

19. Microdata as an Essential Resource for Scientific Discovery and Policy Making

Lara Cleveland, IPUMS, University of Minnesota

IPUMS International partners with National Statistical Offices to preserve and harmonize census and survey data from around the world and disseminate microdata for use by the research community. In 2021, 473 anonymized microdata samples from 102 countries are available for scholarly and policy research through the IPUMS International online data dissemination system. 23 UNECE member states participate in the IPUMS data dissemination initiative. The data are used widely across academic disciplines to study human populations in their social, economic, and physical environments. This brief presentation highlights the benefits of facilitating researcher access to microdata by describing data usage in recent scholarly and policy research articles and reports. International research organizations and United Nations divisions and agencies use harmonized census microdata to track progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and inform policy development and evaluation. Access to harmonized microdata, particularly from high-density census samples, enables the recommended disaggregation in the calculation of SDG indicators. During the COVID crisis, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) used harmonized census microdata from IPUMS to construct a dashboard of COVID vulnerability. The flexibility of microdata and the extensive coverage of censuses allowed data teams to quickly create and display custom analyses highlighting subnational concentrations of older vulnerable adults, describing characteristics such as their access to utilities and household living arrangements. Thousands of scholars worldwide use the data alone or in combination with climate, survey, macroeconomic and other data. They conduct in-depth analyses of complex social processes including aging, urbanization, household living arrangements, population and climate dynamics, migration, educational mobility, disability, and a wide range of other topics.