



UNECE's work ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

Why we need censuses

Censuses are at the heart of national statistical systems. A census aims to count all the people in a country, as well as all the homes, providing baseline information for a vast range of crucial national statistics. We need to know the size of the population to calculate some of the most commonplace indicators such as income per capita. Census data are used to formulate and monitor policies and plans for economic development, healthcare, education, transport infrastructure, housing and a wide range of other areas.

Many of the indicators for monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals depend on knowing the size of the population, or of particular parts of it: children, older people, women and men, and where they live in a country. In fact, censuses are so crucial for sustainable development that conducting a census is itself [one of the targets of the 2030 Agenda](#) (target 17.19).

How we support countries

Recognizing the essential role of population and housing censuses, [UNECE supports countries](#) to conduct their census in the most efficient way. This is important since the traditional methods of conducting a census can make it one of the most complex, expensive and time-consuming exercises undertaken by statistical offices. This means exploring new data sources and new ways to gather data, and developing guidance for countries to adopt these so that they can produce the required information rapidly and accurately while adapting to ever-changing needs of data users.

The [Conference of European Statisticians \(CES\) Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses](#) are the principal source of internationally-agreed guidance on censuses for countries in the UNECE region, as well as other developed countries across the world. Developed in tandem with the global-level *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division, the CES Recommendations provide all the information needed to ensure a country's census follows harmonized methods, with standardized concepts, definitions and classifications, and an agreed list of core and non-core topics to be covered. The world's leading census experts work together with UNECE to update the Recommendations every ten years, ensuring that the guidance on operational aspects, legislation, dissemination and communication remains up-to-date for each new census round.



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How we support countries

UNECE's [Group of Experts on Population and Housing](#) provides a forum for countries to exchange their latest cutting-edge research. This covers themes such as the use of new technologies, integrating new data sources, enumerating hard-to-reach groups such as migrants, the homeless and older people living in institutions, and adapting censuses to address newly-emerging topics such as same-sex couples and gender identity.

The [Steering Group on Censuses](#), a group of experts from 12 countries and 6 international organizations reporting to the Conference of European Statisticians (CES), is currently working to identify the ways in which censuses will change beyond the 2020 round, and how the international statistical community—and the CES Recommendations—will need to adapt. A CES [Task Force](#) is also developing guidelines for assessing the quality of administrative sources for population and housing censuses; a direct follow-up to the 2018 publication, [Guidelines on the use of registers and administrative data for population and housing censuses](#).

There is huge diversity in the degree of development of statistical systems across the UNECE region. Some countries need more support to conduct censuses and to apply the international guidance, especially those that have not conducted censuses regularly. This is why UNECE helps to develop capacity through national and sub-regional workshops to facilitate application of the CES Recommendations, focusing on methodological guidance such as transitioning to new technologies, using geospatial information for census operations and using census data to develop SDG indicators.

Value & impact of our work on censuses

- Our Regional Recommendations for conducting censuses have been the main reference for UNECE countries since the 1950s.
- Prepared in close cooperation with Eurostat, the CES Recommendations form the framework for census operations and data requirements of European Union countries.
- For the 2020 round, two-thirds of UNECE countries will use innovative methods and/or administrative data sources for their census, guided by the CES Recommendations.
- Responding to the recommendations of the 2018 UNECE-Eurostat-EFTA joint overview of the statistical system, Uzbekistan will conduct a census in 2022; its first since 1989.
- Investing in censuses pays off:
 - the UK's Office for National Statistics estimated the 2011 census of England and Wales to bring benefits to society worth [£490 million annually](#), covering the cost of undertaking the census in just over one year.
 - calculations found that the 2013 Census in New Zealand cost 198 million New Zealand dollars, but crucially, [every dollar invested led to a return of about 5 dollars](#) for the country and its economy.

UNECE guidance helps countries both to reduce the costs of conducting a census and to increase the value of census data by ensuring they are accurate, relevant and produced rapidly.



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