



On the future of census

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For

UNECE Census Week 2022

Key question:

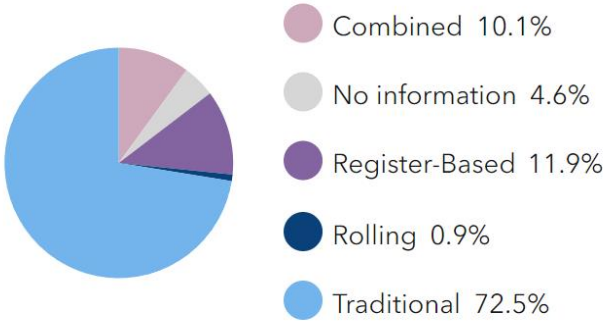
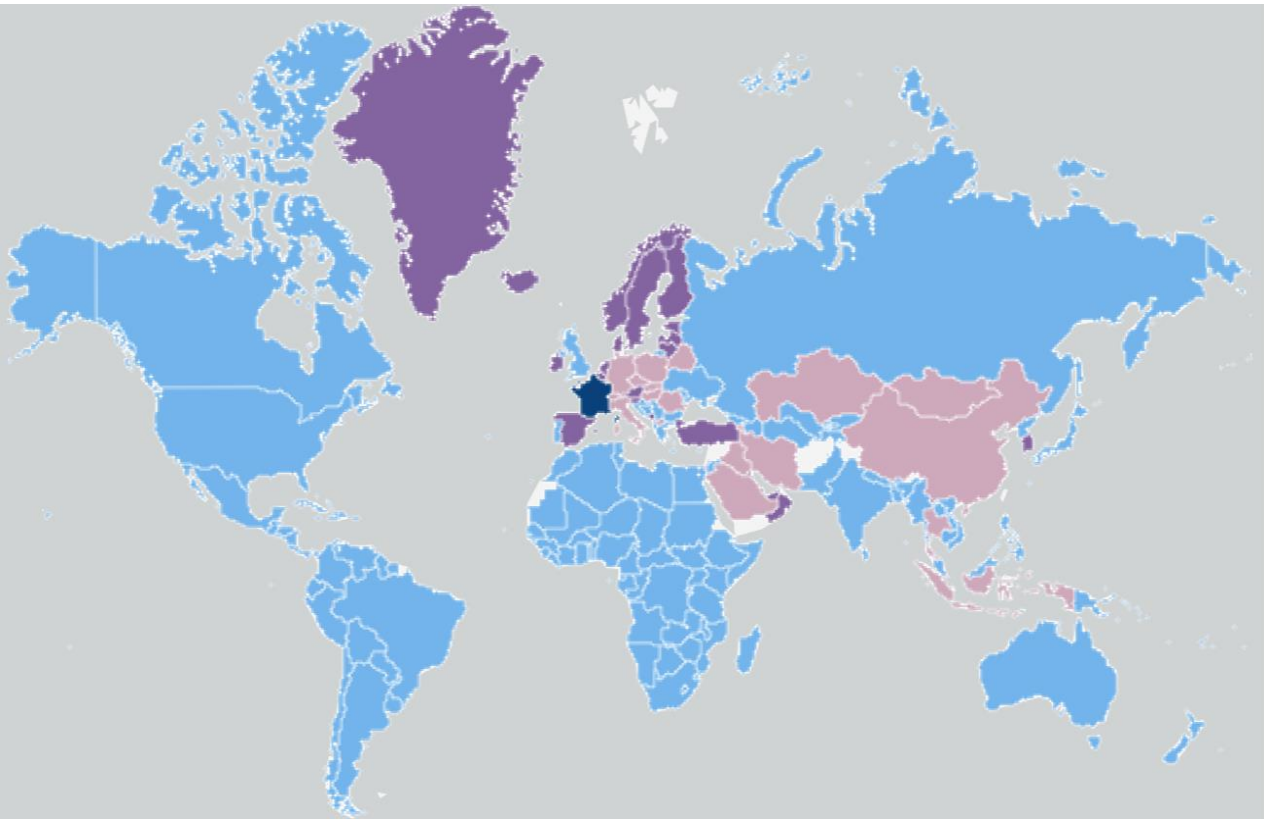
Is the census still “fit for purpose”?

- Decreasing cost-effectiveness:
 - Constraints of public finances;
 - Infrequent periodicity;
 - Limited utilization of census data;
- Concerns about the accuracy, relevance and coverage of census data
- Challenges in capturing new types of living arrangements and patterns of mobility
- Systematic under-enumeration of some population groups

A stock-take of census methodologies

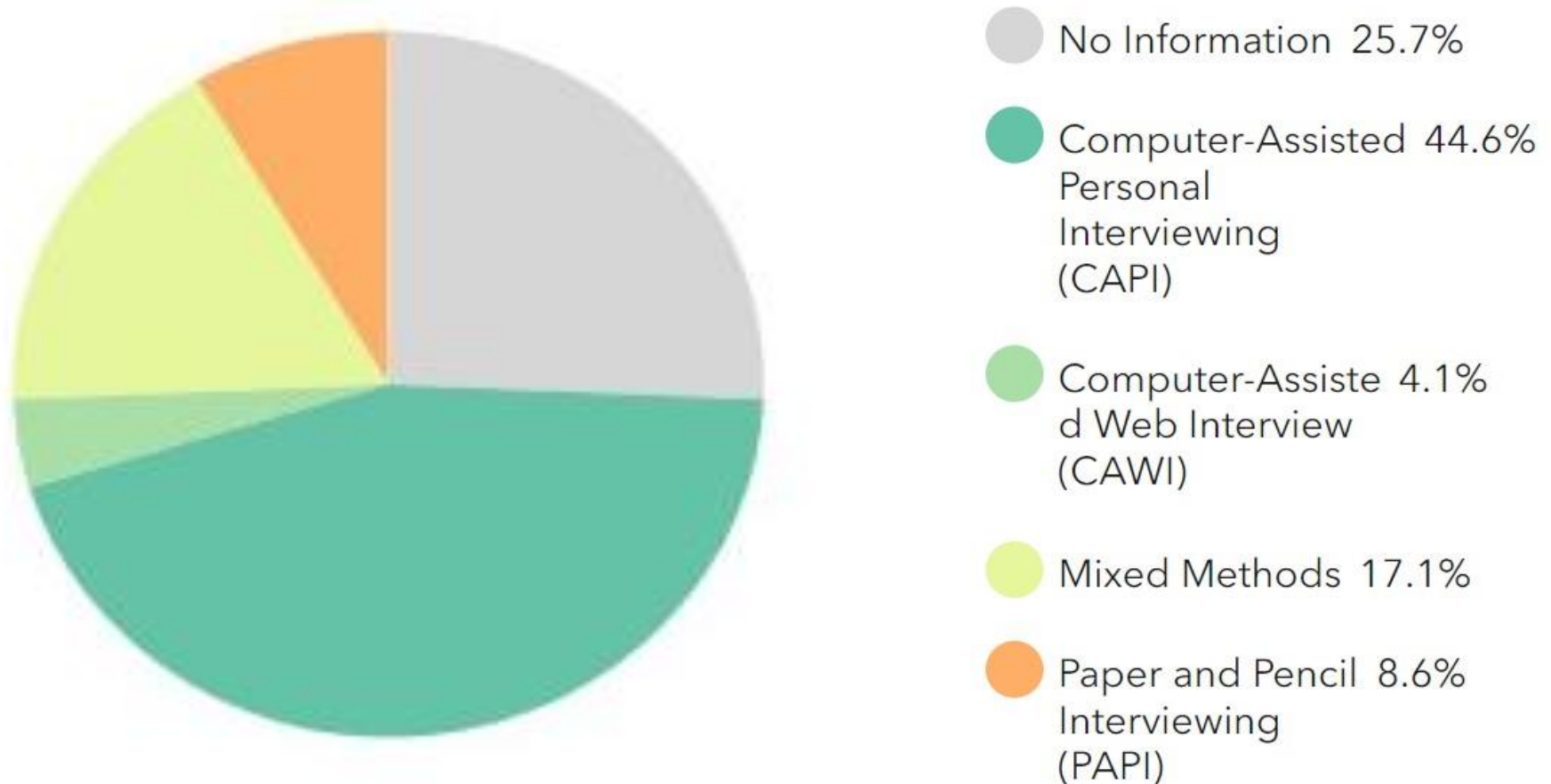
- PAPI: Interview- and paper-based
 - Still widely used in combination with CAPI
- CATI: Interview- and telephone-based
 - Typically only in combination with other methods
- CAPI: Interview- and computer (tablet)-based
 - Rapidly gaining in popularity
- MBE: Mail-based self-enumeration
 - Usually combined with other methods for complementarity or follow-up
- CAWI: Web-based self-enumeration
 - Only where high internet penetration exists, even then, with varied success
- RBC: Register-based census
 - Increasingly seen as the “silver bullet”, but limited so far to countries with good administrative data systems
- Hybrid or combined census
 - Various combinations of methodologies

Countries by type of census.



Source: [UNFPA Global Census Tracker](#) (as of July 2022).

Countries conducting traditional or combined censuses by method of enumeration (2020 census round)



Source: [UNFPA Global Census Tracker](#) (as of July 2022).

Key considerations for census innovation

- Reduction of per capita cost of a census
- Faster census data processing
- Improved timeliness of census data dissemination
- Improved quality of census data
- Real time monitoring of census operations
- Automated enumeration area delineation
- Potentials of geo-spatial data analysis
- (Doing away with ten-year census intervals)

Key issues regarding “classic” census funding

- Lack of financial resources is one of the top three challenges experienced by statistical agencies in the conduct of the 2020 census round (UNSD, 2020)
- Field work represents around 40% of the total census costs
- Uncertainty and delays of funding affect quality of census operations
- Dependence on foreign donors
- International support for censuses and surveys has been stagnant
- Rapid population growth pushing up the cost of census enumeration (Africa)

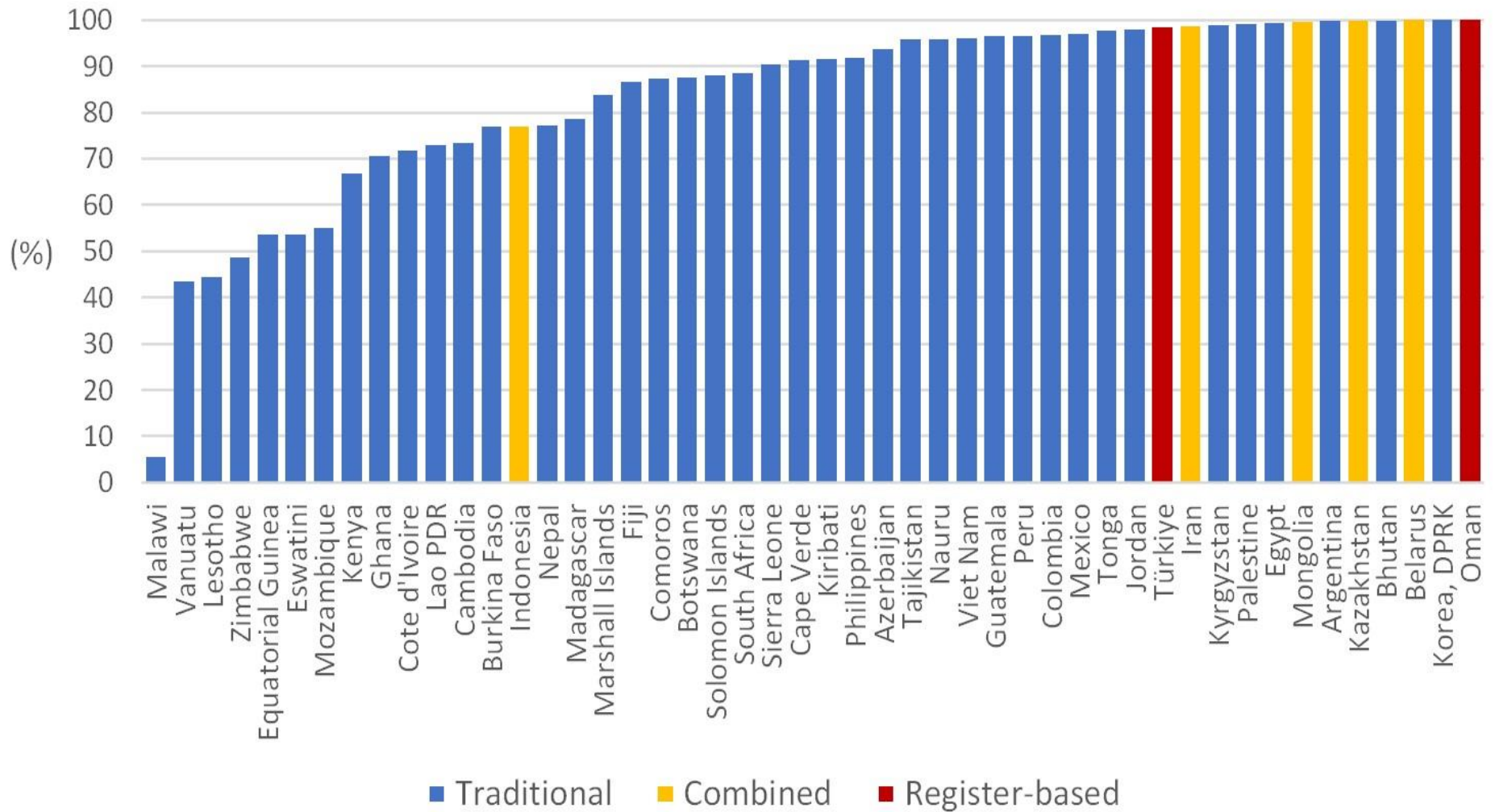
Census in the Post-COVID era

- Postponed censuses may suffer from budget cuts
- Issues may arise regarding representativeness and comparability of census results
- Periodicity of census operations is affected
- Donor fatigue and multiple competing priorities
- Acceleration towards non-interview-based census methodologies

Prerequisites for a register-based census

- well established and comprehensive set of administrative registers
- accompanying institutional and legal frameworks to support access to and use of administrative data for census purposes
- Ways and means to link different administrative registers at record level

Percentage of children under age 5 registered by the civil registration system by type of 2020 round census, selected countries*.



Note (*): UNFPA Program Countries which completed the 2020 round census as of July 2022.
 Source: [UNICEF birth registration data](#) and [UNFPA Global Census Tracker](#) (as of July 2022).

Concluding observations

- The vast majority of countries will continue to do field-based census operations
- But increasingly using technologies that facilitate field-based census data collection
- And exploring hybrid methodologies – when and where feasible
- Transitioning to register-based census is likely to take many years for most countries
- The coverage and quality of CRVS systems is a good indicator – though not the only one - for readiness to transition to register-based census.
- The costs of refurbishing and maintaining administrative data systems to suit census purposes must be taken into consideration