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Implementation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Statistical Programme 2020

Addendum

Report of the Workshop on Population and Housing Censuses for countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: modernizing censuses for sustainable development

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The report presents the key outcomes of the Workshop on Population and Housing Censuses for countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia which took place on 16-17 September 2019 in Geneva.

The report is submitted to the Conference of European Statisticians for information.

Please recycle

I.   Organization and attendance

1.   This capacity development workshop on population and housing censuses was organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in cooperation with the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat). Financial support for the workshop was provided by the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and by the United Nations Development Account 10th tranche project "Data and statistics".

2.   The workshop was attended by participants from the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czechia, Georgia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), and IPUMS International (Census Dissemination Partnership) were also represented. An independent consultant from IntCensus and an independent census expert attended at the invitation of the Secretariat.

3.   The workshop took place immediately before the UNECE-Eurostat Expert Group Meeting on Population and Housing Censuses (18-20 September 2019).

4.   The workshop programme and the slides used in the presentations are available on the meeting page of the UNECE website[1].

II.   Purpose

5.   The purpose of the workshop was to enhance the capacity of participants:

(a)   to conduct their population and housing census in compliance with the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations

(b)   to communicate effectively about the census and its results, before, during and after it is conducted

(c)   to use census data for producing Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators

(d)   to harness the potential of geospatial information to improve the efficiency of census operations at all stages.

6.   The workshop was designed principally to benefit experts working on population and housing censuses in national statistical offices (NSOs) in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

III.   Summary of proceedings

A.   Sharing national experiences: country progress reports, challenges and solutions

7.   Regional insights on the current state of census planning were shared by CIS-Stat. The importance of countries across the region conforming to the CES Recommendations was stressed. It was noted that a turning point has been reached in census methodology—while 100 per cent of countries in the region used traditional methods during the last census round, many are using or planning to use modern methods for some or all of their census operations in the 2020 round.

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[1] http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50816

8. Participating countries were invited to prepare reports on the current status of census operations or census planning in their countries. They were asked to focus on use of new technology and on the use of administrative data sources where relevant to their national situation. Each country was asked to inform the workshop of the census date, status of pilot testing, enumeration method(s), core and non-core topics included and excluded, methods for coverage assessment, and plans for dissemination including microdata dissemination.

9. Belarus and Azerbaijan have conducted their censuses in 2019. The use of mobile census stations in Belarus was discussed, as well as the recruitment and payment of enumerators in both countries. There was discussion about the methods of determining who has already completed the census online in order to avoid duplication when visiting households. This led to further, more general discussion about the risks of duplication with concurrent modes. Duplication presents both administrative and reputational costs.

10. Countries conducting their censuses in 2020 include Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Armenia and Ukraine. There is some uncertainty regarding the possibility of postponement of the census until 2021 in Armenia. As the only country represented at the workshop that will use register data, Armenia was at the centre of discussion about how to assess the quality of register data.

11. The purpose of questions about emigrants was discussed—they are an imperfect but useful means of gathering information about emigration but cannot provide information from those no longer in the country. Participants considered the implications of a 'bring your own device' approach such as is planned in Kyrgyzstan, including security, the possibility and desirability of multi-tasking, and the availability of mobile phone infrastructure in rural areas. For those countries purchasing devices, questions were asked about the methods for testing and choosing them, and about what will be done with them afterwards. Tajikistan, for example, is considering donating them to rural doctors via the ministry of health.

12. Countries planning to conduct their next census in 2022 or 2023 are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. UNFPA plans extensive cooperation with Uzbekistan to support their first census since 1989. There was debate about the methods that would be most appropriate for the unique case of Uzbekistan given the dearth of recent experience in census-taking in the country and the reputational risk if anything goes wrong. There was discussion in relation to Georgia and the Republic of Moldova about the implications of integration of agricultural topics into the population and housing census. There was also discussion about the challenges that come when a census occurs close to elections, since the census can then become highly politicized.

13. Several countries indicated an intention to include questions on disability, on migration and on agriculture and there was discussion of the specificities of such questions and the need for careful interviewer training.

14. Training in general was a much-discussed topic, with emphasis being placed on maximizing time spent training enumerators. It was suggested that this can take place during the period when an online channel is open, for countries using multiple modes.

15. Discussion included the increasing importance being placed on publicity to reassure people about confidentiality and about the value of the census.

16. The role of pilot censuses was a recurring topic in the discussions. It was noted that the value of the pilot census is as a 'dress rehearsal': hence it should follow as closely as possible all the methods that will be used in the census itself, including data processing. However, the processed data should not themselves be published or used for analysis, beyond analyzing the functioning of the methods and tools used.

17. Discussion also covered the importance of contingency planning when changing methodology, especially when moving to complex technological solutions. They can enhance efficiency significantly but they also bring risks, so mitigation plans must be in place. It was stressed that such risks exist across all levels of statistical development and no country is immune - some recent high-profile examples in countries with advanced statistical systems were noted.

B. Use of census data for measuring Sustainable Development Goals

18.   This session of the workshop showcased the work of two international organizations that are taking a role in coordinating improved production of SDG indicators. With as many as 98 SDG indicators being population-based (having population counts in either the numerator or denominator), the importance of census data is clear. Furthermore, the true value of most indicators for policymaking and policy monitoring comes when they are disaggregated along many dimensions and used in relation to small geographical areas—as full counts rather than samples, census data provide the best possible source for such disaggregation.

19.   CIS-Stat presented an overview of progress among CIS countries in formulating national SDG indicators and in producing and disseminating them. Censuses are key to enabling the required disaggregations, such as by disability status.

20.   UNSD presented a draft of a technical report designed to aid countries in producing SDG indicators from census data as well as from civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS). The paper includes guidance on structuring census questionnaires and analyzing data, and considers the relative strengths and weaknesses of census and/or CRVS data against other sources. Participants were invited to study the draft and to provide feedback as soon as possible. It was suggested that upcoming revisions of global and regional census recommendations may need to consider closer alignment with SDGs, especially in light of increasing use of administrative sources.

21.   In concluding the session, it was stressed that support for censuses (and for official statistics more broadly) depends on public and political recognition of their essential contribution to matters that are given high political priority—such as sustainable development. It is therefore important that NSOs use every opportunity to remind their stakeholders of these links.

C. Geospatial information in census activities: latest developments and experiences

22.   In this session of the workshop an invited expert from Poland explained the some of the latest developments in using geospatial information to improve the efficiency of census operations. The presentation stressed the importance of good cooperation between NSOs and mapping agencies. The added value of geocoding census data with x.y coordinates was emphasized. Such geocoding permits improvements in efficiency for dispatchers and enumerators. It also greatly enhances the possibilities for policy-relevant analysis using the spatial dimension, which when using geocoding by x.y coordinates is no longer limited to analysis by existing statistical or administrative boundaries.

23.   The representative of Georgia showed how geospatial information was used during the 2014 census. Efficiency gains were made during the pre-enumeration period (developing the list of dwellings and households and determining enumeration areas), the enumeration period (managing fieldwork operations and avoiding over- and undercounting) and the post-enumeration period (quality checking, data analysis and dissemination of results). While challenges were encountered, overall the use of geospatial information brought many advantages.

24.   Topics of discussion included the human resources challenges in finding suitably qualified experts; the need to keep in mind confidentiality rules when disseminating geocoded data; and the potential offered by geocoded census data for improving humanitarian responses to emergencies.

25.   The discussion highlighted the fact that including the geospatial dimension in censuses permits production of small-area statistics, which is a crucial element of the global and regional census recommendations and a core feature of the SDGs (since small area statistics facilitate efforts to 'leave no-one behind'). It is at the level of small geographical areas that real policy decisions can be made based on census data. This, along with cost

reductions, can form the basis for NSOs to make the case to decision-makers for introducing geospatial information systems into census operations.

D. Future activities

26.   UNECE, CIS-Stat and UNFPA outlined plans for census-related international activities in the coming year.

27.   CIS-Stat will continue monitoring of and providing support for census preparations among countries in the region.

28.   UNFPA informed the meeting about a data fund to be announced at the ICPD+25 meeting in Nairobi in November. Among other planned activities, UNFPA will continue collaboration with the Russian Federation to provide technical support to countries, notably Uzbekistan.

29.   UNECE will organize a workshop for EECCA countries on 28-29 September 2020, immediately prior to the Expert Meeting.

IV. Conclusions

30.   The workshop was considered by participants to be a valuable opportunity for learning and for sharing knowledge and experience. With many countries in the region now undertaking their third census since independence, the level of expertise and confidence in conducting censuses is now high and countries have important expertise to share.