20 years of rolling census in France

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From 1801 to 1999: traditional censuses

- One census every 5 years until 1940

Since 2004: an annual rolling census

- 1/5th of the territory is surveyed each year
- Within large municipalities (over 10000 inhabitants), only a sample of the dwellings is enumerated (40% of the dwellings over a 5-year cycle)
- Population stocks and characteristics of the inhabitants and dwellings are updated every year at each geographical level
1. Some French particularities

2. Advantages and drawbacks of the rolling census

3. The expected benefits of a statistical population register
The French Census has 3 (classical) goals:

- To count the population at each geographical level
- To describe the demographic and social characteristics of the population
- To enumerate and describe the dwellings
A (very) large number of geographical units

Metropolitan France
13 « régions », Nuts 1
96 « départements », Nuts 3
35 000 « Communes », LAU
France also has 11 overseas territories

- 5 are “départements” which are also European Outermost Regions
- 6 are “collectivités”
Incomplete administrative data

No population register

✓ No exhaustive and localised administrative data on individuals

No national identifier shared between all data sources

✓ Decided after 1972 and the creation of the French data protection authority

Some key variables are missing in administrative data

✓ Detailed citizenship, date of entry in France, educational level
✓ Means of transportation, heating mode,…

Some quality issues of main administrative data (tax, social protection,...) in the overseas territories
Advantages and drawbacks of the rolling census
Main principles of the rolling census

1- Based on an exhaustive statistical “register” of dwellings
   - Updated before each data collection for small municipalities (less than 10 000 inhabitants)
   - Updated on an ongoing basis for large municipalities using
     - Administrative data on construction of new residential buildings
     - Some field work

2- A door-to-door data collection
   - Due to the lack of population register (impossible to send mail or email)
   - Paper and on-line (70 %) answers

3- A massive use of tax data
   - To check the collected information
   - To estimate the population between two censuses in small municipalities
   - To check the register of dwellings

4- Specific protocols for specific cases
   - Homeless people and people living in moving house, people living on boats
   - Non permanent residential buildings (for Mayotte)
   - Road inaccessible areas (for French Guyana)
Adapted to a country with “relatively poor” administrative data

Production of annual data on population and dwellings at all geographical level

Cost-effective: same cost as a traditional census every 7 years

Professionalism of all participants: Insee & Municipalities

Quality of the data (compared to other sources or measured by quality surveys) and limited non-response (4.2% in 2023)
Drawbacks of the rolling census

**Timeliness:**

- 3 years between the reference year and the dissemination of the data
- Because the reference year is chosen as the middle of the 5-year cycle for accuracy and robustness purposes

**Difficulties to measure changes in flows: migration or residential mobility**

**Cost?**
What’s next?
The implementation of a statistical register

Scheduled for 2025

Using different administrative data

✓ tax data, social protection data, students’ data,…
✓ to produce a register of individuals and a register of dwellings

Requiring a huge amount of work:

✓ statistical work: pairing issues, implementation of sign of life methods,…
✓ Technical challenges
✓ but also ethic and legal work

Serving different purposes

✓ To build a more complete sampling frame
✓ To measure the quality of administrative data sources
✓ To facilitate the pairing between different data sources
✓ And, if possible, to improve the census
To obtain better data to:

- Check the data of the census
- Target and reduce our field work on dwellings
- Improve our intercensal estimates (for small municipalities)
- Estimate population at the grid level

To delete some questions of the census

- For example, questions on employers for salaried workers

In a more distant future,

- to rely mainly on the statistical register to count the population at every geographical level
Our concerns

Missing some populations:

✓ Homeless people
✓ Cross border workers and their family
✓ Students

Missing some characteristics of individuals or dwellings:

✓ Level of education
✓ Detailed citizenship
✓ Heating mode

Needing a lot of coverage surveys

Needing to maintain a specific method for overseas territories
Thank you for your attention