satisfies all the essential features of a census shown above. However, as it has the disadvantages of relatively high cost, being labour-intensive and complicated to administer, and can be applied only at a long interval of five or ten years. Moreover, a lot of time is consumed in tabulation.

b. Register-based approach

This approach making use of registers has been introduced since the 1970s, as it can produce census-like results. It utilizes existing administrative records such as the register of residents as well as registers for education, taxation, and

employment.

To adopt this approach, it is critical that there exists an established central population register of high quality, and that it is linked precisely to various related administrative records. To satisfy the essential features of a census shown earlier, these administrative records need to be updated in a timely and proper fashion. Moreover, legal provisions should be made to enable the use of these administrative records for production of statistics, and people's understanding of their use should be sought.

This approach reduces cost and enables more frequent production of statistics. But it should be borne in mind that the development of these administrative recording systems costs much more than census taking, and that the statistics produced are confined to within the range of the existing administrative records.

c. Rolling census approach

The rolling census is an approach in which enumeration takes place successively over a certain period of time, and hence does not satisfy simultaneity at all, nor universality in a sense that the entire population is not enumerated at a single reference time.

It has the merits of enabling the production of more frequently updated statistics, stability of cost and labour, and introduction of new technologies without delay, but precise sampling design and estimation techniques are required to produce accurate statistics.

4. Contracting out of census work

In many cases in many countries these days, part of census work is contracted out to external organizations. While contracting out brings about a reduction in cost, introduction of new technologies, and so on, it may affect people's trust in census taking. Therefore, the P&R will compile a list of points for consideration when any part of census work is contracted out.

Specifically, a new chapter will be added recommending that countries analyze census work in detail, and examine from the following viewpoints whether each component is suitable for outsourcing or not:

a. Strict protection of data confidentiality

Confidentiality assurance is the first and most important issue that should

be considered by national statistical offices, and they are responsible for data confidentiality in terms of both perception and reality. It is extremely harsh for national statistical offices to find leakage or misuse of confidential information by ex-post-facto monitoring and controls. Consequently, contracting out of tasks with potential for such incidents should be avoided. For example, it is highly recommended that contracting out should be avoided in the data gathering phase, because it is closely related to earning the trust of the public and the strict protection of confidentiality.

b. Method of confidentiality assurance that satisfies the general public

As described in the “Essential Roles of the Census”, a census should be undertaken by the method that can produce the most reliable results and in a manner that wins the trust of the general public in terms of both perception and reality.

c. Guarantee measures of quality assurance

In outsourcing, quality assurance should be guaranteed and cost should not be the first priority in considering and judging the successful bidder in this respect. Although fair competition among several companies to reduce costs is desirable, it is worth mentioning that merely considering low price bidding as a determinant factor may adversely affect the quality of the job to be done by the successful bidder. Low quality work could cause a significant loss of trust among the general public.

d. Ability to manage and monitor the outsourced census tasks/activities

National statistical offices should fully assess both the capabilities as well as the disabilities of companies to select the successful bidder to which the activity/ies in question are to be outsourced. It is highly recommended that the practical and financial peculiarities of companies should be considered after assessing their capabilities. With every private company, there is a potential risk of bankruptcy or of the company changing the field of its activity. It should be kept in mind that if a selected company is unable to fulfil the assigned tasks, the probable problems may not be resolved through penalties.

e. Having control over the core competence of national statistical office, and appropriateness judgment

It should also be recommended that under no conditions should national statistical offices endanger their competence and core responsibilities by contracting out census tasks. For example, in coding of education, occupation, and industrial classifications, contracting out is not advised. This is due to the

fact that the coding depends on the minor differentiation and level of coding (general and detailed classifications according to different coding standards) as well as of the coding manual and education of the coders. Considering such subtle criteria for judgment, it is difficult to prepare a complete coding manual in advance before checking the filled questionnaire. (However, to reduce the staff resources required, and to improve timeliness, uniformity and accuracy, automated coding procedures may be employed.)

5. Utilization of IT

Many countries have introduced IT for data input by OMRs and OCRs and data dissemination using GIS, owing to great progress in IT. But, IT has not only merits but also demerits, for example high cost. Therefore, the recommendations will warn in various contexts where appropriate that census planning should take due account of such demerits of IT.

6. Census topics

The Recommendations make it a rule from the beginning to list up topics recommended to be investigated in census taking, and select the most important topics out of these as “core topics” together with detailed explanations. The revised list of core topics that have been determined through examination by the EGM is as follows:

- a. Geographical and internal migration characteristics
Place of usual residence, Place where present at time of census, Place of birth, Duration of residence, Place of previous residence (Place of residence at a specified date in the past may replace these two topics.)
- b. International migration characteristics
Country of birth, Citizenship, Year or period of arrival
- c. Household and family characteristics
Relationship to head or other reference member of household
- d. Demographic and social characteristics
Sex, Age, Marital status
- e. Fertility and mortality
Children ever born, Children living,
Date of birth of last child born alive (newly added to the core topics),
Household deaths in the past 12 months (newly added to the core topics)
- f. Educational characteristics

Literacy, School attendance, Educational attainment

g. Economic characteristics

Activity status, Occupation, Industry, Status in employment

(Time worked has been deleted from core topics)

h. Disability characteristics

Disability status (newly added to the core topics)

V Future schedule for revision

November 2006: After the editorial review by the secretariat, submit to the United Nations Statistical Commission

February 2007: Adoption by the 38th Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission