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**Revising the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations
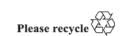for Population and Housing Censuses for the 2030 round:
Communication and outreach**

Developing the Recommendations on Communications and Outreach

Note by the Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Communications and Outreach*

Summary

> This document includes the draft chapter on Communications and Outreach for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses, and a summary of the changes introduced in comparison to the Recommendations for the previous, 2020 round, in which content on communications and publicity was incorporated as part of the chapter on Field and Other Operational Activities. The proposed text is now presented as a stand-alone chapter. The main purpose of the document is to elicit comments and suggestions from national census experts on the proposed text, to ensure that it reflects the needs and priorities of national statistical offices.

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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.

2.   Previous editions of the Recommendations did not contain a separate chapter on communications, but included content on this topic within the chapter on Field and Other Operational Activities.

3.   Section II of this document summarizes the changes introduced in the content, in comparison with the Recommendations for the previous, 2020 round.

4.   Section III presents the draft chapter on Communications and Outreach for the CES Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses. This content is now proposed as a stand-alone chapter, reflecting the heightened importance now given to the topic.

5.   The main purpose of the document is to elicit comments and suggestions from national census experts on the proposed draft text, to ensure that it reflects the needs and priorities of national statistical offices.

A. Overview

6.   The 2020 recommendations provided comprehensive information regarding census engagement and traditional publicity campaigns. However, the pandemic has drastically changed both our operational context and the media landscape. The Task Force on Communications and Outreach, with representatives from multiple nations and organizations, after a careful review and analysis of the 2020 Recommendations and the 2023 survey responses, has updated the content of the Recommendations for the 2030 Censuses of Population and Housing to enable census authorities to meet the challenges of the new digital environment.

7.   Drawing on the considerable experience of the task force members in communications and outreach throughout the census cycle and taking into consideration the feedback provided by other countries, communications experts and census task forces, the proposed text for the recommendations for the 2030 round includes new content on various communications activities and tactics that are essential in an integrated and effective communication strategy.

B. Adapting to the new environment

8.   The pandemic has drastically changed both the operational context and the media landscape. The past few years have also witnessed the rise of major social media platforms, the emergence of digital media and publicly-available artificial intelligence tools, and a significant shift in social fabric and values. Additionally, the rise of misinformation and disinformation has become a significant global issue, impacting various aspects of society, including politics, health, and security. The proliferation of false information, often spread through social media and other digital platforms, not only undermines public trust in institutions but also fuels social divisions and hampers effective policymaking.

9.   Moreover, the ways in which census data is collected have undergone significant transformations over time, adapting to the evolving public environment and technological advancements in each country. More countries are moving away from the traditional full-field enumeration census to greater use of registers and administrative data. Many reasons can justify and support this new approach, including cost efficiency, reduced respondent burden, timeliness and frequency, accuracy and coverage and resource allocation. Overall, a register-based census approach aligns with modern data practices, optimizing resource use and potentially providing more accurate and timely demographic information.

10.   To meet the challenges of this new environment where change seems to be the only constant, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) need the tools, tactics and resources that will enable them to cut through the noise, foster trust among the public and obtain results. The new and updated recommendations proposed by the Task Force on Communications and Outreach are forward-looking and adapted to this next context. They cover in detail all the essential pieces of an integrated communications strategy and offer practical advice on how to run a successful publicity campaign in support of the census while planning proactive and reactive measures for the most common situations.

II.   Summary of changes from the 2020 Recommendations

11.   Most of the content from the 2020 Recommendations was reused or updated to address the new operating environment mentioned above. Ten sections, each addressing a specific topic, have been created to guide the reader in the various phases and steps composing the communications and outreach aspect of the census:

(a)   *Importance of Communications for all Phases of the Census Cycle:* In this section, new content was added to highlight the benefits of a communication strategy, especially in the context of misinformation and disinformation, and the fact that the communications function should remain consistent in all stages of the census cycle, whether countries are adopting a field enumeration methodology, wholly or in part, or an entirely register-based approach;

(b)   *The Changing Nature of Census Enumeration:* Since more countries are moving away from the traditional full-field enumeration census to greater use of registers and administrative data, the Task Force on Communications and Outreach felt it was important to explain how communicating changes is crucial for ensuring transparency and fostering trust and social acceptance among the public. This section also proposes a few communications and engagement strategies and explains how to use the 2030 Recommendations on communications no matter the census methodology used by NSOs;

(c)   *Consultation:* The 2020 recommendations provided comprehensive information regarding census consultations. Most of the content from this section was reused with some minor edits to ensure conciseness, provide clarity on some of the recommendations and reflect the wording used in the 2023 survey questionnaire and the resulting findings. New content was also added to recommend consultations with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds to obtain full and comprehensive metadata;

(d)   *Publicity and Paid Advertising:* The publicity and advertising content has been reorganized and enhanced to reflect the shifting media landscape. While television remains the leading platform for paid advertising, digital media continues to gain momentum, including social media platforms that now increasingly leverage artificial intelligence technologies. New content has been added to this section to highlight the benefits of paid advertising and branding, provide enhanced recommendations on how to plan a publicity and advertising campaign and provide further guidance on how to do research and testing to reach harder-to-enumerate groups. Recommendations regarding the use of digital advertising were also added;

(e)   *Social Media and Misinformation/Disinformation:* A new section on social media was added since many countries reported increased use of social media and digital advertising during their last census and there were no recommendations on this topic in 2020. The new content focuses on the benefits of using social media and best practices. Content from the 2020 Recommendations on reactive communications and media monitoring was updated and enhanced to help NSOs counter misinformation and disinformation. The media has a significant influence on people's behaviour and even minor distractions and mistruths can have a detrimental effect on the outcome of the census. The Task Force on Communications and Outreach also proposed concrete solutions and recommendations on how to use monitoring tools available via both social and traditional media, and to establish collaboration with major social media entities;

(f) *Outreach, Influencers and Partnerships*: The section on outreach and partnerships was enhanced to also include recommendations on influencer engagement considering the increased use of social media. As trust in government has been declining globally, it may become increasingly difficult for NSOs to convince their populations to participate in the census and use the resulting statistical data, especially when doing a field-based enumeration. Partnerships, collaborations, and influencer engagement may help mitigate this trend by engaging trusted community voices. New content was also added to this section to highlight the benefits of partnerships in various census activities;

(g) *Segmentation, Target Audiences, and Harder-to-reach Audiences:* The importance of understanding target audiences in census communications planning cannot be underestimated. Harder-to-enumerate groups may require specific strategies to reach them and ensure their representation in the census. In this regard, a new section was added to explain the segmentation process and how it can help identify harder and easier-to-reach groups and determine the best tactics, budget allocation, and creative approaches to effectively reach these audiences. Content from the 2020 Recommendations, related to public issues impending census collection and public concerns, was reused with minor changes;

(h) *Recruitment:* Field staff recruitment is essential to a successful census field enumeration. Attracting quality candidates helps reduce attrition rates and census costs, and ensures performance. Such country-specific factors as low unemployment rates, social polarization, political instability, conflict, the short-term nature of census jobs, and pandemic after-effects may make it difficult to recruit for the census. A robust communication strategy can contribute greatly to a successful census recruitment campaign. This communication aspect was not addressed in the 2020 Recommendations. A new section was added accordingly;

(i) *Communications Aspect of Dissemination:* The benefits from the census are realized when the data and insights are published, and audiences can use them to make decisions. To maximize the use of census data, it is vital to consider how data will be disseminated, both in countries which adopted a field enumeration methodology, wholly or in part, or an entirely register-based approach. It is also important to ensure that users and potential users are made aware of the availability of census outputs. The communication function of census dissemination was not detailed in the 2020 Recommendations. A new section was added here to recommend best practices;

(j) *Evaluation and Performance Measurement:* Understanding the effectiveness of communications and publicity strategies is crucial for optimizing investments and achieving organizational goals. By analyzing performance metrics, NSOs can gain insights into the strongest areas and identify opportunities for improvement. Evaluation and performance measurement was not addressed in the 2020 Recommendations. This new section provides recommendations on how to create SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) objectives that align with the NSO's goals and create a clear roadmap for communications efforts.

III. Draft text for the chapter on communications and outreach for the Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses

A. Importance of Communications for all Phases of the Census Cycle

12. An integrated communications strategy, together with far-reaching publicity and information campaigns, play an essential role in ensuring the success of the census. It helps raise awareness, educate the population, gain public support and trust, and influence behaviours. This is especially so for those countries adopting a field enumeration methodology, either wholly or in part, where the public is expected to participate actively in the census activities as respondents and, possibly, as temporary employees as part of either the field staff or in the data processing operation. But even among countries adopting an entirely register-based approach, where direct engagement with the public may be minimal,

communication with the public and key stakeholders is vital to ensure that acceptable levels of quality for such components as the relevance and accessibility of outputs can be achieved.

13.   During the collection phase, publicity and information campaigns are needed to inform the public that a census is taking place and to provide the necessary information to enable and encourage them to participate and increase self-response. Special attention is often given to identifying and targeting harder-to-enumerate population groups to ensure consistent levels of response across the country. Essentially, the aim is to engage, inform, encourage, and, if necessary, enforce participation.

14.   In recent years, collecting accurate population data has become increasingly challenging due to complexities in information gathering and the growing prevalence of misinformation and disinformation. Effective communication and publicity campaigns are more crucial than ever to inform the public about the upcoming census, explain objectives and processes, reassure the public about the safety and confidentiality of the information they are sharing, and ensure comprehensive coverage and reliable data collection. This is particularly important for countries employing field enumeration methods, either entirely, as in a traditional census, or partially, as part of a combined approach. Whether countries adopt a field enumeration methodology, wholly or in part, or an entirely register-based approach, the communications function should remain consistent in all stages of the census cycle. Communicating the results of the census is equally important. The benefits of the census are only realized when the data and insights are published, and audiences can use them to make decisions.

B.   The Changing Nature of Census Enumeration

15.   The ways in which census data is collected have undergone significant transformations over time, adapting to the evolving public environment and technological advancements in each country. More countries are moving away from the traditional full-field enumeration census to greater use of registers and administrative data. Many reasons can justify and support this new approach, including cost efficiency, reduced respondent burden, timeliness and frequency, accuracy and coverage and resource allocation. Overall, a register-based census approach aligns with modern data practices, optimizing resource use and potentially providing more accurate and timely demographic information.

16.   When NSOs decide to adopt a new census methodology, communicating changes is crucial for ensuring transparency and fostering trust among the public. Clear communication helps to explain the reasons behind the changes, the expected benefits, and how they might affect data quality and usage.

17.   Consulting with the public, communities and stakeholders is essential for social acceptance, as it allows for addressing concerns, incorporating diverse perspectives, and enhancing the legitimacy of the process. Furthermore, explaining that administrative data may improve efficiency and accuracy while maintaining privacy and data security can help build trust and acceptance. This inclusive approach can mitigate resistance, improve cooperation, and ultimately lead to more accurate and representative census data, which is vital for effective policymaking.

18.   A slow transition in campaign messaging may be necessary for countries following this trend. NSOs which are still using a full-field enumeration strategy but are considering adopting a combined census or register-based approach in the future should be transparent about their plans and launch consultations and awareness campaigns as soon as possible to ensure social acceptance.

19.   NSOs that are already using a register-based approach would also benefit from an effective communications strategy. They can inform the public about the nature and benefits of a register-based census, build public trust in the census process by addressing privacy and data security concerns, engage key stakeholders who can facilitate the census process, ensure that organizations providing administrative data are well-prepared and aligned with census requirements and quickly address any issues or misinformation that may arise during the census process.

20. There exists a wide range of census collection methodologies employed across different countries worldwide and these methodologies evolve constantly. The recommendations presented in this chapter aim to inspire and establish high standards for census consultation, data collection, and dissemination. However, it is essential to acknowledge that each country will need to evaluate these recommendations based on the specific methodology they employ and the resources available to them. Ultimately, it will be up to the NSO to determine which recommendations are applicable and feasible within their unique contexts, taking into account their existing practices, technological capabilities, and resource constraints.

C. Consultation

21. In the early planning phases of the census, consultation with a wide range of stakeholders is necessary to ensure that user requirements are met, the questionnaire design is effective, the methodology is accepted, working partnerships are forged, and technical specifications are well understood.

22. A particular key area for consultation with users is establishing the requirements for statistical data on each census topic. Although there will likely be a set of core topics on which NSOs will want to collect information to fulfil international obligations (e.g., the present Recommendations and the European Union Census Regulations), many questions will be included to meet national and local requirements. To justify the inclusion of particular census topics, consultation with the user community should aim to confirm the relative merits of the topics to be considered. The criteria for accepting these topics should be that:

(a) There is a demonstrated need for the information at both national and local area level;

(b) Users' requirements cannot adequately be met by information from other sources;

(c) Relevant questions should be shown, in tests, to have no significant adverse effect on the census, particularly the level of public response; and that

(d) Practicable questions can be devised to collect data that is sufficiently accurate to meet users' requirements.

23. Consultations should cover (where appropriate):

(a) User requirements;

(b) Census methodology;

(c) Questionnaire design;

(d) Enumerating harder-to-enumerate and special population groups;

(e) Confidentiality and/or statistical disclosure;

(f) Design, content, and dissemination of outputs including metadata;

(g) Field operations;

(h) Language, community liaison or outreach programmes;

(i) Data quality;

(j) User satisfaction review; and

(k) Post-census evaluation.

24.   Some of these topics will be of interest to users and others to experts. They assist in planning a census that is responsive to stakeholders' needs and views while promoting broader understanding and support for census plans and activities. The key user communities to be encompassed by such a programme of consultation should include (either individually or collectively):

    (a)   Central government departments or organizations;

    (b)   Local government authorities or organizations;

    (c)   Academics and education service providers;

    (d)   Ethnic/racial communities;

    (e)   Public service providers;

    (f)   Press and the media;

    (g)   Religious groups;

    (h)   Disability groups;

    (i)   Market researchers;

    (j)   Business, retailers, and other commercial sectors;

    (k)   Health service providers; and

    (l)   Housing groups.

25.   Other key stakeholders may include international organizations, partners with whom the census agency collaborates for the provision of specialist services and donors who may help fund elements of the census operation.

26.   Consultation can occur through formal meetings with advisory or working groups comprising user community representatives and census authorities. Alternatively, public consultations, in-person or virtual, or electronic questionnaires can be used. The increasing accessibility and use of websites and social media enables such direct consultation and feedback to be carried out among a much wider audience including individual organizations and members of the public. In addition, census authorities may wish to consider *ad hoc* public meetings or bilateral meetings as means of discussing either specific census issues or more general plans and developments.

27.   It is recommended to conduct separate consultations with different groups of users or stakeholders who share common interests and perspectives, such as administrators, planners, policymakers, demographers, market researchers, and community leaders. This approach is preferable to holding simultaneous meetings for all data users, as it allows for more focused and tailored discussions catering to the specific needs and concerns of each group. Such combined meetings often prove to be less effective because there are substantial differences among users and stakeholders in their technical background and expertise, priorities, and level of interest in the details of the census content and operation.

28.   To have a full and comprehensive metadata, census authorities should consult with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including government agencies, researchers, policymakers, and the public using, for instance, structured surveys, focus groups, or other consultations. Feedback may be collected to refine metadata descriptions, making them more intuitive and comprehensive.

29.   Behaviour tests, pilot tests, focus groups, and other tools can be used to understand how respondents interpret and react to census questions and instructions to design better questionnaires and communications products. During a pilot, the effectiveness of census questions and instructions can be evaluated better under typical field conditions.

D.   Publicity and Paid Advertising

30.   For countries that undertake a significant field operation, public acceptance and cooperation are essential to ensure the success of the census. A large-scale publicity and

information campaign is recommended to inform the population of the census and to explain its purpose. Implementation of the publicity campaign is best left to experts in the field of communications, public relations, or advertising. When such expertise cannot be found within the NSO itself, it may be appropriate to outsource some or all this work. The publicity programme may include:

(a)   A public relations campaign,

(b)   A community liaison (or outreach) programme,

(c)   An advertising campaign,

(d)   Monitoring of public opinion, and

(e)   Social media and media relations, including monitoring of the mass media.

31.   There are several main messages that census agencies will need to communicate to the public to maximize outcomes for the census. Key messages should also be framed based on the different stages of operations (pre-collection, collection, follow-up activities, post-collection). Here are a few examples:

(a)   Privacy and confidentiality will be protected (individuals will not be identifiable in any published information, the personal information will only be used for statistical purposes, and there are penalties for enumerators and other staff who misuse personal information);

(b)   The census serves the public good as an important source of information to paint the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the society, an important evidence base for many national and sub-national policies, and a tool to plan for the future;

(c)   Filling in the form is a duty of the citizen, which will benefit their community and country; and

(d)   Participation is mandatory.

32.   Care is necessary in finding the correct balance between these different messages. For example, an over-emphasis on the mandatory nature of the census may serve to reinforce negative perceptions that the census is an imposition by the government on the population, rather than an activity for the common good.

33.   The following methods and media may be used readily in any part of the publicity campaign to reach one or more sectors of the community:

(a)   National and local press and magazines;

(b)   National, regional, and local TV and radio;

(c)   Community-based media;

(d)   Press conferences, round table discussions and briefings;

(e)   *Ad hoc* statistical or scientific conferences/events;

(f)   Internet websites, social media, and mobile technology;

(g)   Leaflets, posters, billboards;

(h)   Call centres (telephone helplines) and local drop-in help centres;

(i)   Paid/free advertising;

(j)   School promotions; and

(k)   Email marketing.

34.   Locations used to promote the census during the publicity campaign may include:

(a)   Regional or local government offices;

(b)   Schools, colleges, and universities;

(c)   Banks, post offices, police stations, and other public user facilities;

      (d)   Stations, airports, and seaports;

      (e)   Public libraries;

      (f)   Local information help points;

      (g)   Places of religious worship;

      (h)   Factories and other workplaces;

      (i)   Bars, pubs theatres, and other places of entertainment; and

      (j)   Sports facilities.

35.   The publicity campaign should consist of several well-timed stages that align with different elements of the census operation, including the 'wave methodology'. In the initial phase, leading up to the census, the campaign should focus on raising awareness about the importance of the census while being mindful not to start too early and risk losing public interest. The campaign should explain the benefits of the census, not only to the country but also to individuals, emphasizing how their participation can make a difference. Messages used in the publicity campaign should help develop an emotional attachment and a sense of pride in completing the census.

36.   As the enumeration phase approaches, the publicity messages should shift their focus to providing clear instructions on what people need to do and when, encouraging them to participate actively and complete their questionnaire online (if the online questionnaire is available). This targeted approach will help maintain public engagement and ensure a higher response rate during the crucial enumeration period.

37.   During the reminder phase, some (but not too much) emphasis should be given to the mandatory nature of the census. The tone and content of messages and letters should be more assertive. Public assurances about confidentiality and data security should be emphasized throughout the entire census operation. More emphasis can be given to enforcement and legal obligations during the non-response follow-up phase.

38.   NSOs may want to extend their communications programme to include messages of gratitude and appreciation to the public for taking part in the census before transitioning into communicating census results and encouraging their use.

39.   The languages used for advertising and other publicity media should reflect the variety of languages spoken in the country or specific regions. This will help to ensure inclusivity across the wide range of minority groups in the population.

1.   Paid Advertising

40.   While television remains the leading platform for paid advertising, digital media continues to gain momentum, including social media platforms that now increasingly leverage artificial intelligence technologies. The proliferation and popularity of streaming services, and advertising within those services, likely indicates a need to diversify spending across all the various platforms, naturally requiring higher budget allocations. The changing regulatory landscape (e.g., in the EU the *Digital Services Act* and *Digital Markets Act*) will also be an important factor in how and where NSOs promote the census.

41.   Paid advertising is ideal for national censuses, especially those using field enumeration methodology since it addresses the challenge of a short timeframe to encourage action and maximize self-response. Census communications campaigns must reach massive audiences while balancing the even bigger challenge of addressing historically undercounted and harder-to-enumerate populations. This type of message can be delivered to the masses through paid advertising in a relatively short time.

42.   Additionally, paid advertising provides the opportunity to integrate the message across campaign channels and areas by easily establishing a standard 'look and feel' for the messaging. Paid advertising lends additional support and trustworthiness to the messages delivered through, for example, earned and owned media.

43.   Unlike other components of the publicity campaign, paid advertising provides the ability for rapid response, the reallocation of paid media spending and the refinement of

messaging during the campaign. It also provides the ability to optimize, target and refine media placements throughout the campaign efficiently.

2. Branding

44. A well-crafted census 'brand,' with a memorable logo and catchy slogan, can enhance the effectiveness of a country's census publicity campaign. Consistently using a distinct logo and slogan across all publicity efforts, including various media channels, printed materials, and promotional items, will help the census establish a strong brand identity. The key is to leverage an existing, trusted brand or to create a logo and slogan that are easily recognizable, positively perceived, and that will survive the test of time.

45. When branding elements are communicated effectively from the early stages, they can boost brand recognition for the census. Clear visuals help validate mail packages, correspondence, and information disseminated through websites, digital advertisements, and other campaign materials, particularly when reinforced through television advertising. A strong census brand increases public awareness, and builds trust and credibility, leading to higher participation rates and more accurate data collection.

3. Planning the advertising campaign

46. It is recommended to bring to the table diverse teams, preferably a mix of private contractors and staff members that represent the different hard-to-enumerate communities represented in the country. Paid media strategies seem to benefit from having diverse voices involved in planning from the beginning to ensure adequate impact on harder-to-enumerate groups. Reaching these audiences requires more planning, in-depth thinking, and meticulous adaptation of communication products and strategies. NSOs might want to develop specific visuals, adopt a different tone, or call to action, and use different languages in these targeted communications.

47. An advertising campaign must maximize audience coverage through specially-developed creative concepts. These concepts should be derived from rigorous expert testing, including focus groups, considering the needs and concerns of various target audiences and regional features. Robust research is strongly recommended before purchasing paid advertising. Data and metrics drive informed decisions about creative and advertising placement targeting specific audiences. Statistical agencies should continue leveraging internal agency statistics and research capabilities provided by agency staff or external service providers to 'pre-inform' the campaign and any additional research. These internal capabilities enable smarter creative and purchasing decisions.

48. Communications and publicity teams should also keep open channels of communication with other teams such as earned media, public relations, social media, and partnerships, as it is necessary to align messaging, promote awareness of activities and coordinate content and strategies. Paid advertising plays a critical role in validating the authenticity of information that respondents encounter on various platforms.

4. Digital advertising

49. Digital advertising will play a key role in future census campaigns. NSOs should allocate sufficient time to establish the optimal combination of display, search, video, social, mobile, email, text messaging, and audio streaming advertising. Digital advertising, particularly at the local level, surpasses other mediums in its ability to deliver customized messaging to specific target audiences and can be optimized based on real-time data and insights.

50. The use of video streaming services has previously been limited for advertising purposes as many didn't offer the advertising options with their paid plans. This is changing as several streamers already allow for paid advertising or have announced those plans. This will allow even more flexible and adaptable ways to advertise on television. It is recommended that paid advertising plans are developed and implemented with a relatively advanced timeline to take advantage of potential partnerships, to include census messaging in popular shows and to negotiate placement on live television events.

E. Social Media and Misinformation/Disinformation

1. Misinformation/Disinformation

51.   The rise of misinformation and disinformation has become a significant global issue, impacting various aspects of society, including politics, health, and security. The proliferation of false information, often spread through social media and other digital platforms, not only undermines public trust in institutions but also fuels social divisions and hampers effective policymaking.

52.   Increasingly the media has a significant influence on people's behaviour, and even minor distractions and mistruths can have a detrimental effect on the outcome of the census. Therefore, in developing their publicity campaign (whether outsourced or undertaken in-house) NSOs should give particular attention to preparing for unexpected events, such as negative attitudes, malicious lobbying, technical difficulties, delays, and misleading information. It is advisable to have, in advance, up-to-date and flexible responses to a wide variety of questions and issues, and to be able to react quickly to unexpected negative (or positive) comments or unusual events to maintain a smooth census operation. It is also recommended that all official participants involved, from senior NSO officials to field managers, know their roles in the communication process both with the media and the public at large.

53.   Monitoring of mass media involves an analysis of social media and mass media publications concerning the issues of the census, particularly the extent to which different population groups have been reached. This helps in the detection and prevention of the development of negative published comments on the census, and the preparation of appropriate responses to negative comments and criticisms.

54.   NSOs should consider the use of monitoring tools available via both social and digital media and develop clear escalation processes, reactive communications products, and strategies to counter negative sentiment or unusual events. During census operations, establishing collaboration with major social media entities is also critical since they can help counter misinformation and disinformation.

2. Social Media

55.   Social media played a key role in encouraging respondents from different countries during censuses conducted over the last few years. Informative content and creative engagement strategies moved people to start conversations, share content, and complete questionnaires.

56.   The use of social media facilitates real-time customer service, allows NSOs to deliver messages quickly and at the right time, generates earned media coverage, and supports digital and local events. Furthermore, social media posts help answer common questions and increase census participation.

57.   The social media approach can include content dissemination (occurring daily or multiple times per day at the height of the campaigns) through organic (unpaid) social media posting and sharing; collaboration with social media influencers; the implementation of customer service chatbots; and the use of livestream technology. Social media tactics and content need to be closely integrated with other campaign areas such as public and media relations, digital paid media, websites, and campaign optimization activities.

58.   Social media are powerful tools when used both as a promotional component and to combat online misinformation. The goal of social media should not only be to reach target audiences, but also to encourage them to engage in a conversation, share content, and ultimately act by participating in the census.

59.   Campaign research helps to identify the audiences and channels that should be prioritized through social media outreach, with particular attention given to how to reach hard-to-enumerate audiences. It is also important to determine the languages and messages that should be used to reach those audiences. Such insights will help NSOs to plan and

prioritize efforts according to geographic locations as well as audience behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values, and media preferences.

60.   When using social media, NSOs should:

(a)   Be proactive in understanding emerging social media platforms and their relevance for census operations. Identify the platforms most used by harder-to-reach populations and their purposes. For these audiences, social media may be the primary or only consumed medium. Tailor social media content to relevant audiences and platforms, with video being the most impactful format;

(b)   Start planning two to three years before the actual census operation. Elevate social customer care and mis/disinformation management to an agency-level, evergreen component;

(c)   Stay updated on the latest methods of analyzing and evaluating content, as social media technology evolves rapidly;

(d)   Be open to collaborating with influencers, particularly to reach harder-to-enumerate audiences. Early planning will help identify the right influencers for the right audiences and develop closer, more organic relationships, which are key to building lasting connections;

(e)   Develop easy-to-customize content for partners and external stakeholders. More flexible content will result in wider usage by stakeholders. Create easy-to-use toolkits with the ability for external partners and stakeholders to create their templates. Building a social media hub for external partners and stakeholders to access promotional materials has proven beneficial;

(f)   Explore the potential use of artificial intelligence, particularly for social media moderation and as part of search advertising;

(g)   Establish a dedicated team, either internally or externally, to monitor social media platforms and sentiment, answer questions, and escalate potential issues.

F.   Outreach, Influencers, and Partnerships

61.   Collaboration between NSOs and civil society is key to a successful census. As trust in government has been declining globally, it may become increasingly difficult for NSOs to convince their populations to participate in the census and use the resulting statistical data, especially when doing a field-based enumeration. Partnerships, collaborations, and influencer engagement may help mitigate this trend by engaging trusted community voices. This strategy involves collaborating with, for example, local authorities, the non-profit sector, social media personalities, and businesses to convey important messages in a more targeted, relatable, and engaging manner.

62.   Because of the particular importance of the role that local entities can play in planning and assisting in carrying out the census, NSOs may wish to establish special working relationships with such bodies through separate liaison mechanisms. Areas in which such partnerships can be beneficial to both the NSO and local organizations and individuals include:

(a)   Amplifying census messaging through their owned and earned channels;

(b)   Spreading awareness of census processes, timelines, and requirements, while dispelling misinformation;

(c)   Conveying constituent information needs and concerns;

(d)   Advising on the characteristics of local populations, particularly the location of harder-to-enumerate groups (such as older persons or persons with disabilities) to determine the most effective means of carrying out the enumeration at the local area level;

(e)   Assisting with local recruitment of field staff and publicity; and

(f)   Ensuring the relevance and quality of results at the local area level.

63.   To maximize the relevance and benefits of the census for the country's population, it is essential to facilitate and encourage participation from all sectors of civil society. Informing individuals about the personal and communal advantages of taking part may facilitate their participation. NSOs should consider forming partnerships with various groups, communities, and organizations that are active in the economic, social, and cultural spheres of the country. Civil society partners can help countries with field-based censuses during all census phases, and countries with register-based censuses during data dissemination.

64.   The decision of whom to partner with and how to establish these partnerships is ultimately up to each NSO. However, potential collaborators could include local authorities, organizations representing ethnic communities, groups advocating for the disabled, religious, and faith-based organizations, housing associations, and agencies working with the homeless. These groups often have extensive networks and strong relationships within their communities, built on mutual trust and understanding. It is important to make it easy for them to participate by providing ready-made, shareable resources and information.

65.   By partnering with such trusted organizations, NSOs can enhance awareness and interest in the census among diverse groups. This collaboration can lead to increased participation, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive and meaningful census for everyone.

66.   Public and private sector partnerships have been around for some time. Influencer engagement, on the other hand, is an emerging field arising from the widespread adoption of social media. An influencer is a person with a large social media following. By working with influencers during the field collection and dissemination phases, NSOs can leverage the trust and rapport these individuals have built with their followers to enhance public understanding of statistics and their relevance to everyday life. By engaging influencers who resonate with harder-to-reach demographics, NSOs can break through trust barriers and deliver their messages in a format and language that is more accessible and appealing. This strategy not only increases the reach of their messages but also increases the likelihood of these messages being understood and appreciated, resulting in higher census completion and recruitment rates.

67.   Influencer marketing, especially unpaid, is a challenging but rewarding tactic if done correctly. Influencer reputations tend to fluctuate, so careful selection and vetting are critical to identifying the right ones. Although the influencers' interests do not necessarily need to be in the field of statistics or science, their social values must align with the NSO's and their political views must be considered to ensure that the NSO retains its political neutrality. Appealing to these values and personalizing the approach may help convince influencers to support the census.

68.   When it comes to social media, authenticity is key. Paid influencers or partners may feel constrained by organizational parameters and not produce the most authentic work or have enough room for creativity. While securing their support without financial compensation can be challenging, it is not impossible—especially if the NSO focuses on those who value fact and data-driven decision-making and have a heightened sense of civic duty. NSOs should avoid imposing strict branding or messaging guidelines, allowing influencer content to retain authenticity. Customized materials on demand can be offered and can provide reliable information about the census. This can help dispel anti-census myths and misinformation.

69.   Statistics and data, while essential, can often appear dry and difficult to understand. Influencers and other civil society partners can help bridge this gap by translating complex information into content that is easy to digest and relate to, especially during data dissemination. For example, an influencer could use a short video to explain the impact of commuting statistics on daily life, using simple language and relatable examples. This not only makes the information more interesting but also shows its practical implications, making it more relevant to the audience. As a result, respondents may not only be more willing to use census data and support collection but also spread awareness through their extensive personal networks.

G.   Segmentation, Target Audiences, and Harder-to-reach Audiences

70.   Segmentation is the process that helps bring key collection-impeding issues to light and incorporate them into a targeted, differentiated census communications campaign. It is an exercise that uses data to divide audiences into specific, relevant, approachable groups based on characteristics, behaviour, and preferences. The main purpose and objective of audience analysis is to use this information to make data-driven decisions on how to communicate the census impactfully and efficiently. This exercise will help identify harder and easier-to-reach groups and determine the best tactics, budget allocation, and creative approach to reach these audiences effectively.

71.   Segmentation takes place in the census pre-enumeration phase and has the strongest influence on the success of the population and housing censuses and the quality of data produced.

72.   It is recommended to start by identifying key public issues impeding census collection. They should be defined based on the existing situation of the country, considering the demographic, economic, ethnic, language, and religious structure of the population. It is necessary to identify citizens' concerns to define the target audiences, as well as to select appropriate implementation methods to reach these groups effectively, inform them about the census, and foster a more positive attitude toward it.

73.   Some basic issues common to countries with enumeration-based censuses relate to those individuals who:

> (a)   Refuse to participate in social or communal activities;
>
> (b)   Provide unreliable information about themselves; and
>
> (c)   Are difficult to locate, especially the more mobile youth.

74.   Specific issues can include the following:

> (a)   Regions within the country experiencing political and social instability, where the relationship between citizens and government authorities may be volatile;
>
> (b)   The existence of groups reluctant to engage in public activities;
>
> (c)   Lobbying efforts or individuals aiming to voice opposition to the census due to concerns over cost, perceived intrusion, confidentiality breaches, or ethical considerations.

75.   In particular, the public's concerns may include that the census is/will be used for one or more of the following:

> (a)   For fiscal (taxation) purposes;
>
> (b)   To build a government database;
>
> (c)   For the oppression of minority national and religious groups;
>
> (d)   To reveal illegal migrants;
>
> (e)   To identify and control 'anti-social elements' and persons on the outside of established society.

76.   Moreover, respondents could be concerned that criminal elements will impersonate census-takers to gain access to property or personal information for the purposes, for example, of identity theft.

77.   Once the key issues are identified, the next step is to pinpoint harder-to-reach audiences by analyzing their shared demographic and psychographic traits. These audiences can be both broad and specific. For example:

> (a)   Socio-demographic groups:
>
> (i)   Population in particular age groups (infants, children of school age and teenagers, men under 30, older people);

(ii)   Social groups by employment type (schoolchildren, students, the employed, housemakers, the unemployed population);

(iii)   Professional groups;

(iv)   Inhabitants of inner cities or other densely urban areas, and (in contrast) people living in remote rural areas;

(b)   Groups with specific concerns or sensitivities, or those living in particular circumstances (who may include):

(i)   Illegal migrants;

(ii)   Persons without a fixed or legal residence;

(iii)   Uncooperative landlords may not wish to report the presence of tenants such as economic migrants;

(iv)   Persons working far from their usual residence and family, or who may find it difficult to participate in the census procedures due to long periods of stay at work.

(v)   Inhabitants of areas where there are ethnic or religious tensions or conflicts.

78.   Setting clear objectives at the outset of the project is crucial. It is necessary to define goals to be achieved through segmentation, such as improved marketing effectiveness or enhanced audience understanding. Then, the NSO should assess what is already known about the audience and identify the gaps in knowledge that the project should address. This should be followed by planning how the results will be used. Developing an implementation plan will help apply the findings of the segmentation effectively and establish key performance indicators to measure success.

79.   To make an audience analysis and segmentation project a success, it is essential to work with a solid foundation of research and understanding of the resources available within the NSO. The NSO should begin by identifying the data already available and the teams that can contribute to the project, such as methodologists, the communications or marketing team, and the business office. They should then determine which data points and variables are essential for a comprehensive understanding of the target audience. They should outline the data available within the organization, keeping in mind privacy laws and regulations. These data might include demographic information, consumer behaviour patterns, or previous marketing response data. If internal data gaps are identified, such as a lack of behavioural or psychographic data, engaging external service and data providers may be needed.

80.   Once the segmentation is complete, the last step is to turn these insights into effective marketing strategies. The first step is identifying the most responsive segments from the analysis. Tailored messages should be developed which speak directly to the needs and preferences of these groups. For example, if a segment is identified as being particularly responsive to digital advertisements, more resources should be focused on online marketing efforts for that group. Similarly, if another segment prefers more direct communication, the use of mailings or face-to-face interactions should be considered. Aligning the marketing strategies with the preferences of each segment will increase engagement, improve response rates, and make the most of the budget. The results should be reviewed regularly, and the strategies adjusted as needed to ensure continued effectiveness.

H.   Recruitment

81.   Field staff recruitment is essential to a successful census field enumeration. Attracting quality candidates helps reduce attrition rates and census costs and ensures performance. Such country-specific factors as low unemployment rates, social polarization, political instability, conflict, the short-term nature of census jobs, and pandemic after-effects may make it difficult to recruit for the census. The level of wages, and flexible working conditions, may not be sufficient to motivate people to apply and then stay in the job.

82.   To enhance recruitment for census operations, it is recommended to develop a comprehensive understanding of the potential applicant pool, if resources are available.

Analyzing data from previous census cycles and current labour market trends will help identify where candidates are located, how they consume information, and what motivates them. This analysis should focus particularly on harder-to-recruit candidates to maximize the return on investment, while also refining strategies for easier-to-recruit groups through tailored messaging and channel selection.

83.   Here are a few examples of audiences that may be interested in census jobs:

    (a)   Young adults, especially students and those still living with parents;

    (b)   Active seniors;

    (c)   Partially employed or underemployed individuals;

    (d)   Those who worked for the census in the past (census alumni).

84.   A robust communication campaign is essential to a successful census recruitment campaign. Such a campaign should not only raise awareness about census jobs but also explain the job conditions and responsibilities clearly and connect the work to higher values that resonate with potential applicants. The use of simple, direct messaging and appealing visuals across selected communication channels will increase engagement. If resources are available, paid advertising can be an effective way to reach a wider audience, especially for hard-to-recruit populations.

85.   Despite the focus on digital strategies, traditional local information distribution remains vital. Not everyone has online access, so local partners and staff, where available, may actively distribute information locally. They know their neighbourhoods the best and can be very effective if equipped with the right communication tools. Advertising-mail cards can also be effective at reaching audiences that do not have access to the Internet (e.g., those in remote and rural areas).

86.   Partnerships with local municipalities, non-profit organizations, businesses and influencers can extend the reach of recruitment efforts significantly. These collaborations can help disseminate information more broadly and attract a diverse range of applicants, if they are equipped with the right tools. Many municipalities and non-profit organizations have a vested interest in promoting local jobs.

87.   The recruitment process itself should be clear and straightforward from the start. Communicating the tasks, requirements, process, and timelines upfront will help manage applicants' expectations. Keeping candidates informed with regular updates is crucial to maintain their interest and commitment. Simplifying the recruitment process to focus only on essential requirements will ensure that it is inclusive and does not deter marginalized populations. Additionally, shortening the recruitment timelines, or at least actively communicating with applicants throughout the recruitment process, can prevent candidates from seeking other employment opportunities.

88.   Training for census employees should include clear guidelines on communications, social media engagement, and the use of communication tools in the field. Field staff need to be well-prepared to identify and address local communication issues and to request support when necessary.

I.   Communication Aspects of Dissemination

89.   Following the data collection phase of the census, a second information campaign is recommended to inform the public about the census results, to demonstrate how the statistical data collected are being used, and to thank the public for participating in the census. Reassurances can also be given that privacy and confidentiality will continue to be respected. This will have the effect of strengthening the NSO's image and credibility.

90.   The benefits from the census are realized when the data and insights are published, and audiences can use them to make decisions. To maximize the use of census data, it is vital to consider how data will be disseminated, both in countries which adopted a field enumeration methodology, wholly or in part, and in those which used an entirely register-based approach.

91. When developing census outputs, NSOs should consider delivering a range of products to meet the broadest possible user needs – from the citizen who wants to see themselves in the data to the expert analyst who wants programmatic access to the data so they can do their analysis.

92. Creating user personas that cover the breadth of different user types helps to focus on meeting user needs. For example, technical users and expert analysts may welcome the ability to build their own data sets based on their needs. For citizens, the focus should be on accessible and engaging ways to interact with census insights. Interactive content, such as census maps, has broad appeal, enabling users to find, explore, and compare data in their local areas.

93. To enhance data comprehension, NSOs can employ relatable scales such as football pitches (or other culturally-relevant references) and visual aids to illustrate population density effectively.

94. The following recommendations apply when determining suitable formats and content:

(a)   Consider how users access information.

(i)   Mobile telephone usage of the internet is now generally more common than desktop machines. Making content smartphone-friendly will open it up to a broader audience.

(ii)   Be proactive. Social media can be an effective way of communicating the main points or letting people know about content on the census website. A schedule of upcoming releases is also helpful for people interested in the census results.

(b)   Make sure it is easy to find main insights quickly.

(i)   Many users do not have much time. This could be anyone from a policy decision-maker to a business owner or everyday citizen. Consider which information the users need and want most, and make sure the format helps people find this information quickly.

(ii)   Format features such as main points, infographics, and clear chart titles that tell the main takeaway message from a visualization can be useful.

(c)   Local or personally interesting information helps engagement.

(i)   Many users will be interested in local information and people like them, but will be less confident or unaware of how to extract that from a spreadsheet or report. Interactive resources can help users access this without completing complex spreadsheet operations or reading long reports.

(ii)   People relate emotionally more to people than to numbers.

(iii)   Customizable tools that allow users to see themselves in the data or facts for their area can be successful. For example, a quiz allows users to see data for people of their age.

(iv)   Including quotes from users' experiences, either from qualitative data or charitable organizations, can help people to understand what the data means in the real world. Equally, the occasional use of graphics depicting people can help create this emotional connection, especially where the subject is not controversial.

(d)   Tools that explore data (maps, charts, interactives) add value.

(i)   While more and more countries are offering interactive online tools to better serve all varieties of user needs in an efficient manner, the main census results should be clearly presented, not requiring users to search through an interactive tool. However, users may have specific questions that are not addressed in the provided commentary. Maps and mapping tools can be very helpful for researchers and other users wanting to compare parts of the country. Interactive charts that allow users to select places and see where a local area sits in a distribution help save users time and effort. It also reduces the barriers to understanding the content.

1. Raising Awareness of Census Outputs

95. Since the benefits of the census are only realized when users use the data, it is important to ensure that users and potential users are made aware of the availability of census outputs.

96. NSOs can use owned channels, including social media, websites, and newsletters to promote the outputs to their audiences.

97. The range of census results provides an opportunity to create assets that raise awareness of specific results, web pages and tools.

98. Video, especially animation, can help to communicate the breadth of results and how the public can access them. 'Talking head' videos with subject-matter experts allow more in-depth information about topics to be communicated. It is recommended to drip-feed these over weeks and months to take advantage of the large amount of data.

99. If a budget is available, paid advertising to promote general and specific results to target audiences should be considered. NSOs can also engage with social media influencers to promote results to niche audiences.

100. The results will be of interest to the media. In addition to news releases, census authorities should consider creating opportunities to promote census data. For example, inviting the press to a launch event at a school is a great way to promote key population figures.

101. To optimize the benefits of the census, effort should be put into promoting its value to new or potential users and explaining how they could benefit from census data. Using case studies of how different organizations from the private, public, and non-profit sectors already benefit from census data, is an effective way to illustrate how people and organizations can benefit from the census data.

102. Representative and membership organizations serve as crucial links between specific industries, professions, and their members. Census articles published in their magazines and websites can effectively reach professionals interested in census data. Offering webinars that explain the available data and how to access it, along with providing toolkits and factsheets on the website, are practical approaches to help individuals get started with census data.

J. Evaluation and Performance Measurement

103. Understanding the effectiveness of communications and publicity strategies is crucial for optimizing investments and achieving organizational goals. By analyzing performance metrics, NSOs can gain insights into the strongest areas and identify opportunities for improvement.

104. Setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals that align with the NSO's objectives provides a clear roadmap for communications efforts. For example, if an objective is to increase awareness of the census, a specific goal could be to achieve a 20 per cent increase in impressions within six months.

105. When developing communications and publicity goals, it is important to choose relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These metrics serve as valuable tools for measuring performance and tracking progress. Some useful KPIs include:

(a) Impressions: the number of times that content is displayed or viewed, regardless of clicks;

(b) Website traffic: the number of visitors to the census website;

(c) Conversion rate: the percentage of visitors who take a desired action (e.g., completed their census online after clicking an online advertisement or downloading census data product);

(d) Social media engagement: the quality and quantity of comments and shares;

(e) Media mentions: the quality and quantity of media mentions;

(f)   Partnerships: the number of partnerships acquired;

(g)   Respondent relations: the number of questions received from the public and the number of questions answered.

106.   Some key performance indicators can be tracked consistently, setting baselines for reference. At the beginning of the census cycle, reading and understanding the post-mortems from previous census cycles is crucial. This, along with new research and analysis, will help determine the baseline for the population's pre-campaign awareness of the census. If conducting a census test, the communications should also be tests and their performance metrics assessed, to shape the next campaign.

107.   Throughout a census campaign, it is recommended to analyze KPI data and feedback from the public regularly. This will allow for identifying trends, areas for improvement, and opportunities for campaign optimization. Data analytics tools are very useful to collect and organize these data. A post-campaign analysis is recommended, using qualitative and quantitative data. A post-mortem report ensures effective campaign performance assessment and aids in understanding the population's needs for future initiatives.

108.   While strategies and campaign goals may change over census cycles, it is important to keep track of the same KPIs over time. This will ensure consistency and provide historical data evidence of the communications and publicity team's efforts and results.

109.   It is important to note that while census KPIs focus on operational aspects of the census, the results also play a crucial role in informing policy decisions that impact people's lives. Census data provides vital insights into the demographic, economic, and social characteristics of the population, enabling policymakers to make informed decisions on issues such as resource allocation, infrastructure planning, and the provision of essential services. However, quantifying the direct impact of census results on specific policy decisions is inherently challenging. Nonetheless, the census remains a critical source of evidence-based information for policymakers at all levels of government.

IV.   Conclusion

110.   The efforts of the Task Force on Communications and Outreach have culminated in a comprehensive set of recommendations that address the multifaceted challenges posed by the evolving media landscape and digital platforms. Through shared practices, discussions, analysis of survey results and findings, and lessons learned from our own census communications strategies, we have recognized the necessity of updating the 2020 Recommendations and formulating new ones to enable NSOs to develop successful and targeted communications strategies adapted to their various needs.

111.   The draft recommendations on Communications and Outreach for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses are presented for comments and discussion.