

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, 24-25 September 2018

Report of the workshop

I. Organization and attendance

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), and with financial support from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Workshop was held in Geneva on 24-25 September 2018, back-to-back with the meeting of the UNECE-Eurostat Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses (26-28 September 2018).

The Workshop was attended by 38 census experts and managers representing the following countries and organizations: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Czech Republic, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan. The meeting was also attended by representatives from Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), IntCensus, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

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

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.

¹ <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47796>

III. Summary of the discussion

A. Overview of 2020 Census Round (CIS-Stat)

In the opening session, CIS-Stat gave an overview of preparations for the 2020 round of censuses in the region. All CIS countries are planning to conduct population censuses of 2020 round. This round may be the first in recent history when all states in the region will conduct censuses. It should be noted the important role of CIS-Stat in coordinating the activities of national statistical offices.

In general, countries are embracing the use of technology, particularly the use of handheld devices for conducting interviews and, in some countries, online self-response.

While this increased use of technology is expected to bring cheaper collection and faster processing, there was discussion about the added difficulties of combining the final data from several sources (paper forms, electronic devices, online self-reporting). It is also important to test these devices in various conditions, and to have a back-up plan in case of device failure.

It will be important to undertake verification activities to ensure the population is counted once and only once. The participants discussed the case of online enumeration for the population living abroad. It was raised that Estonia proposed a system of blocking IP addresses from abroad to combat the expected overcount. However, there were cautions raised about using this method due to the potential for preventing in-scope respondents from taking part.

B. National presentations on preparations for next censuses of 2020 round

The countries described their preparations for the upcoming censuses, focusing on various aspects including developing questionnaires, procuring electronic devices and undertaking public awareness campaigns.

In *Armenia* the census is planned in October 2020, and a pilot census is planned in 2019 during which the use of mobile devices for mapping and tablet computers for data collection in some parts of the country will be tested. There was discussion of the future use of administrative registers in Armenia.

In *Azerbaijan* the census is planned in October 2019, and it will be a traditional census with paper questionnaires. A question is planned on mathematical literacy, to provide information required for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In *Georgia* the next census will take place in 2022 or 2023. New technologies will be tested, including the use of electronic devices and GIS for pre-enumeration (listing of dwellings and households), and Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in the big cities. Specific questionnaires on agricultural activities and emigrants are under discussion. For the question on agricultural activity, advice from UNFPA was to undertake light linkage, by asking whether anyone in the household had any agricultural activity, then use these results to limit the frame for the agricultural census.

There was a long discussion about the purchase and use of tablets for censuses. UNFPA mentioned a scheme in the Pacific where countries re-used tablets from other countries in order to reduce costs, however there are no plans for such a scheme in the EECCA region. Several countries were opposed to this idea due to the implications on software development, data security, and timeliness, given censuses typically take place at the same time, and technology quickly becomes obsolete. Most countries have arranged to distribute the tablets to other government departments after the conclusion of the census.

Belarus delivered two presentations, on the preparations for the 2019 Census and the pilot census carried out in 2017. They have adopted electronic collection through both online self-reporting, and the use of tablets. Tablets will be pre-loaded with information, and some personal information will be pre-filled if the respondent provides their PIN number. The focus for 2019 will be on confidentiality and security of data, while the pilot revealed the need for a widespread public awareness campaign, close co-operation with local administrative authorities, and more training for field staff.

The discussion concerned the reduction in processing time due to electronic collection, and workforce/operational issues. The population register will be used as validation in the census, however it is known to contain an undercount of the population and has only been operational since 2013. It will be used to check, for example, whether online responses have been received for all members of a household. With regard to security, Belarus confirmed that the large workforce of temporary staff would be required to sign a declaration to ensure confidentiality. On the issue of non-response, while people are obliged to take part in the census, there is no penalty for a person who refuses.

Kazakhstan gave an update on their 2019 census preparations, including the pilot test. They will be using a series of administrative registers, as well as tri-modal collection involving paper/electronic forms and online self-reporting. As a result of the pilot census, the online enumeration period will be extended from 10 to 15 days, while it also demonstrated the need for better translation between Kazakh, Russian, and local dialects in rural areas. Hard to reach areas will be enumerated ahead of time, and rural areas will have slightly higher ratios of staff to respondents. Additionally, the pilot census highlighted the issue of pay, since it became difficult to attract and retain staff due to very low salaries. This led to a new parliamentary decree which will result in higher salaries for field staff in the census itself.

There will be a pilot census in *Kyrgyzstan* in March 2019 and a full census in 2020. The questionnaire will be expanded to ask about disability, SDGs, internet usage, and renewable energy, but the census will still be conducted on paper only, due to lack of resources. There was a discussion around the collection of information on own-use production, which was included in the ILO's 2013 resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization.

The *Russian Federation* presented the October 2018 pilot census, in view of the full census in 2020. Respondents will be first given a chance to submit online, then followed up by interviewers using paper or electronic forms for those who have not yet replied. People can also report through stationary census posts that will be active

throughout the second half of the census collection period. Data will be linked through the state services portal to validate responses for the household.

Much of the discussion surrounded new modes of collection. Russian Federation will use USB keys to transfer data from tablets, rather than online transfer, in order to reduce costs. They will also consider the possibility and feasibility of using big data sources from mobile phone companies in the future.

The *Republic of Moldova* will hold a census in 2023, based on the use of tablets. They assessed the costs, and while the tablet approach would be slightly more expensive, this was outweighed by the other benefits in terms of higher quality data, faster processing, and improved public image.

Tajikistan outlined its plan for the upcoming census in 2020, to be conducted online (10%), by tablet (50%) and paper (40%). Key developments include the geocoding of addresses, and recent creation of a system of Unique Identification Numbers, which may be used in the future to create a population register.

Turkmenistan outlined the initial plans for a census in December 2022, through questionnaire responses using paper and tablets.

Ukraine described plans for their first census since 2001, planned for October 2020. Respondents will be given the chance to submit their census online using a verified digital signature, which will be followed by a round of interviewer visits. Interviewers will record responses on tablets, with paper forms available as a back-up only. Interviewers will visit every dwelling, but if the form has already been filled in online, they will simply check the confirmation code. Discussion concerned the prevalence of digital signatures within the population, and the processes concerning the security, storage and transfer of data from the back-up paper forms onto tablets.

Uzbekistan held their last census nearly 30 years ago and are currently preparing for a census in 2022. It is expected that they will use a traditional method with paper questionnaires. They are currently engaging international assistance to develop the concepts and methods, which will be presented to government for approval in December 2018.

C. Use of census data for monitoring SDG indicators (CIS-Stat)

CIS-Stat developed and sent a questionnaire in 2016 regarding countries' perspectives and readiness to report on SDG indicators. This revealed a list of 111 indicators deemed most relevant by a majority of CIS countries, of which 22 are available from the 2010 census round. It was noted that while not all these indicators will be collected in the 2020 round, some will be added in selected countries, while others are available from alternative sources such as registers or administrative data. Participants also agreed that the monitoring of SDG indicators was difficult using a 10-yearly census, because data become out of date very quickly, meaning indicators cannot be easily tracked over time.

D. Survey on Censuses post-2020 (UNECE)

UNECE presented the results of an informal survey conducted in August-September 2018, and the group discussed some of the key expected areas of development post-2020:

(a) Dissemination of census results for the 2020 round: only a limited number of countries in the region are planning to offer interactive, user-definable tabulation tools, or release microdata. UNECE encouraged countries to adopt these modern dissemination tools. Census microdata, in particular, is a key focus of UNFPA Census support programs.

(b) Register-based censuses: for the next census after the 2020 round, about half the countries in the region may consider moving from a traditional census to a combined approach, using data from registers and a limited field collection.

(c) Several countries are contemplating innovations such as: increased use of geo-referenced information for data collection, increased geographical detail in the planned census output, and greater integration of the census program with other NSO statistical programs.

(d) Big data: despite user interest, there are only a few examples of big data being used for official statistics. Some countries are investigating the use of utility data to determine dwelling vacancy, and trials have taken place using mobile phone data. Key concerns among the group were the difficulties in evaluating quality of big data, prohibitive costs of acquisition, the role of private companies in data collection and ownership, and government and public mistrust of the data.

(e) A few countries noted that revisions are needed to key census concepts, referring in particular to the 'usual residence' concept.

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

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

UNECE proposed to undertake a similar workshop again in 2019.

CIS-Stat shared information on a study tour in Moscow and Veliky Novgorod in October, where preliminary results will be shared from pilot censuses; and plans for a survey in 2019 on the state of affairs in national statistics offices regarding Censuses.

UNFPA outlined the upcoming workshop on CSPro, as well as plans for an initial version of a population data platform, expected to be launched in late 2018.