

ENGLISH ONLY

**STATISTICAL COMMISSION and
UN ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR
EUROPE (UNECE)**

**STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE
EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES
(EUROSTAT)**

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN
STATISTICIANS**

Joint UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Population Censuses
Organized in cooperation with UNFPA
(Geneva, 23-25 November 2004)

Session 1 – Invited paper

**AN OUTLINE OF EUROSTAT'S PLANS FOR THE 2010 ROUND OF POPULATION
AND HOUSING CENSUSES**

Submitted by Eurostat*

1. Planning for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the EU will be based largely on experiences and lessons from the 2001 censuses. Generally, the last census appears to have been a successful exercise in most Member States and the Community Tabulation Programme has been widely respected. However, there is scope for significant improvements regarding the harmonisation of census dates, timeliness of data delivery and dissemination, issues of coverage, clarity and implementation of concepts and definitions, and coherence of census variables with those of other major sources of population statistics.
2. The framework for methodological and conceptual improvements is the joint UNECE / Eurostat Recommendations and the relevant Working Groups, Task Forces and Steering Groups working on different aspects of censuses. Therefore, several of Eurostat's methodological concerns are not mentioned in this outline as they are being dealt within the common work programme with the UNECE.

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3. Harmonisation of census dates and improvements in data delivery and dissemination can be achieved by the adoption of a dedicated legal basis. In most important areas of Community statistics, European legislation exists that governs various aspects of the statistical activities to be undertaken and the data to be supplied to Eurostat. Although the 1991 census round had such a legal base, this approach was not followed for 2001. The absence of such a legal basis for the 2001 census round has resulted in census dates that were more widely dispersed than in 1991, and a certain 'laxity' in providing data to Eurostat by the agreed deadlines. An efficient way of looking at this matter is to adopt a comprehensive approach which would cover both the decennial censuses and the annual population statistics. As in other areas of statistics, we could aim at the adoption of a (i) *framework legal basis* which would govern the general aspects of the annual population statistics and the decennial censuses, and (ii) *implementing legal acts* which would explain in detail issues regarding concepts, methods, classifications, timeliness, dissemination and other technical aspects.

4. While providing a proper and rigorous framework regarding *core* content, concepts and timing, such a legal basis needs to be flexible with regard to *data sources* and *census types*. This is particularly important in view of the range of approaches to the production of population statistics that exist across the EU, and given the move by several countries away from *traditional* censuses and towards alternative methods – including an increased use of register data - that are thought to be more efficient, less costly and to offer more frequent statistics.

5. Another advantage of adopting a legal basis (instead of a gentlemen's agreement) is that both Member States and Eurostat can more easily obtain and allocate adequate resources for these activities. Frequently, the allocation of resources among competing statistical projects is decided according to whether or not the project is based on legislation.

6. A probable time schedule for the adoption of legislation would be as follows:

- Initial discussion on the need for adopting statistical legislation; February 2005, at the Eurostat Working Group on Demographic Statistics, Luxembourg.
- Development of a draft proposal by the end of 2005; technical discussions with Member States, international organisations and main users.
- Presentation, discussion and agreement on a draft proposal for statistical legislation at the Statistical Programme Committee, during first quarter of 2006.
- Finalisation of the draft proposal (discussions within relevant Task Forces and Working Groups) and its adoption by the European Commission by the end of 2006.
- The adoption of the proposed legislation by the European Parliament and the Council may take quite a long period (+/- 18 months), but it will still provide adequate time before the national census operations begin.

7. Throughout this period, Eurostat will ensure that new developments in the international census recommendations (UN) are explicitly taken into account in the relevant parts of the legislation. Consistency is also required with other relevant legislative initiatives like the forthcoming EU Regulation on migration and asylum statistics

8. The current Table Programme, consisting of 40 detailed tables with aggregate data, forms a good basis for a standard reporting of census results; it covers most but not all users' requests. There are two issues in this respect: First, it would be highly desirable to expand the content and to include additional information on the homeless, living conditions of the elderly and data on population living in institutions. Second, the standard tables could be replaced by country specific, large, anonymised micro-data files which would allow much more flexibility for data analysis.

9. Population censuses provide a unique opportunity for harmonising a number of core variables that are also used in other surveys and / or administrative sources. Areas of particular concern relate to migration, education (attainment, attendance and skills), employment and health. Eurostat is committed to work towards improving the consistency and harmonisation of key variables which are common to censuses and to other sources; a large body of knowledge and experience in this respect is currently shared with Member States and other international bodies and agencies such as UNECE, ILO, UIS, OECD, WHO, CoE and others. We are confident that with the continuous collaboration of all stakeholders at national and international level, the 2010 round of population and housing censuses will achieve these objectives.
