



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
General

ECE/CES/2006/SP/16
29 May 2006

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-fourth plenary session
Paris, 13-15 June 2006
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**SEMINAR ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES
SESSION I**

Recommendations for 2010 round of population and housing censuses
Measuring economic characteristics in a population census

Submitted by the International Labour Office

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Why is it important to measure the number and characteristics of the economically active population in a population census? This question has been answered in the opening paragraphs of Chapter 6 “Economic characteristics” of the draft *Recommendations for 2010 round of population and housing censuses*. The following note is an expansion of these paragraphs.

2. As stated in the draft Recommendations, statistics on the economic characteristics of persons are needed from population censuses for many reasons:

- (a) Fine level of detail (for occupation, industry, age/sex groups, small areas, etc): Information on the number and characteristics of the employed, unemployed and economically inactive persons are needed in detail and for small geographic areas. This information permits detailed analysis at small geographic levels and in respect of specific detailed branches of economic activity and/or occupations which is important for decentralized planning and development programmes in all countries. It could also be useful when producing current small area estimates of unemployment. For example, there

may be user interest in:

- (i) statistics on the number of female paid employees working as dentist technicians in a particular region; or
- (ii) the number and educational characteristics of males and females employed in automotive manufacture; or
- (iii) the number of unemployed graduates whose previous job was in mining of iron ore.

(b) Detailed structural information on economic activity: In a further expansion of this point, there is strong user interest in the number of employed and unemployed cross-classified by detailed groups of occupation and detailed groups of branches of economic activity. In particular, it enhances the analysis of equality issues such as gender and race disparities. For example, the number of males and females of differing detailed occupations who work in the hotels and restaurants industry group.

(c) Cross-relationships with other social and demographic characteristics: These detailed statistics on economic activity are needed in respect of the same reference point of time as other demographic and social items are being measured so that a comprehensive picture of the socio-economic situation is available. Other personal, household and dwelling characteristics that are included in the range of census topics (such as education, income level, type of dwelling, number of dependents, migrant status, etc.) are strongly related to economic activity of the household members. It is, therefore, desirable to collect information on the economic characteristics of household members in the census so that cross-relationships between these data items can be examined. For example, there might be policy interest in:

- (i) statistics on the number and characteristics of urban youth unemployment in specific suburbs in order to identify the areas where particular action is needed; or
- (ii) statistics on the relative number of employed persons and unemployed or inactive dependents in households of varying types in order to analyse the social impact of unemployment; or
- (iii) the economic status and detailed occupational characteristics of recent migrants from a particular region.

(d) Benchmark information: The population census provides benchmark information to which statistics from other sources can be related. Population censuses also provide the sample frames for most household-based surveys. It is therefore useful to include as many data items as possible in the benchmark information or sample frames.

3. There may be problems in reconciling information from different sources due to differences in scope and coverage, concepts and definitions, classifications, statistical units, reference periods, precision, measurement errors, etc. When presenting census results, it is suggested that any such differences be highlighted and explained in footnotes to tables and in metadata as well as in any textual analysis. This issue of reconciling and harmonising statistics that are produced from different sources is a key point of concern. The ILO recommends that particular attention be given to:

- (a) Dissemination of these metadata on the differences between labour force surveys and population censuses as sources of labour statistics; and

(b) Explaining and clarifying the differences between statistics on registered jobseekers (available from employment service centres) and statistics of the unemployed (obtained from labour force surveys or other household-based collections). It might be useful to consider LFS-based unemployment statistics as the official statistics, and/or to publish the census rates only for analytical purposes.

4. Detailed statistics on economic activity with cross-relationships to other variables might be obtained from other sources such as a household-based labour force survey or administrative records (such as the registration of jobseekers at employment exchanges or from social security records), but these other sources have certain limitations. Data obtained from labour force surveys are subject to sampling error and, therefore, rarely provide reliable estimates for small areas, or for detailed groups of industries and occupations. The definitions used in administrative records are usually not as precise as those in surveys and censuses and they are less likely to conform to international statistical standards. Also, administrative records may not have the same quality of occupational and industry coding, nor the same comprehensiveness in population coverage, and do not always cover the same demographic and social topics that may be found in a population census.

5. In a final point, it may be recalled that countries that have ratified ILO's Labour Statistics Convention, 1985 (No. 160) are required to produce statistics on the detailed structure and distribution of the economically active population, and that such statistics are generally only available from a population census.

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