



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
15 June 2012

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses

Fourteenth Meeting

Geneva, 24-25 May 2012

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the report

Report

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the joint UNECE/Eurostat Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses was held on 24-25 May 2012 in Geneva, at the Palais des Nations, back-to-back to the UNECE-UNFPA Workshop on Censuses Using Registers (21 May) and the joint UNECE-Eurostat Expert Group Meeting on Censuses Using Registers (22-23 May).
2. The meeting was attended by participants from Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Union was represented by participants from Eurostat. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat) were also represented. The meeting was also attended by a number of experts invited by the Secretariat and by UNFPA.
3. UNFPA financially supported the attendance of a number of participants.

II. Organization of the meeting

4. Ms.Pnina Zadka (Israel) was elected as Chairperson of the meeting.

5. In the opening of the meeting, UNSD and UNECE gave two presentations on the 2010 round of population and housing censuses from a global (UNSD) and regional (UNECE) perspective.
6. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:
 - a) Full enumeration versus sample surveys;
 - b) Access to microdata;
 - c) Address/dwelling listing;
 - d) Internet data collection.
7. The discussion at the meeting was based on 22 papers submitted by the participants. The papers are available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2012.05.census2.html>. The presentations were posted on the same web page after the meeting.
8. The summary of the main items discussed at the substantive sessions is presented in the annex to the present report.

III. Future work

9. The meeting recommended the following plan for future work on Population and Housing Censuses in the UNECE region:
 - (a) **Second half of 2012/first half of 2013: Online survey of national practices in 2010 census round**, covering the following topics:
 - (i) Census methodology (including data sources and enumeration methods).
 - (ii) Geo-referencing (including GIS and mapping).
 - (iii) IT for data collection (internet census, handheld devices).
 - (iv) IT for data processing (scanning, OCR, coding, editing).
 - (v) Field operations.
 - (vi) Outsourcing.
 - (vii) Confidentiality and disclosure control.
 - (viii) Communication and publicity.
 - (ix) Dissemination.
 - (x) Census evaluation (coverage error, content error) and quality reporting.
 - (xi) Costs (breakdown of costs; cost/benefit analysis).
 - (xii) Census legislation.
 - (xiii) Documentation, metadata and archiving.
 - (xiv) Problems and lessons learned.
 - (xv) Successes.
 - (xvi) Innovations.
 - (xvii) Pilot census
 - (xviii) Practices in collection of selected census topics, tentatively with focus on:

- a. Population to be enumerated
- b. Economic characteristics
- c. International and internal migration, and ethno-cultural characteristics
- d. Household and family characteristics
- e. Housing topics

(xix) Plans for next (2020 round) census, with focus on innovations.

Tentative timetable for the survey:

- by October 2012: finalization of survey questionnaire;
- by December 2012: completion of questionnaire by countries (online);
- January-May 2013: processing and analysis;
- by June 2013: finalization of report(s).

(b) In the second half of 2012 and first half of 2013: establish **task forces** responsible for revising selected parts of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) recommendations, taking into account the results of the survey of national practices. Tentatively, task forces could be established on the following topics:

- (i) Census methodology and enumeration methods.
- (ii) Census technology.
- (iii) Population to be enumerated.
- (iv) Economic characteristics.
- (v) International and internal migration, and ethno-cultural characteristics.
- (vi) Household and family characteristics.
- (vii) Housing topics.

A task force on census costs and benefits (topic not included in the CES recommendations for the 2010 censuses) should be also established. Its objective should be to produce a report based on the information collected in the survey, to review the challenges of assessing costs and benefits across countries, and to draft a text for possible inclusion in the CES recommendations for the 2020 censuses.

(c) Autumn 2013 (in Geneva in the week 30 September to 4 October¹ 2013): **Joint UNECE-Eurostat Meeting on Censuses**, to discuss the reports based on the survey of national practices and work on the revision of census recommendations for 2020 round of censuses.

(d) Autumn 2014 (tentatively in October): **Joint UNECE-Eurostat Meeting on Censuses**, to review the draft revised CES recommendations for the 2020 round of censuses.

10. The final draft of the new CES recommendations will be completed by December 2014, and then submitted for review by the CES Bureau in February 2015 and adoption by the CES in June 2015.

¹ For organizational reasons these dates replace the dates 23-27 September 2013, announced as possible dates at the meeting.

11. The work on the revision of the new CES recommendations will be carried out in close cooperation with the revision of the “Principles and Recommendations for the 2020 round of censuses” by UNSD, to ensure that the main concepts and definitions in the two sets are consistent and that possible synergies are created between the two processes.

12. Census experts from national statistical offices and international organizations are encouraged to consider their participation in the various task forces listed above and communicate their availability to UNECE.

IV. Adoption of the report

13. The meeting adopted the present report before it adjourned.

Annex

English only

Summary of the main issues discussed at the substantive sessions

A. Full enumeration versus sample surveys

Documentation: Papers submitted by Canada, Poland, Slovakia, United States and CIS-Stat.

1. Various issues related to the use of sampling were raised in the discussion that followed the presentations. For instance, how data users react to the fact that in some cases it is impossible to have low levels of geography due to sampling? In the United States, low levels of geography are available by combining years, though this is confusing to users. On the other hand, users appreciate increased frequency.
2. With regard to costs, not always sampling results in cost reductions. In the United States, it is estimated that ultimately the American Community Survey (ACS) is more expensive in the long run. However, it allowed for the simplification of the short form of the census and removal of the long form). Moreover, the use of ACS allowed changing the number of enumerators assigned to a given region based on perceived difficulty of where they work. The number of regional offices decreased from 12 to 6.
3. The approach developed by Poland attracted lot of interest. Using data from existing registers and a sample survey on 20 per cent of the population allowed costs to be reduced by a factor of ten. The decision to combine census and administrative sources was taken about three years before the census, and it was not difficult for the president of Central Statistical Office to convince the government and the parliament.
4. Several countries expressed interest in the “paperless” technology. Whilst the smart phones used in Poland had the disadvantage of small screens, it is likely that new and better technologies are likely to be available by the time of the next census. The census app worked both online and offline (in the event of lacking cell coverage), data were encrypted, and newly found buildings recorded by enumerators were immediately updated in the system.
5. The discussant noted that each country needs to evaluate its own situation for deciding whether to use a mixed, administrative or traditional census. Depending on how and what data are collected, changes in methodologies may result in less comparable data. More attention will need to be spent on ensuring comparability between countries. Moreover, it becomes more important to harmonize concepts definitions between the census and social surveys.
6. Some participants observed that some of the methodological options may result in lower quality and asked how to measure the value of quality, e.g. the value of putting a hospital in the best location. It is important to understand who data users are and what data they need, as this information can be used to justify why certain information is collected and certain questions are asked.

B. Access to microdata

Documentation: Papers submitted by Ireland, the United Kingdom and the University of Minnesota.

7. In the discussion, alternative approaches to microdata dissemination were discussed, with their advantages and disadvantages. Some countries offer onsite access to have better control on the use made of data, while others provide remote access online system. Mexico allows users to download data, including sample survey data, but restricts geography.

8. With regard to the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) project at the University of Minnesota, the value added of the product offered was discussed in relation to the movement towards registers. For South American data, IPUMS protects the data, while European countries do it themselves. IPUMS does the complete integration in-house, controls the microdata themselves, and have a virtual microdata laboratory for making data available. Breaches of the rules of use are discouraged by the possibility of the whole of a user's institution being banned from accessing IPUMS data in the event of their breaking the rules.

9. In general, participants agreed with the importance of building relationships of trust with users.

C. Address or dwelling listing

Documentation: Papers submitted by Israel, Italy, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

10. A number of questions were asked about the use of address lists in the United Kingdom census. The address register for the 2011 census cost £6million to obtain, out of a total census cost of £480 million. The United Kingdom undertook a non-targeted check of 1 per cent of the addresses on the address register, plus a targeted check of 15 per cent of the addresses, at a cost of around £1million. This revealed seven times more address errors in the targeted 15 per cent check than in the non-targeted 1 per cent general check, so was considered a cost efficient way of measuring and managing the quality of address information obtained from compiled address lists.

11. Some aspects of the United Kingdom address list provision were subcontracted, which meant the Office for National Statistics did not have direct ownership of the address data to allow modification, and could not pass corrections back to the owners of the address lists. However, they were able to inform the address list providers as to which areas had the highest numbers of address errors.

12. With regard to comparing the quality of address lists against that used for the 2001 UK census, this was limited due to the use of a different approach: Only one address list was used for the 2001 census, which was three years old, and some areas, such as London and Manchester, missed significant numbers of dwellings where enumerator quality was poor. This made it hard to estimate undercoverage prior to the address checking of the 2011 census, but it was believed to be an improvement against the previous census.

13. The estimated under-coverage for the 2011 United Kingdom census was 0.7-0.8 per cent,. The biggest problem encountered was in the quality of instructions given to field staff with regard to complicated communal dwellings.

14. In Italy, the quality of the census addresses were guaranteed by checking half of the addresses in the country. Whilst this was expensive, at around 20 million euros, it provided a strong infrastructure to use with other databases of administration. Municipalities shared register data for the census, and data collected in the census were used to update the

registers. In Israel, as in other countries, the law does not allow census findings to be shared with authorities.

15. In Ireland, the 2011 census discovered an extra 40,000 dwellings, which were to do with time delays in the data and newly built houses.

D. Internet data collection

Documentation: Papers submitted by Canada, the Czech Republic, Italy, Japan (not presented), Lithuania, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

16. The IT systems necessary for the internet data collection require large investments. Therefore some participants asked whether the IT infrastructure could be re-used for surveys like the Labour Force Survey. In the Czech Republic, it is considered that re-using the IT infrastructure for other statistical activities is not possible. The United Kingdom subcontracted its infrastructure, therefore it is not possible to use it for other purposes.

17. Canada rented the IT system for the census, rather than having to build one, and found that predicting the size of demand was one of the biggest challenges for internet census collection. One difficulty with re-using census IT infrastructure for other purposes is that census teams are not always well integrated into the rest of the National Statistical Offices. The Canadian data collection vision for the future is to use one data collection method for multiple surveys. It was asked why Portugal considers moving from a traditional (but internet based) census methodology to a register-based one, if the results of the traditional method are good. The Portuguese expert clarified that various options are being considered, and the final decision on register based or combined census is expected by 2013. For the 2011 census, the register quality was too poor for a register-based census, but the census data obtained can be used to understand the limitations of the register data, for example in terms of coverage and quality. Cost is a very important reason for moving to a register-based census, as well as increasing quality of register data (for example, due to ID cards). A microcensus in 2016 will be used as an experiment for learning lessons for 2021 for most of the variables of interest.

18. Portugal's, the internet questionnaire automatically suggested text for educational qualification as whilst users were typing the information. It was asked whether there is any evidence of this introducing a bias in this data. The Portuguese expert explained that the internet data model is the same as for the paper questionnaire, and that comparison of differences in the responses from paper and online questionnaires is undertaken in order to report on data quality to meet EU regulations.

19. It was observed that, compared to traditional enumeration, technologies may make the census easier for statisticians, but require the public to correctly interpret questions and enumerate their responses. Canada did a feasibility study on the difficulty of filling in the form, with testing done for many segments of the population. Self-response requires the respondent to interpret questions correctly, with the risk of possible misinterpretation. Where respondents had difficulty interpreting questions, these were mostly left blank, so one approach is to re-contact those who have lots of missing data.

20. The United Kingdom noted that systems can be designed to be quicker to fill in than a paper form, as question routing is possible depending on previous answers. Moreover, it is possible to design IT systems to have pop-ups for when users take a long time to fill in questions, or who keep changing their answers.