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(Geneva, 10-12 June 2003)

**REPORT OF THE MAY 2003 JOINT ECE-EUROSTAT
WORK SESSION ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES**

Introduction

1. The Joint ECE-EUROSTAT Work Session on Population and Housing Censuses was held in Ohrid (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) from 21 to 23 May 2003 at the invitation of the State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia. It was attended by delegates of Albania, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. A representative of the United Nations Statistics Division was also present.
2. After opening the meeting, a welcoming address was given by Mr. Donco Gerasimovski, Director of the State Statistical Office.
3. The provisional agenda was adopted.
4. Mr. Tomaz Smrekar (Slovenia) was elected as Chairman.

Organisation of the meeting

5. The following substantive topics were considered in separate sessions at the meeting on the basis of 21 invited and supporting papers:

Session I: Lessons learned from the 2000 round of population and housing censuses (concepts, collection, processing, outputs) -- Organiser: Aidan Punch (Ireland)

Session II: Planning for the next census -- Organiser: Eliahu Ben Moshe (Israel)

Session III: Process to be used in producing an updated set of "Recommendations for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in the ECE Region" -- Organisers: UNECE and Eurostat

6. The conclusions reached by the participants during the discussion of the substantive items of the agenda are presented in the annex to the report that was prepared after the meeting (see Annex I of this report).

7. The participants expressed their great appreciation to the State Statistical Office for the excellent organisation of the meeting and the social activities that were offered to the participants.

Recommendations for future work

8. The participants were informed that the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians, at its October 2002 meeting, recommended that future ECE – Eurostat joint meetings in the CES work programme have a specific purpose and/or product in mind, and that they should be planned and prepared by a Steering Group composed of national experts.

9. The meeting agreed on the need for intensive joint work by the UNECE and Eurostat over the course of the next four years aimed at drawing up a revised set of UNECE –Eurostat Recommendations for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the ECE Region. It also agreed that the new set of recommendations would constitute an essential and concrete output of the type envisioned by the CES Bureau. The participants also stressed that in the interest of international comparability a revised set of ECE recommendations is even more important today than in earlier decades because of the growing number of approaches that are being developed by various countries for the next round of censuses. They also agreed that the ECE secretariat has played a leading role in developing the regional variant of the UN census recommendations for the past five decades and that it should continue to play a very active role in developing the new set of recommendations for the 2010 round of censuses.

10. The participants agreed, therefore, that joint work by ECE and Eurostat on drawing up and preparing the draft new set of recommendations should proceed as planned. They also agreed that the Steering Group for guiding future joint work by ECE and Eurostat on censuses in the CES work programme for the 2003-2007 period should be composed of representatives of Canada, Ireland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Eurostat and the ECE, all of whom had volunteered to serve on the group.

11. The joint work should be planned in such a way so as to ensure that the draft new set of recommendations could be submitted to the June 2007 plenary session of the Conference and to the 2007-2008 meeting of DGINS for approval. It should also be planned so that

ECE's and Eurostat's joint work on drawing up the new set of census recommendations for the ECE region be coordinated with the work on the global version of the census recommendations being developed by UNSD, and that the ECE and Eurostat tabulation programmes for the next round of censuses be fully coordinated.

12. The meeting agreed that the joint work on drawing up the new set of recommendations should consist of the following steps, and that it should follow the tentative timetable as indicated below:

- a) Step 1 - Autumn of 2003 (by ECE, in consultation with Eurostat): Distribution of a detailed questionnaire to all ECE countries to obtain detailed information from them on the extent to which they complied with the ECE-Eurostat Recommendations for the 2000 round of censuses in their last censuses, as well as feedback from them on which parts of the 2000 recommendations they think should be revised and improved.
- b) Step 2 - January to October, 2004 (by ECE and Eurostat): Preparation of synoptic papers, one dealing with the population census topics and the other with the housing census topics, summarising the extent to which ECE countries complied with the recommendations for the 2000 round of censuses.
- c) Step 3 - January 2004 to December 2006: Setting up of Task Forces composed of a small number of interested countries, and conduction of work by the Task Forces on designated parts of the 2000 recommendations which are considered as being in need of significant revision.
- d) Step 4 - Spring 2005: Joint ECE-Eurostat work session on **population** censuses, to conduct an in-depth review of the synoptic paper on the 2000 population censuses, and to recommend types of modifications to be made to the recommendations for purposes of obtaining an improved set of population census recommendations for the 2010 censuses.
- e) Step 5 - Autumn 2005: Joint ECE-Eurostat work session on **housing** censuses, to conduct an in-depth review of the synoptic paper on the 2000 housing censuses, and to recommend types of modifications to be made to the recommendations for purposes of obtaining an improved set of housing census recommendations for the 2010 censuses.
- f) Step 6 - Preparation (by ECE and Eurostat) of the draft new set of recommendations for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the ECE Region, for review at an ECE-Eurostat Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses to be organized in Geneva in the first calendar quarter of 2007.
- g) Step 7 - Submission of the draft new set of recommendations to the June 2007 CES plenary session for approval.

13. The meeting also asked the Steering Group to consider whether there may be enough time at the proposed spring 2005 work session on population censuses and/or at the autumn 2005 work session on housing censuses to have the meetings also include one methodological topic on the agenda of the meeting, and in the event of there being sufficient scope for that, to select an appropriate topic of that kind.

Adoption of the report

14. The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

ANNEX

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY THE PARTICIPANTS DURING THE DISCUSSION

Topic (i): Lessons learned from the 2000 round of population and housing censuses (concepts, collection, processing, outputs)

Documentation: Invited papers by Canada, Eurostat, Russian Federation, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom; supporting papers by Albania, Italy, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the United Kingdom.

1. The session was organised by Mr. Aidan Punch (Ireland).

Preparatory phase

2. While the legislative basis for the conduct of the census may differ from country to country, there was widespread agreement that the independence of the statistical office must be guaranteed if the census is to succeed. This independence, which is normally inscribed in the general statistics legislation, was not a feature of the censuses carried out in all member states in the region during the course of the 2000 round.
3. The meeting was of the view that work on appropriate pilot testing of issues such as questionnaire content, field operations, processing and dissemination, needs to commence much earlier in all countries. In particular sufficient time must be given to the determination and composition of the enumeration areas to be used during the fieldwork phase.
4. Increased use is being made by the NSIs in the region of contracting out services, which were formerly provided in-house. Examples are recruitment and payment of field staff, running helplines, and developing and delivering processing systems. This places a heavy onus on NSIs in terms of complying with public procurement policies and managing the relevant contracts.

Fieldwork

5. The recurrent problem of recruiting and retaining field staff of a sufficiently high calibre was highlighted. While the labour market conditions pertaining in the various countries at the time of the census have a marked impact on these issues there was a general feeling that, notwithstanding budgetary pressures, enumerators should be better remunerated for the onerous work they carry out.
6. One of the highlights of the session was the diversity of methods used in the region for the collection of census or census type information. A wide variety of collection systems was used in the 2000 round of censuses, including enumerator delivery and collection, enumerator delivery and mail back, mail out/mail back, partial use of administrative records supplemented by sample surveys, and the full use of administrative records. No one system was deemed to be superior to any other and each country must choose the method which best suits its own circumstances.

7. The need for focused public awareness campaigns was underscored. Most of these are provided on a fee basis by advertising agencies in response to the requirements of the NSIs. However, the increasingly important role being played by the media (print, radio and TV) in optimising response to the census was also remarked upon. NSIs will need to be more proactive in this regard in future, not just during the critical fieldwork phase of the census but also when the results are being communicated to the public. It is incumbent therefore on statisticians to better develop their communication skills, both written and verbal.

8. Facilitating respondents by enabling them to return their completed census forms over the internet will be a feature of censuses to be undertaken over the coming years. The necessary technological advances have been made. The only major obstacle is managing the so-called peak-load situation (also evident in helplines), although some concerns were expressed about maintaining security and confidentiality and protecting the database from hackers. Each household will need to be issued with a unique user ID and password in order to guarantee the integrity of the returns.

9. The use of the internet for collection will imply that countries may have to adapt to multi-modal means of collecting their data and will therefore face new challenges in ensuring complete enumeration while taking the necessary steps to avoid duplication.

Processing issues

10. Scanning of census forms and capturing the information on them through the use of optical mark and character recognition techniques would appear to have been successfully implemented in quite a number of the countries in the region during the 2000 round of censuses.

11. The use of automatic and semi-automatic coding systems was also widely reported. Taken in conjunction with scanning and recognition this has resulted in major gains being made in the processing of census returns compared with the situation which obtained during the previous round.

12. In order to lessen respondent burden and with a view to speeding up processing a number of countries in the region still adhere to the use of short and long forms.

Dissemination

13. The success or failure of a census is often judged by the speed with which results are made available to the public. Clearly processing gains have a major role to play in that regard.

14. Many of the countries in the region have disseminated their results on their websites although practices differed in relation to the volume of output provided and the extent to which charging applied or not.

15. The role of the media in communicating census results was again highlighted and was adjudged to have positive feedback effects in terms of enhanced response rates especially in those countries which have five yearly censuses.

16. It was agreed that every effort should be made to ensure that the results are made available not just in the form of tabular data but also through reports which are written with the general reader in mind and which make use of graphical aids and GIS tools.

Topic (ii): Planning for the next census

Documentation: Invited papers by France, Israel, Norway, and the United States.

17. The session was organised by Mr. Eliahu Ben Moshe (Israel).
18. The session focused on new (alternative) approaches to Census taking, compared to the traditional Census approach.
19. It was clear from the presentations and the discussion that many if not most of the countries in the area are engaged today in trying to find suitable alternative approaches to Census taking, that could be used in the next Population Census round around 2010.
20. The high and growing costs and increasing reluctance of the public to collaborate with the Census were among the more common reported reasons for looking for alternatives. All that, in conjunction with enabling conditions - the availability of alternative (administrative) sources in digital form, the fast development of new information technologies and new statistical methodological advances – have pushed many countries to reconsider their approach to Census taking.
21. One additional reason parallel to the mentioned difficulties of Census taking and the enabling technological and methodological developments, is the increasing request from NSI's to produce Census like information more frequently than once (or twice) a decade.
22. Four different approaches were presented:
 - a. The case of Norway who in their last Census are completing the process of transforming the Census into a full administrative Census, by adding to their administrative systems the “missing link”: the link of each person in the population register to the dwelling where they live, that is itself uniquely identified in a new and complete dwelling register
 - b. The case of the USA who are considering re-engineering their next Census by replacing their long form sample (the traditional vehicle it has used to collect the socio-economic data) by a continuous annual household sample survey of 2.5% of American households, while reducing the full Census collection to the basic demographic and housing characteristics of the population
 - c. The case of France who are planning to modernize their traditional Census by switching towards a “rotating” Census, transforming the whole Census operations into an annual sample survey of around 10% of the population each year, producing annual Census like population estimates at different but detailed levels of geographical resolution
 - d. The case of Israel who, abandoning the traditional Census approach, plans to combine administrative data for the whole population with a 20% household sample that is intended to statistically correct the administrative data, complement the socio-economic data missing in the administrative sources, and produce combined statistical estimates to replace the traditional Census counts

23. The variety of new approaches presented showed that the next Census round should be expected to be characterized by the use of a high variety of different approaches with their two main characteristics being the intensive use of existing administrative data and the use of sampling and statistical estimates to replace the traditional head count that has been the base of the traditional Census approach.

24. Some questions about the legitimacy of calling Population Census the new approaches, that aim to produce Census like data using new and untraditional methods, were raised by some of the participants.

25. It was proposed that the Census approach should be evaluated on the basis of its ability to reach the Population Census goals, regardless of the type of method or operations that are involved in the production process. It was further suggested that any approach that produces reliable demographic and socio-economic data at a high level of geographical (and small group) resolution, that can be used as the benchmark of the continuous population estimates and provide a high quality description of the demographic and socio economic structure of the whole population living in a determined territory at a specified point in time, may be called a Population Census.

26. Some difficulties inherent to the new approaches have been discussed. Among them:

- a. difficulties related to the identification of new type of households inherent to the administrative data;
- b. the public relations challenge of convincing users and the public that statistical estimates may be as good if not better than traditional head counts;
- c. the effect that may have such change in the organizational structure of the NSI; the difficulties of finding proper sampling frames (like reliable building registers or GIS systems) and the dependence on the quality and coverage of these frames;
- d. the possibility of a decrease in the response rate in sampling surveys as compared to the traditional Census.

27. It seems clear that the new Census round compared with previous ones will be characterized by a high heterogeneity in the methods that will be used to produce the Census data; and that we may expect to see in the near future the conduction of much more frequent Censuses than one or twice in a decade. The participants also concluded that there is no single "right" way of producing Census information, and the particular choice of method for each country will always be dependent on actual conditions in the country.

Topic (iii): Process to be used in producing an updated set of "Recommendations for the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in the ECE Region"

Documentation: Notes prepared by the ECE Secretariat.

28. The session was organised by UNECE and Eurostat.

29. The session started with the presentation of the future activities planned in the field of population and housing censuses by the ECE's Population Activities Unit (PAU) and UNSD.

30. The representative of the PAU presented briefly the most recent developments on the project Integrated Census Microdata Initiative (ICM-Europe). The aim of the project is to anonymise, integrate, and make accessible for research use microdata samples based on multiple rounds of population and housing censuses in a number of European countries. The project will build on the experience of the PAU and the Minnesota Population Center (MPC) of the University of Minnesota, as well as on the expertise of a consortium of European statistical offices and academic institutions.

31. In order to ensure an adequate funding for the project, a grant proposal was submitted to the European Commission within the 6th Framework Programme for Research. A decision of the European Commission on whether to fund the project is expected in early autumn. Separately, the PAU was awarded limited funding from the U.S. National Institute on Aging, which will cover the costs of some of PAU's work related to the 2000-round of population and housing censuses, including the promotion of the idea to create in interested countries higher-density samples of older persons.

32. The representative of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) presented some information on the United Nations' World Population and Housing Census Programme in support of censuses, which is aimed at the development and setting of guidelines and international standards to facilitate the collection and production of population and housing statistics and also to promote international comparability of such statistics. The census programme of UNSD is designed with the primary goal of assisting countries in planning and carrying out improved, timely and cost effective censuses. This goal has been addressed through: (i) the preparation of reference and training materials (including the "Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses", manuals and handbooks); (ii) the provision of technical assistance services, and (iii) census capability building.

33. Information was also provided on two major meetings planned for 2003 and 2004. The first is the review of the United Nations Demographic Yearbook scheduled for November 2003 and the second a census symposium, which is tentatively scheduled for August 2004. The census symposium was requested by the 34th session of the Statistical Commission as a follow-up to the census symposium held in August 2001 in New York (the proceedings are available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/census/index.htm>). The meeting will assess the 2000 round of census (1995-2004) activities and identify issues and emerging problems from the current round of censuses and seek solutions that would serve to guide countries in census planning during the 2010 census round (2005-2014).

34. After the presentations by ECE's Population Activities Unit and UNSD, the meeting discussed the proposal on possible future joint work by ECE and Eurostat to produce an updated set of recommendations for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the ECE Region. The results of the discussion under this item are summarised in the body of the report, in section "Recommendations for future work".
