United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Conference of European Statisticians
Workshop on Population and Housing Censuses
for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia
Geneva, 2-3 October 2017

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP

I. Organization and attendance

1.   The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) organized the Workshop on Population and Housing Censuses for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA), in cooperation with the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The Workshop was held in Geneva on 2-3 October 2017, back-to-back with the meeting of the UNECE-Eurostat Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses (4 October – 6 October 2017).

2.   The Workshop was attended by 35 census experts and managers representing the following countries and organizations: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. The meeting was also attended by representatives from Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), IPUMS International (Census Dissemination Partnership), IntCensus, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD).

3.   This report presents the summary of the discussion and the recommendations of the Workshop, to be read in conjunction with the presentations made at the Workshop. The presentations are available at the UNECE website[1].

II. Purpose

4.   The purpose of the Workshop was to provide an opportunity to census managers and experts from countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to discuss their plans for the next census of the 2020 round and issues related to the implementation of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations for the 2020 Censuses of Population and Housing.

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[1] https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43938

III.   Summary of the discussion

A.   Census technology – UNSD Draft Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses

5.   In the first session, UNSD presented the main draft chapters of the new Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses.

6.   There was a general discussion about cost-effectiveness of the use of new technologies for censuses. Some experts noted that it would be useful to be able to provide evidence to national Ministries on the necessity to adopt modern technology. UNSD noted that it is not possible to do simplistic calculations, also because some aspects, like the possibility to publish data faster, cannot be easily measured in economic terms. Modern technology provides important advantages in terms of savings of both time and human labour, and they can be re-employed for either statistical or non-statistical purposes. Often savings are not great, but the aggregate benefits justify increased costs. Generally, bigger the country – greater the savings from using technology.

7.   **IntCensus** recommended that care be taken in significantly modifying the guidance on the use of new technology, given the rapid evolution in this area.

Chapter E − "Data Collection with Handheld Electronic Devices"

8.   In order to reduce the number of handheld devices required and therefore limit costs, some countries consider using the same devices in different areas in subsequent periods, thereby extending the overall data collection period. The IntCensus expert however recommended to carry out the census in the shortest time period practicable, possibly not longer than two weeks. Ideally the enumeration should be conducted simultaneously in all areas, in order to avoid or minimize issues related to the movement of residents.

9.   A cost reduction in the acquisition of devices can be achieved by producing them domestically or by sharing them between countries. Bilateral agreements have been relatively common practices.

10.   A crucial aspect to consider when acquiring new technologies is the compatibility between hardware and software. The adoption of IT devices creates a similar burden of security issues with respect to paper materials, even if the issues created by the two methods will be different. Israel has reported the successful software sharing between Egypt and Jordan.

11.   The document also addresses the impact that different climates and temperatures can have on devices adoption. CIS-Stat has suggested the possibility of combining different methods, such as, for example, electronic devices in the cities and paper material in villages and rural areas, even if it would require good coordination to aggregate the information coming from different channels.

Use of Geospatial Technologies in Census Operations

12. The expert from Poland shared the country's experience regarding the use of geospatial technologies for censuses. address database for censuses. A crucial step is to build the address database. Collecting data from mapping agencies can be very time consuming, and it was recommended to make arrangements – and prepare specific legislation if necessary - to receive this data well before the censuses.

13. Enumerators have to check in the field the existence of buildings and the XY coordinates. If the mapping agency cannot provide this information, more personnel must be sent to the field, thereby increasing costs. GPS technology is fine if the accuracy is around 6-10 meters. Nonetheless, it is necessary to consider that the introduction of this technology can take between 1 and 4 years, depending on each country's situation.

14. Thanks to faster data collection facilitated by new technologies and electronic questions pre-filled from registers, Poland was able to conduct a paperless mixed census, and reduce substantially the number of enumerators.

Chapter F − "Data Collection with the Internet"

15. Internet collection can be used not only as the sole collection method, but in combination with a field operation including other means to collect data (e.g. interviews, self-completed paper forms). If individuals are not willing to cooperate, countries should introduce new, more attractive ways to respond via the Internet.

Use of Multi-Mode Methods in Census Data Collection

16. The expert from Estonia presented the country's experience with multi-mode data collections. The difficulties associated with the telephone approach were underlined, due to the requirements in terms of special equipment, service centres etc.

17. Israel sends username and password through mobiles to the respondents, who tend to answer quickly using internet on their mobile. This method is suitable for short questionnaires only. CIS-Stat has reported that data collected through mobiles questionnaires in the Russian Federation were of low quality, thus data collection by telephone should be used in exceptional circumstances only, while internet is preferable.

B.   Experience from the 2010 census round

18. Moldova shared the evaluation of its 2014 Population and Housing Census. Moldova has collected all the questionnaires, but it hasn't processed the data due to lack of capacity. The calendar plan has been outlined according to the law on conducting censuses, but it was not possible to follow the timetable precisely, also due to changes in the legislation concerning the census. Moldova commented that some of the articles in the census legislation were not needed, but in order to exclude them the law should be changed: For these reasons, it was noted that it would be better to have more general laws on censuses.

19.   There was limited use of administrative data. In practice, if the respondent didn't respond after to three enumerator visits, the information about the dwellings was retrieved from administrative data.

20.   Moldova has also addressed questions on independent teams used for the Post Enumeration Survey (PES), noting that teams for the PES should be recruited and specifically instructed independently from the census data collection. Regarding students and soldiers, Moldova has introduced the new definition of regular residence and has enumerated them according to their place of residence.

C.   Plans for next censuses of 2020 round - Belarus

21.   Belarus has presented the preparations for the population census of the 2020 round, including the pilot census. The population is informed by distributing information on the upcoming census through mail boxes. Moreover, statisticians themselves, and state and ministry employees went directly to the field. Enumerators were trained in three days, being taught about legal aspects, how to fill the questionnaires and how to work with tablets.

22.   Belarus has also responded to the concerns about the classification of higher education degrees obtained in the URSS era, by explaining that the section of the questionnaire involved has been expanded so that the answer can be broader. Postgraduate is enough, and there is no need to specify the type of degree. Nonetheless, CIS-Stat highlighted that specialists in the former URSS are not considered in the new standard classifications of the Bologna process, so the corresponding section of the questionnaire must address the problem by considering three levels of education. Israel has reported problems in finding an equivalent for the education of migrants.

23.   In its pilot census, Belarus adopted the rate of one enumerator for 750 respondents, which has allowed to perform the data collection in 11 days. Special category of closed institutions, such as boarding school or military establishments, were not assigned to any enumerator, but the administration of the institution had the obligation to complete the questionnaire for the census.

24.   Population registers are used in order to pre-fill some parts of the questionnaire. When the respondent's identification number of people registered permanently at their place of residence is entered, some parts of the questionnaire are automatically filled-in.

25.   Belarus has planned to acquire 16000 tablets, of which a proportion has already been obtained with the help of a statistical company, and the rest will be purchased after the official tender in 2018. After the census the tablets will be given to ministries, hospitals and schools for re-use.

26.   In view of a possible future fully register-based census, the State Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs have already provided information on properties, the administrative information has been attached to the maps and this information has already been used on the field.

D.   Short updates on plans for the next censuses of 2020 round

27.   **Armenia** will conduct the next census in 2020 but the law does not specifically establish censuses every 10 years so the decision is not final. There are plans to use CAPI in surveys and to train mostly students for the purpose, but the implementation seems to be difficult at the moment.

28.   **Azerbaijan** has increased the number of questions in response to an increased demand for data from different institutions. There are plans to use traditional paper census and to collect some data from population registers. Tablets will be bought from abroad and this will delay the adoption of new technologies. It is expected to employ one enumerator for every 300 respondents.

29.   **Georgia** may consider using a combined approach – paper in rural areas where there is no access to Internet, and new technologies in big cities. GIS has already been used successfully for mapping, checking and monitoring data collection. Issues related to computer literacy of the personnel, combined to internet accessibility, make the use of paper questionnaire more reasonable for the moment.

30.   **Kazakhstan** has already prepared the budget and the methodology for the next census, and problems appear to be resolvable so far. The main census will be conducted through tablets and online questionnaires. The Internet portal is under development, and it will require resident ID and phone number, so that the respondent will receive a code on its mobile which will enable him/her to access the questionnaire on the website.

31.   **Moldova** will prepare the next steps by the end of the year. A census committee has been established, the government will adopt the decree and the committee will adopt the new timetable. The census is planned for 2023 but more political and legislative support is still required. An agricultural census will be conducted before the population census. Agriculture plays an important role in Moldova and the agricultural census will provide a good basis for the population census in terms of both experience and data collected.

32.   **Russian Federation** has recently introduced additional provisions in its law about the use of internet, tablets and online questionnaire. The fact that individuals do not have a legal obligation to participate in the population census creates issues that should be addressed with new amendments. In cases of non-response, some limited information can be provided by administrative sources. A Post Enumeration Survey was tested to assess data quality. However, it was difficult to interpret this information and the procedure has been cancelled due to high costs and a negative reaction from the population.

33.   **Tajikistan** has adopted a new legislation on population censuses and hopes to receive support from donors. Tablets, geolocation and papers will be used for the next round.

34.   **Ukraine** had issues related to budgeting and the political situations, but the census is expected for 2020. All materials, housing registers, maps, legal basis and the pilot census have been prepared. Due to socio-economic, demographic, and migration issues, the law, maps and some data must be updated.

35.   **Uzbekistan** will perform a census when the decision is taken at political level. The census will be conducted taking into account other countries' experiences.

36.   **Israel** has suggested using multisource data and multi-frame censuses to make sure nobody is left out of the census, since total coverage is challenging.

37.   **Estonia** will use a register-based approach and a quality assessment.

E.   Census publicity, communication campaign and dissemination

38.   **CIS-Stat** and **Moldova** presented practices employed in communication campaign, as well as the challenges and the results obtained. They concluded that communication is necessary to combat negative views on censuses related to its necessity, privacy issues and the perception of burden on respondents. Social media can be very effective for this purpose. Insufficient financing of the information campaign is a limitation to fulfilling its potential. Efficiency in accessing respondents must be balanced with avoiding giving the sensation of "spamming".

39.   The focus of pre-census communication should be on encouraging people to respond, while the emphasis post-census and in-between censuses should be on using the data and demonstrating the power of the census to produce useful information. There were contrasting views on whether the communication process should be continuous or re-start before every census, and whether a "logo" should be maintained over time or if the message should be renewed to target current issues.

40.   **Moldova** has hired a private company to design their communication strategy for the census. For many NSOs, it is difficult to perform this work internally, but relying on external parties involves risks and requires close monitoring. An ideal situation would be to build capacity within the NSO at the same time as a partnership with a private company, with a focus on developing the internal know-how for future use.

41.   It has been noted that, contrary to what might be expected, the motivation to respond is often the lowest in urban centres. Strategies developed to perform communication campaigns in remote areas have included multi-ethnic videos, publications in indigenous languages, and using gatherings or events of indigenous people.

42.   **CIS-Stat** has also presented an exercise of gathering, tabulating and disseminating comparable census data from countries across the CIS. The discussion highlighted the need to include harmonized data on topics which are of growing in importance such as IT literacy.

F. Work plan for future activities to support the 2020 census round

43.   **UNECE, CIS-Stat, UNFPA,** and **UNSD** each outlined planned activities.

44.   **UNECE** has recently issued a call for interest in advisory missions in the field of census technology, for which the countries selected would be announced within the coming few weeks. The annual week of census meetings will take place at approximately the same time in 2018.

45.   **CIS-Stat** will undertake the annual review of preparations for the next census, and will continue to promote the exchange of national experiences.

46.   **UNFPA** has recently announced a new strategic plan with a strong focus on population and development which gives a greater mandate to supporting censuses. A growing emphasis on small areas and groups for the SDGs has boosted demand for census data, and especially for geo-referenced data. Hence UNFPA is involved in development of a data platform for standardized, harmonized, geo-referenced census data. Openness of data has been highlighted since it is what makes the participants' investment in censuses worthwhile.

47.   **UNSD** has reported on recent and ongoing products, a methodological framework for supporting implementation of 2020 censuses, and handbooks on the use of handheld devices, on census editing, and on use of GIS for censuses. There will be 3-4 capacity-building workshops in 2018, focusing on Asian countries. The UNSD census website will serve as a repository of updated information on stages of preparation for the 2020 round, plans regarding collection modes and technologies, and a knowledge base of relevant development materials, as well as a database of 2010-round data from 140 countries.