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

Sex and gender

Developing the Recommendations on Sex and Gender

Note by the Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Sex and Gender*

Summary

This document includes the draft section on Sex and Gender for the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses, and details the process followed to develop this new section, which was present only in very limited form as part of the chapter on Demographic Characteristics in previous editions of the Recommendations. 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 and the latest developments in the topic area.

* The Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Sex and Gender currently consists of the following members: Amy Smith (United States of America, chair), Maria Lucia Franca Pontes Vieira (Brazil), Laurent Martel (Canada), France-Pascale Ménard (Canada), Deirdre Lynch (Ireland), Fiona O'Riordan (Ireland), Gillian Wall (Ireland), Yael Feinstein (Israel), Eugenia De Rosa (Italy), Mauricio Rodríguez Abreu (Mexico), Snezana Remikovic (Montenegro), Micah Davison (New Zealand), Clare O'Connell (New Zealand), Marija Stevanovic Ciric (Serbia), Joanne Evans (United Kingdom), Sophie John (United Kingdom), Zoe Caplan (United States), Rae Ellis (United States), Andrew Roberts (United States), Maria Isabel Cobos (United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)), Iliana Vaca Trigo (UNSD), Baktybek Kainazarov (United Nations Population Fund Kyrgyzstan).

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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 included sex and a very limited discussion of gender within the chapter on Demographic Characteristics. The scope of the task force was to expand and revise this section to take account of growing needs and new methodological developments in the measurement of sex and gender.
3. Section II presents the draft section on sex and gender for the CES Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses.
4. 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.

II. Draft text for the section on sex and gender for the Recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses¹

A. Sex (core topic) and gender (non-core topic)

5. Sex is designated as a core topic and relates to biological attributes that result in one being labelled as male or female. Disaggregating the other demographic, social and economic characteristics by sex is important, as is the use of sex data for survey controls. Some countries are moving from collecting information on sex to collecting information on gender. This may or may not be accompanied by the collection of information on sex at birth in order to derive information about gender. While these concepts are often used interchangeably, they are distinct from sex.
6. The sex (male or female) of every individual should be recorded in the census or taken from the appropriate administrative record for countries using a register. Sex-disaggregated data is a fundamental requirement to understand variations in the experiences of males and females when it comes to a host of demographic, social and economic characteristics such as ageing, marital status, living arrangements, educational attainment, labour force status, migration and disability.
7. With growing awareness of the distinction between sex and gender, as well as the increasing visibility of gender minority populations, some countries have started collecting information on gender or gender identity in their census. Thus, at this time gender is recommended as a non-core topic for countries that want to measure the gender diversity of their population in a census. *Because sex and gender are often conflated, it is important to make clear what is being measured.* Gender is broadly defined as a multidimensional concept that includes psychological, social, and behavioural aspects. Gender identity is generally an individual's self-perception or sense of belonging as a man/boy (masculine), woman/girl (feminine) or non-binary person (a person who is not exclusively man or woman). Transgender people are those whose sex at birth and gender do not match.
8. There is diversity in the way in which countries approach inclusion of sex, gender or both sex and gender in data collection. This is highly dependent upon cultural context.

¹ The section will be presented in the final Recommendations publication as a stand-alone section, and the corresponding sub-section on sex in the chapter on Demographic Characteristics will therefore be replaced with a cross-reference to this section.

B. Testing and Research

9. While the existing methods to collect information on gender demonstrate significant differences, all are supported by rigorous ongoing testing programmes. Countries have published robust research on topic development, question wording and response options based on knowledge from cognitive testing and focus groups. Information exists on field testing that includes examining collection methods by mode, with considerations for the privacy of respondents. Country collaborations have occurred to understand data processing methods and evaluations along with discussions about balancing the need to publish granular data juxtaposed against population size.

10. There are still many areas where additional gender research is needed. There is limited information about proxy reporting, where one person responds for all household members. Since research shows that gender identity forms at a variety of ages and that the number of people that one shares one's identity with can vary, there are potential implications that are yet to be understood.

11. Another consideration is whether there are distributional differences when comparing responses for the core variable of sex compared to responses for either sex assigned at birth or gender. This consideration may become important where census data is used in downstream products such as intercensal estimates, population estimates or as survey controls. To measure a small population like the transgender population accurately, the alignment of sex and sex assigned at birth are relevant issues. Currently, Statistics Canada is using census data on gender as survey controls for their monthly Labour Force Survey.

C. Census Data Collections

12. Countries that have collected information on gender have used two different approaches.

13. Canada, Ecuador and New Zealand used a question design commonly referred to as the 'two-step approach', where a question on gender is paired with a question on sex at birth. Canada and New Zealand modernized their most recent censuses using gender as the default demographic for output. Canada now asks, "What was this person's sex at birth?" as opposed to "What is this person's sex?" as used in the 2016 census. This question's response options of male and female remained unchanged across censuses. The next question asked, "What is this person's gender?" with response options of "Male" and "Female" with a write-in option "Or please specify this person's gender."

14. Ecuador used a similar two-step approach, although they had more detailed response options for the gender question, including "Male", "Female", "Trans male", "Trans female", "Nonbinary" and "Does not know/Does not respond."

15. It is important to note that when using a two-step approach, it is necessary to use responses from both parts of the question to derive gender.

16. Censuses in the United Kingdom took a different approach, and this varied between countries. In England and Wales and in Scotland the core sex question was maintained, asking "What is your sex?". Later in the England and Wales questionnaires, respondents were asked "Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?", with response options of "Yes", "No" and a write-in response. In Scotland the second question asked, "Do you consider yourself to be trans or have a trans history?" with response options of "No" and "Yes, please describe your trans status", with a write-in. The question includes the note "Trans is a term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were registered at birth."

17. The data from England and Wales showed that while there is confidence in the gender identity estimates at a national level, there are some patterns in the data that are consistent with – but do not conclusively demonstrate – that some respondents may not have interpreted the question as intended, for example, people with lower English language skills in some areas. At the time of preparing these Recommendations, findings have not yet been released

in Scotland to determine how the second question asking about being “trans” or having a “trans history” performed.

D. Incorporating Population Register Data

18. In the New Zealand census, if the sex assigned at birth or gender responses did not include a usable value, information was gleaned from administrative data sources where the concepts align.

E. Recommendations

19. While research on how to measure sex and gender is evolving, it is imperative that the existing validated research guide census data collections. This is particularly important for small and vulnerable population groups. Using the existing methods, it is important to determine whether collecting sex as a core variable is sufficient in the census or if information on gender is needed as a non-core topic. To inform this decision countries may consider whether collecting information on gender adds value withing their policy, public opinion, and legal context given the sensitivity of the topic.

III. Conclusion

20. The draft recommendations on sex and gender for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses are presented for comments and discussion.
