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Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses

Eighteenth Meeting

Geneva, 28-30 September 2016

Item 1 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

Annotated provisional agenda

To be held in room VII at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, starting at 9:30 am on Wednesday 28 September 2016.

I. Provisional agenda

1. Adoption of the agenda and election of officers
2. Assessing costs and benefits of censuses
3. Frameworks and tools for bilateral and multilateral cooperation among NSIs with regard to censuses
4. Alternative methods for counting of population, in particular hard-to-count population groups
5. Methods for assessing quality and usability of registers and administrative sources
6. Innovations in census methodology and technology, and results of testing
7. Possible uses of new data sources (e.g. "Big Data") for censuses
8. Future work
9. Other business.

II. Annotations

The meeting is organised jointly with Eurostat following the provisions of the UNECE Statistical Programme for 2016, adopted by the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) and approved by the UNECE Executive Committee.

1. Adoption of the agenda and election of officers

The UNECE in cooperation with Eurostat organize regularly meetings for the Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses. The main purpose of the meetings is to facilitate the exchange of experiences among countries, increase knowledge on various issues related to the planning and conduction of population and housing censuses, promote the development and implementation of the CES Recommendations for the Censuses of Population and Housing. This results in increased capacity by countries to plan and conduct the population and housing censuses and produce data comparable across countries. The proposed provisional agenda will be presented for the approval by the participants of the meeting.

2. Assessing costs and benefits of censuses

In most countries, population and housing censuses have to be conducted with limited budget since NSIs and census agencies face increasing financial constraints. This represents a challenge in particular when the census methodology adopted requires direct field data collection, which is very expensive. In these countries, special measures are often taken to improve the enumeration of specific hard-to-count population groups, resulting in additional costs.

Assessing in advance the census costs as accurately as possible is a basic requirement to obtain the funds necessary to conduct a census. In assessing the census costs, consideration is normally given to the costs of the previous census (unless a significantly different methodology is adopted), taking into account inflation and other relevant factors. Assessing the census costs is particularly difficult when a new methodology is adopted, which may result for instance in the reduction of costs for direct field collection, and in the increase of costs for technology and communication.

In order to convince the government (or other providers of funds) to allocate the funds required for the census, it can be useful to provide detailed information about the benefits of the census, which may include also estimates of the financial value of the census.

In this session countries are expected to share experiences and/or challenges with assessing the costs and benefits of censuses, in particular in the framework of reducing census budgets.

3. Frameworks and tools for bilateral and multilateral cooperation among NSIs with regard to censuses

Cooperation at the international level between NSIs is important and useful for population and housing censuses as in all statistical areas. Many countries have recently developed alternative methodologies and technologies, with the objective to increase efficiency and reduce costs. Countries sharing their experiences with other countries can often provide useful information on lessons learned, best practices, requirements and the implications of different innovative methodologies and technologies on census planning, implementation, and data quality.

In addition to expert meetings and other initiatives promoted by international organizations, bilateral and multilateral cooperation among NSIs plays a fundamental role. This session will be dedicated to discuss some examples of frameworks and tools for bilateral and multilateral cooperation among NSIs, and collect feedback on how to further improve cooperation.

4. Alternative methods for counting of population, in particular hard-to-count population groups

In the traditional census approach, the enumeration is based either on face-to-face interviews or on self-completion of the census questionnaire by the households. In recent years other methods emerged, like the Internet response options, which in some countries has become the main method of collection. In countries with a register-based or combined census, the enumeration is based on data derived from population registers and other administrative registers.

For each of those methods, there are some population groups that are difficult to count for various reasons. They may include, for instance, immigrants (especially those arrived in the country recently, with undocumented status, or stateless), refugees and asylum seekers, students, transient populations, homeless or roofless people. Information on sexual identity and/or gender identity is also difficult to collect.

Countries are expected to discuss in this session their past experiences or plans for the future census concerning the counting of the population in general and hard-to-count groups in particular.

5. Methods for assessing quality and usability of registers and administrative sources

Many countries are considering adopting in the 2020 round alternative census methods that make use of data from different types of registers and administrative sources. For these countries, a critical issue is the assessment of the quality and usability of these sources for the census. The session will provide an opportunity to exchange experiences, presents results, discuss opportunities and challenges.

The UNECE Task Force on Register-based and Combined Censuses, established by the Bureau of the CES in February 2016 with the objective to prepare guidelines on register-based and combined censuses, will have the opportunity to discuss in this session the draft outline of the future guidelines and some preliminary results of its work.

6. Innovations in census methodology and technology, and results of testing

Plans for the 2020 census round show that a significant number of UNECE countries, particularly in Western Europe, will increasingly use data from registers and multiple sources, and apply innovative census technologies. They include an Internet response option, which in some countries will be the main enumeration method. Many countries are also working on innovations that will allow geo referencing census data, making use of digitized maps and GPS.

In this session, countries will discuss their plans for using alternative census methodology and innovative technology the 2020 census round. The results of tests, when available, will be presented, so that the experiences of single countries will be discussed and possibly compared with those from other countries.

7. Possible uses of new data sources (e.g. “big data”) for censuses

Many countries have changed or are considering changing the method used to conduct the census, often adopting methods based on multiple data sources, such as registers and

administrative datasets. Some countries are also considering the use of “big data” (from public administrations or the private sector) in the census, either as direct source of data, or to improve the coverage and quality of address lists.

In this session countries are expected to exchange experiences on the possible uses of new data sources for censuses.

8. Future work

In this session, the plans for future work in the UNECE region to support countries in the implementation of the CES Recommendations for the 2020 census round will be presented and discussed.

9. Other business

In this session, the experts may discuss additional census-related items proposed by the Secretariat or the participants.
