

How is the French census coping with the Covid crisis?

Valérie Roux, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), France

The French rolling census questions 5 million dwellings and 9 million inhabitants in 4 to 5 weeks each year. It starts on the third Thursday of July and finishes around the end of February.

In 2019, the lockdown occurred at the beginning of March and fortunately, the census survey was finished by then. Nevertheless, we had to adapt all our post survey controls to this new situation by implementing new automatic checks, telephone phone checks, etc., instead of field research. In June, we made a first assessment of these new procedures which could be useful for other countries which intend to have a census in the field in 2021.

Now we are also brainstorming about our survey for next year, especially regarding the possible adaptations of our procedures if we have to face restrictions on circulation, meetings or training sessions. And the immediate idea –which is to rely on Internet responses– is not necessarily the best one if we want to avoid biased estimates. We are thinking about new ways to transmit the connection identifiers to the Internet questionnaire or the paper questionnaires with the minimum of contact. We must also imagine new forms of training for the 30,000 personnel in the field. We propose to present our main reflections about what a census survey could be like in the context of a new wave of the Covid pandemic.