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Session 5– Invited paper

ETHNIC GROUP, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing
in the ECE Region

Submitted by Swiss Federal Statistical Office *

1. EVALUATION OF THE 2000 RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Ethnic group (non-core topic 9)

1. 29 out of the 46 countries (63%) that responded to the ECE survey asked in the 2000 round of Censuses a question on ethnic group. There is a clear regional bias: countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the United Kingdom and the traditional immigration countries Australia, Canada, USA, Israel asked one or several questions regarding ethnic affiliation, whereas Western European countries did not.

2. 25 countries complied with the definition proposed in the 2000 ECE/EUROSTAT recommendations, 4 countries diverged from it by enlarging the scope of the topic to ancestry, origin and race (USA, Australia) or by limiting it to certain subpopulations (Cyprus, Ireland).

* Paper prepared by Dr. Werner Haug.

3. This good compliance with the 2000 recommendations is not a result of their quality but rather of the fact that they were kept extremely general and refrained from any substantive presentation of the topic.

4. However, questions regarding ethnicity and origin are of increasing relevance to an important number of countries that face diversity as a result of immigration, the integration of migrant groups and the presence of minorities. The topic should therefore receive more attention than in the past. The recommendations should be more explicit and detailed, including the experience of countries that diverged from the 2000 recommendations.

5. Issues that should be addressed include: the definition of ethnic group, the difference between ethnic and national group, the relationship with data on language and religion and aspects of ancestry and origin.

1.2 Language (non-core topic 10)

6. 35 out of 46 responding countries (76%) asked in the 2000 round of Censuses a question on language. The recommendations were much more detailed than in the case of ethnic group and distinguished different approaches. 21 countries asked for mother tongue (a), 3 for main language (b), 11 for the most spoken language (c) and 19 for the knowledge of languages (d). Some countries limited the question to certain minority languages (UK, Ireland) or the use of the majority language (USA).

7. The recommendation to ask either the question on mother tongue (a) or on main language (b) was followed: no country asked both questions. However, the recommendation to prioritize the question on spoken language (c) to the one on knowledge of languages (d) was not followed. Many countries, particularly from the region of the former Soviet Union for reasons of comparability with former Censuses, preferred to ask the question on knowledge of languages. Several countries (mostly immigration countries and multilingual countries) asked both questions.

8. The language question is of particular importance for multilingual and multicultural countries. The recommendations are already quite detailed but they could draw conclusions from the 2000 experience and introduce more precision and flexibility. The proposed priorities for certain questions are particularly problematic.

1.3 Religion (non-core topic 11)

9. 24 out of 46 countries (52%) collected in the 2000 round of Censuses data on religion. Three different approaches to the topic were proposed in the recommendations. 6 countries asked for formal membership of a church or community (a), 9 countries asked for religious belief (c). No country asked for participation in the life of a church or a religious community (b) but 9 countries choose a different concept essentially referring to identification with communities or denominations.

10. The countries that collect data on religion are mainly immigrant countries, countries from Central Europe, but also some countries from Western and Southern Europe. Western European countries mainly asked for formal membership of a church or community.

11. Clearly, the recommendations are not covering the topic in a sufficient way yet. They seem to address some irrelevant aspects and are silent on others. The suggestion to prioritize the

question on formal membership was not followed by most countries while identification with specific communities or denominations (beyond or without formal membership) was not explicitly addressed. Some countries collapsed it with “religious belief” but most did not. The approach to the question of religion has to be improved in the new set of recommendations.

2. PROPOSED REVISIONS FOR THE 2010 RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The following text is proposed for the new set of recommendations (possibly presented in parallel to the text of the old set):

2.1 Ethnic affiliation (non core topic ...)

13. Countries with a diverse population in terms of culture and origin may wish to collect information on the ethnic affiliation of the population or of certain subpopulations.

14. Affiliation with an ethnic group is based on a shared understanding of its origins (territory, history), particular cultural characteristics and a common identity.

15. Data on ethnic affiliation are distinct from data on language and religion. The combined collection of data on ethnic affiliation, language and/or religion is particularly informative for the understanding of cultural diversity.

16. Data on ethnic affiliation should not be confounded with data on citizenship or nationality. The use of the term nationality in place of ethnic affiliation should therefore be avoided.

17. Ethnic affiliation has a subjective dimension. Information on ethnic affiliation should therefore always be based on the free self-declaration of a person and questionnaires should include open questions.

18. Countries should document the definitions and classification procedures for ethnic affiliation and inform the respondents and data users about the scientific and socio-political concepts on which they are based.

19. Some countries may also consider collecting data on ancestry and ethnic origin of parents and grandparents. In this case the reporting of one or more origins should be allowed.

20. Some countries may consider some ethnic groups as national groups with a special status compared to other ethnic groups.

2.2 Language (non core topic ...)

21. Multilingual countries and countries with immigrant populations may wish to collect data on language. Depending on the information needs, the following data may be collected:

- a) Mother tongue, defined as the first language spoken in early childhood;
- b) Main language, defined as the language which the person commands best;
- c) Language(s) most currently spoken at home and/or work;
- d) Knowledge of language(s), defined as the ability to speak and/or write one or more designated languages.

22. Countries should clearly spell out the chosen definitions during data collection and document the classification procedures for languages. Data on a) and b) will generally refer to one language only. Data on c) and d) refer to several languages and questions have to allow for multiple answers.

23. It is suggested to countries to ask more than one question regarding language and to combine one question from the first group (a, b) with at least one question from the second group (c, d).

2.3 Religion (non core topic ...)

24. Countries that are traditionally multi denominational or accept large immigrant groups of different denominational background may also wish to collect data on religion. Depending on the specific circumstances and information needs, the following data may be collected:

- a) Formal membership of a church or a religious community;
- b) Identification with a certain community or denomination;
- c) Religious belief;
- d) Religious denomination in which a person was brought up.

25. Countries should clearly spell out the chosen definitions during data collection and document the classification procedures for religious denominations and communities. In all four approaches respondents should be allowed to state "none".

26. Data regarding a) can be based on administrative data. Data regarding b), c) and d) should always be based on the free self-declaration of a person and questionnaires should include open questions.
