



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
1 October 2010

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

#### Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses

##### Thirteenth Meeting

Geneva, 7-9 July 2010

## Report

### Note by the secretariat

#### *Summary*

The Conference of European Statisticians, at its fifty-eighth plenary session in June 2010, approved the activities undertaken under the UNECE Statistical Programme 2010, and endorsed the list of meetings planned to be organised from July 2010 to June 2011, as provided in document ECE/CES/2010/5/Add.2. This list included a meeting of the Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses, organised jointly with Eurostat, on 7-9 July 2010 in Geneva.

The present document is the report of that meeting, and is provided to inform the Conference of European Statisticians of the organization and outcomes of the meeting.

## I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the joint UNECE/Eurostat Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses was held on 7-9 July 2010 in Geneva, at the Palais des Nations. It was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by participants from Eurostat. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN-ESCWA) were also represented. The meeting was also attended by a number of experts invited by the Secretariat and by UNFPA.

2. A number of participants attended the meeting thanks to financial support provided by UNFPA.
3. Mr. Aidan Punch (Ireland) was elected as Chairperson of the meeting.

## **II. Organization of the meeting**

4. The UNECE gave a presentation on the status of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in countries of the UNECE region, based on information collected by UNECE and UNSD.
5. The representative of Statistics Netherlands presented a short report on the UNECE/Eurostat Expert Group Meeting on Register-Based Censuses (The Hague, 10-11 May 2010). Report and papers for this meeting are available at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.05.census.htm>
6. The UNECE presented a short report on the UNECE Work Session on the Communication of Statistics (30 June – 2 July 2010, Paris). Report and papers for this meeting are available at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.06.communication.htm>.
7. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:
  - (a) Census communication and dissemination, including the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS);
  - (b) Plans for census quality evaluation;
  - (c) Data collection on de facto same sex couples in the 2010 round of Censuses (special presentation invited by the Secretariat);
  - (d) Beyond the 2010 census round: plans for the 2020 round.
8. The discussion at the meeting was based on 18 papers submitted by the participants. The papers and the presentations are available on the UNECE website at the following address: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2010.07.census.htm>

## **III. Summary of the main items discussed at the substantive sessions**

### **A. Census communication and dissemination, including the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

Documentation: Papers by France, United Kingdom (three papers), Ireland, Portugal and the Minnesota Population Center

9. Regardless of the different census methodologies and enumeration methods adopted, all countries share a common challenge, that is to disseminate the census results to users providing as much as possible the outputs they need in the desired format. Various countries presented their strategies to disseminate and communicate the census outputs. The IPUMS–International, which is a particular case of dissemination of integrated anonymised samples of census microdata from various countries and for various years, was also presented.
10. Strategies (clients, outputs): Countries' strategies to disseminate and communicate the outputs of 2010 round Censuses are primarily built on the identification – through

consultations - of the different categories of users and of their respective needs. The outputs are then tailored to the types of data generally sought by end users, which include central and local government authorities, academics, commercial users and the general public, all having different levels of knowledge of census data and statistics in general.

11. Output types and formats: Census outputs can be of different types, including standard data tables, customized tables, or analytical publications, depending on the specific requests from users. The formats used for releasing the 2010 round of census outputs include printed publications, CD-ROMs, DVDs, static web pages, searchable databases, and visualizations of data and maps using Geographic Information Systems tools. Dissemination plans foresee the release of growing amounts of data, compared with previous censuses.

12. Release calendar: Most often, the release of census outputs is planned to take place within an established calendar that can be defined during the data processing phase. The timeframe depends on various factors, including the enumeration methods used and the schedule for data entry and processing. In general, the objective is to release the data in a timely manner. However, there can be a trade-off between timeliness and accuracy.

13. Release of provisional census results: Where the census collection methodology allows it, some countries traditionally release provisional results because the users expect some data shortly after the census. When the final data are released, however, the discrepancies between provisional and final data (that in general are very limited) have to be explained to the public. To avoid this problem some countries prefer not to release preliminary figures, in particular when the final data can be released in a relatively short time after the data collection.

14. Pricing census products: In the majority of countries census data are considered as a public good, as the information is provided by the respondents and the census is paid for using taxpayers' money. For this reason, standard census outputs are normally disseminated at no cost. The charges for certain types of census outputs are set with the objective of recovering the costs of preparing these outputs. For instance, in most countries the users are charged for requests for specific tables (other than the standard tables), which require additional work from the Statistical Office.

15. Individual data and confidentiality: Some census data products, like detailed tables on small populations and/or small geographical areas, may lead to potential identification of individuals. In this case, measures have to be taken to make sure that the data disseminated respect the criteria on data confidentiality set in the relevant statistical legislation. In this case there is a trade-off between the utility of the data collected and the need to ensure personal data confidentiality.

16. The concern over data confidentiality is felt in particular with regard to the provision of anonymised census microdata, especially considering that the current technology makes it relatively easy to match an address in a database with the census information. An alternative solution for this problem is a searchable data warehouse with online access and specific limitations to detailed level of variables to preserve data confidentiality. Participants warned, however, that such a warehouse may prove costly to develop.

17. Data comparability: In disseminating census results, consideration should be given to the comparability of the results across administrative geographical boundaries, in particular for small output areas. For the French rolling census, where data on small municipalities are collected in different years, estimates are made to take this factor into account. The accuracy of such estimates may be problematical in periods of major economic change. Users should be made aware of the issue.

18. In order to ensure comparability of census results across countries, it is very important that the census is conducted in compliance with the CES Recommendations for the 2010 censuses, in particular with regard to key concepts concerning the population to be enumerated and the definition of place of usual residence. This is a condition for each person being enumerated in one place and only in one place.

## **B. Plans for census quality evaluation**

Documentation: Papers submitted by Canada, France, Poland (two papers), and the United Kingdom (three papers). Presentation by Eurostat

19. In this session, countries discussed their strategies and plans for evaluating their 2010 round censuses. Attention was paid in particular to the different dimensions of quality, also with reference to the work conducted at the EU level concerning census quality reporting.

20. The discussion focused in particular on the evaluation of census coverage, and on the advantages and disadvantages of Post-Enumeration Surveys (PES), which represent the most common methodology for evaluating the coverage and content of censuses.

21. Several countries are going to implement a PES for the next census as they did for past censuses. In some cases (like in the UK), the estimates resulting from the PES are used also to adjust the census figures.

22. One of the drawbacks of PES is that the assumption that the PES survey data are correct and the census data are not may not always correspond to the reality. Furthermore, it is not possible to separate the various effects that may influence the difference between census and survey (PES) results, including: survey mode (i.e. self-completion/interview), questionnaire effect, proxy respondents. This limits the possibility to intervene in order to correct the causes of the errors. Finally, the PES can be relatively expensive.

23. Several countries with limited experience on PES and census evaluation showed interest in technical and organizational aspects of PES. The UNECE informed the participants that the technical report "Post Enumeration Surveys - Operational guidelines" was recently published by UNSD and can be downloaded from the UNSD website at: [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/handbooks/Manual\\_PESen.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/handbooks/Manual_PESen.pdf)

24. Participants discussed about the census questions with lowest quality responses. In the UK, where a Census Quality Survey is conducted in addition to the coverage survey, the questions with lowest quality include those with many categories available for the reply, those that are subjective, or can be sensitive, or can be interpreted in different ways (i.e. educational attainment, disability, ethnicity/national identity, number of rooms of dwelling).

25. Some participants were concerned by non-response in PES and how to deal with it, and considered potential non-response bias an issue that should be investigated.

26. Poland presented the quality implications of the next census, in which many innovations will be introduced: use of data from many administrative sources, internet completion, field data collection using the long and short form, and interviewers equipped with handheld devices. These innovations will allow the number of enumerators to be reduced from 200,000 (in the previous traditional census) to 20,000. However, the various innovations may have quality implications that will have to be evaluated.

27. Participants also discussed about the implications on quality of non-response (in terms of absolute non-response levels and selective non-response), in particular where participation in the census is not a legal obligation. Although in most countries, people are

legally obliged to participate in the census, in Russia it is not compulsory but a “social responsibility”. For the persons who refuse to provide data, basic data are taken from administrative sources. In the 2000 census, this happened for 4% of the respondents.

### **C. Data collection on de facto same sex couples in the 2010 round of Censuses (Special presentation invited by the Secretariat)**

Documentation: Paper submitted by Italy

28. This presentation was invited by the Secretariat following the informal survey that the Italian NSI conducted in Spring 2010 among selected countries on their plans for collecting data on de facto same sex couples in their 2010 round censuses. The information was sought by Italy to enable to decide whether and how data on same-sex couples would be collected in the 2011 census. Recently, groups of the Italian civil society made an appeal to the Italian statistical office in this regard.

29. The participants noted that the census is an important source of data on this topic, especially when no other sources are available. However, given the sensitivity of the topic, it is very important to establish a dialogue with the civil society groups in order to find the best way to collect information on this topic, and communicate it to the public.

30. Advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches to collect data on de facto same sex couples were discussed by the participants. A relatively simple approach consists of relying on the information on the relationship to the reference person, combined with the information on the sex of the persons. In the experience of some countries this approach does not provide good quality results: often “false” same-sex couples are identified, which are in fact opposite-sex couples where the information on the sex of one of the partners was wrong. For this reason some countries like the USA prefer to ask a direct question, or include explicit categories for same-sex partners in the question on the relationship to the reference person.

31. It was noted that the survey mode may influence the results, as some respondents may be reluctant to state that they are members of a same-sex couple in an interview, while they would do so with a self-completed questionnaire.

32. The Netherlands reported on how estimates can be produced using register data, for instance considering persons reported as married or in civil partnership for which there is no information on the sex of the spouse/partner.

33. In Portugal, where same-sex legal marriages were introduced recently, no changes are needed to the census questionnaire. Same-sex legal marriages will be considered together with opposite-sex legal marriages, and will be identified through the sex variable.

### **D. Beyond the 2010 census round: plans for the 2020 round**

Documentation: Papers by Italy, Russia, United Kingdom and United States.

34. Although most countries are currently preparing or conducting their 2010 round census, some are already planning the census for the 2020 round. This is the case in particular for countries that are changing, or are planning to change their census methodology.

35. In Russia, after the 2010 census a comprehensive programme of social and demographic surveys will be implemented between 2010 and 2020. In 2020 a new census will be conducted, probably following a model similar to that of the 2010 census.

36. In the United States, the 2020 census will be designed with the objective of delivering the highest quality census while reducing costs and managing risks. This could be achieved by tailoring methods to the different subgroups of the population (such as through the use of the Internet to gather information from the technologically literate), reusing administrative data where possible (such as for non-response), designing software to reduce staff time, and by continuously updating the address frame over the decade. Concerning administrative data, a system was created based on seven registers. In the future other registers could be possibly added to this system.

37. In the UK, the “Beyond 2011” project was launched to look at options for the population statistics system in the long term, with a strong focus on the use of administrative data (although in the UK there is no population register). Various options are being considered to use alternative data sources such as administrative registers and surveys for the 2021 census.

38. Italy is introducing many important innovations in the 2011 census, including the acquisition of lists of households and addresses from municipality registers, mail out of questionnaires to all households, multichannel collection (using also the web), and - in large municipalities - collection of socio economic data by long form only from a sample of households. After 2011, Italy may consider moving to a multiple time point register based census which uses two sample surveys in crucial stages of a continuous process. The two surveys are very different for scope and requirements: the first survey would be specifically designed for the population enumeration and to collect key structural data contained in registers; the second survey would be designed to produce socio economic data on households and individuals to be released at national and European level.

39. In the discussion, Spain reported that for the 2020 round there are plans to link various registers (population, tax, social security, education, and cadastre) and conduct small annual rolling surveys.

#### **IV. Future work**

40. The meeting recommended the following plan for future work on Population and Housing Censuses in the UNECE region:

- (a) 2011: No meetings (break for census-taking period);
- (b) Spring 2012 (April/May) - Two back-to-back meetings (2 + 2 days) on first lessons learned from the 2010 round:
  - (i) Joint Meeting on Censuses, to discuss topics such as:
    - a. Experience with address lists and other preliminary work;
    - b. Internet data collection;
    - c. Comparative quality indicators;
    - d. Microdata samples;
  - (ii) Expert Group Meeting on Register-Based Censuses, to discuss topics such as:
    - a. Methods for selecting most relevant registers;
    - b. Quality and completeness of registers and other sources used;
    - c. Methodology for estimating information missing in registers;

- d. Organization of a register-based census;
  - (c) Second half of 2012/first half of 2013: first survey of national practices in 2010 census round, covering census topics (concepts, definitions, classifications, etc.), field issues, internet census, use of registers, mix modes, census costs, etc. Tentative timetable:
    - (i) Autumn 2012: completion of questionnaire (possibly online);
    - (ii) Winter 2012/Spring 2013: processing and analysis;
    - (iii) By June 2013: finalization of report;
  - (d) Autumn 2013: Joint Meeting on Censuses, to discuss report on national practices and start work on revision of census recommendations for 2020 round of censuses;
  - (e) End of 2013/first half of 2014: second survey of national practices in 2010 census round, covering processing, dissemination and uses of census results (including demographic analysis), etc. Tentative timetable:
    - (i) Autumn 2013: completion of questionnaire (possibly online);
    - (ii) Winter 2013/Spring 2014: processing and analysis;
    - (iii) By June 2014: Finalization of report;
  - (f) Autumn 2014: Joint Meeting on Censuses, to review second report on national practices and continue work on revision of census recommendations for the 2020 round of censuses.
41. Objective: finalization of new recommendations for the 2020 round of censuses by the end of 2014, in time for adoption by the CES in June 2015.

## V. Adoption of the Report

42. The report of the meeting was finalised by the Secretariat after the meeting and circulated by email to the participants for comments.
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