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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Conference of European Statisticians

#### Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses

##### Twenty-fifth Meeting

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Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda

##### Revising the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses for the 2030 round:

##### Enumeration Methods

## Preliminary progress report of the Conference of European Statisticians Census Task Force on Enumeration Methods

### Note by the Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Enumeration Methods\*

#### *Summary*

The Task Force on Enumeration Methods, with representatives from the United Kingdom, Argentina, Armenia, France, Italy, Montenegro, Switzerland, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Population Division, reports good progress towards the development of content for the Recommendations for the 2030 Censuses of Population and Housing. The Task Force has drawn on expertise with a range of experience from running censuses and surveys across the world. It was recognized that the enumeration methods vary significantly depending on the design of the census and that recent changes in technology and access to alternative data sources are having profound effects on how censuses are conducted. A series of changes have been recommended to the questionnaire for the UNECE **survey of national practices and experiences** in the 2020 round, reflecting discussions within the task force, across a range of topic areas (not only field operations but also technology, methodology, communication and publicity). Further input from which learning and innovation was captured, was provided by the impact of COVID pandemic on member countries' censuses.

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*Note:* The designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

## I. Introduction

1. Every ten years the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) issues Recommendations to guide countries in conducting their population and housing censuses. The Recommendations are developed by expert task forces overseen by the CES Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses. Task Force 4, on Enumeration methods, consists of experts from the United Kingdom (UK), Argentina, Armenia, France, Italy, Montenegro, Switzerland, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Population Division. Jon Wroth-Smith (UK) is the Task Force chair.
2. The planned activities of the Task Force, as for all the others established for this purpose, are the following:
  - (a) contribute to formulating questions for the relevant sections of a **survey of national practices and experiences** in the 2020 round
  - (b) **analyze the survey results**
  - (c) use these analyses, among other sources, to **prepare revised text** for the 2030 Recommendations.
3. The present document reports principally on the first of these activities.

### A. Defining the scope of the work and developing a framework for Enumeration Methods

1. The enumeration (or collection) of data for the census is vital in achieving the goal of high-quality statistics. Enumerating the whole population and housing stock is likely (for many countries) to be the single most expensive exercise that a national statistics agency undertakes. Such an undertaking, normally carried out over a few short weeks once every five or ten years, brings with it inherent risk, as lower-than-expected response rates will directly impact on the quality of the statistics produced.
2. Profound changes have been made to enumeration methods across the UNECE region. In defining the scope of the task force we were mindful to take account of the different census designs used. This includes countries which conduct a traditional census (as in the UK) and countries which use a blend of traditional collection and where administrative data or surveys are used in a ‘combined design’ (as in the case of Switzerland and Italy). Some countries are moving to a far greater reliance on administrative data (as with UK after the 2020 round).
3. Early work on reviewing the Recommendations from the 2020 round highlighted that enumeration methods were relevant across a range of topic areas. In making proposals for the changes to the 2030 Recommendations a topic-based approach was used covering:
  - (a) Technology – including online data collection, resources to support field operations and digital mapping tools
  - (b) Methodology – including combinations of approaches used for data collection
  - (c) Field operations – including use of geographic data, questionnaire type and delivery, documentation to support operations, recruitment and training, tests/pilots, evaluation
  - (d) Communications and publicity – including aspects of the operation which were consulted with stakeholders and the means of promoting enumeration.

### B. Updating questions for gathering more information on Enumeration Methods

4. The task force undertook three tasks in the first six months of meetings.

5. First, task force members presented their experience of the 2020 round. This was important to understand the overall design of each country's census and some of the key lessons which had been learnt.

6. The impact of the COVID pandemic was referred to by several members. Experience of member States was varied and reflected the enumeration designs. Members described the changes that were made ahead of collection and some of the key lessons learnt which were already influencing future thinking.

7. Second, task force members reviewed the Recommendations made for 2020. In doing so they recognized how important enumeration methods were across a range of sections. Members also noted that they made use of the previous Recommendations to help shape their plans.

8. Third, members reviewed the questionnaire used to gather experiences from the 2010 round from UNECE countries. An equivalent questionnaire is being used as the basis for updating the Recommendations for the 2030 round.

9. A series of changes have been recommended to the 2010-round questionnaire, reflecting discussions within the task force. These are summarized below with reference to the relevant topic area:

(a) Methodology:

- i. Greater clarity was needed for countries to be able to describe the design of their census. This reflects the increasingly broad range of approaches used and is particularly important given planned changes to approach which are likely to be made for the 2030 round. Explicit reference was made to countries which use a combination of census, survey and administrative sources.
- ii. Further clarity was also needed for describing the outcomes of the enumeration approaches. Again this included countries relying on different forms of source data (census, survey, administrative data) but was also related to the mode of response used (mobile, tablet, laptop).

(b) Technology

- i. Where Internet response was an option, countries have different experiences of how first contact is made. This can be in the form of an invitation letter (with access code) and/or sending a paper questionnaire with an access code included. Task force members were also aware of examples of no access code being required at all.
- ii. Online data collection provides new opportunities to validate the authenticity of respondents. Two-factor authentication was referred to as being used by countries through SMS when, for example, an individual did not have an access code.
- iii. A further distinction was needed to differentiate between where technology is used for the field operation process and for enumeration itself. Tablets and laptops are widely used in managing the operation on the ground (for example, to follow up, or in direct data collection) as well as being used by respondents themselves.
- iv. Refinements were made to questions about technology used by enumerators, based on experience. These included the visibility of screens (e.g. in bright conditions) rather than just the screen size.
- v. Experience of task force members identified the use of route optimization algorithms to guide enumerators on which address to visit next. Understanding the use and success of such algorithms was important to improving the efficiency of enumeration.

(c) Field Operations

- i. A number of countries conducted field activities ahead of the main operation to understand the completeness and accuracy of address information. Experts spoke of differing objectives and success of such activities, as well as changes which were made in response to the pandemic.
- ii. The pandemic also impacted countries' ability to conduct training for field staff in the way intended. Online training was a necessary change made in most countries, but brought with it a different set of challenges.
- iii. Pre-collection activities also included test, pilot and rehearsal activities. A clearer distinction was needed on the objectives of these activities and further information was sought on their relative success and importance.
- iv. Post-collection activities were also highlighted by members. There is a need to distinguish between post-enumeration surveys which are carried out to measure coverage errors and those carried out to measure quality.
- v. Understanding enumerators' experience of the field stage was also identified as a relevant topic. This related closely to also asking countries what information they published on the evaluation of field activities.

(a) Communication and Publicity

- i. Use of social media influencers was identified as an area that was far more important in the 2020 round than for the previous round. Likewise, use of online communities and working with research institutions were activities that experts reported had a positive impact on enumeration levels.

## II. Conclusion

10. The task force on Enumeration Methods has been broad in the scope of areas under consideration. This reflects not only the importance of enumeration in the quality of subsequent statistics but also the broad range of factors that influence enumeration. Experience of a range of countries has proved invaluable to understanding the key themes in these emerging trends and to identify how best to collect this information from all other UNECE countries.

11. Task force members referred to the 2020 Recommendations as being crucial for preparing for that census round. Undertaking a census during a pandemic presented a unique set of challenges for member countries and there is a need to capture the learning and innovation which resulted.

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