

Summary of main proposed changes from 2020 Recommendations

1. Cross-reference has been added to the new expanded section on sex and gender drafted by Task force 9, which will be inserted as a separate section within this chapter.
2. Discussion of the reasons for sex disaggregation has been reduced, as this is now more adequately covered in the sex and gender section.
3. Terminology has been revised to better align with current accepted practice, e.g. replacing 'the elderly' with 'older persons' and eliminating the term 'opposite sex'. Where 'sex' is referred to within classifications, it is noted that it could be replaced with 'gender' where relevant to national contexts.
4. A category has been added to the de facto marital status classification for non-coresident partners.
5. Language has been simplified where possible throughout the chapter.
6. Text contained in boxes other than definitions has been converted to normal body text.
7. It is proposed to re-order the chapters so that the chapters on demographic characteristics and on household and family characteristics are contiguous (in the 2020 edition, they are separated by six other chapters).

Demographic characteristics

Introduction

The demographic characteristics of sex, age and marital status are core variables that are fundamental in classifying and reporting on other information from the census to foster understanding of socioeconomic and demographic issues. In the case of sex and age, it is essential to record this information for every person for whom census information is collected or compiled. If this information is incomplete, it should therefore be derived or imputed for census purposes rather than being reported as 'not stated'. In the case of marital status, as discussed below in paragraphs [xxx], it is recommended to collect this information at least for persons aged 15 years and over.

A population census may provide an opportunity to collect the data needed for estimating fertility at both national and sub-national levels. The use of a population census as a vehicle for producing fertility estimates is particularly important in countries lacking a reliable registration system for the production of vital statistics, because of the opportunity that census data provides for estimating vital rates that would not otherwise be available. Even in countries with complete birth registration, however, some demographic topics – such as numbers of children born alive, children still living, and age at marriage or union – are still of great value as they can be cross-tabulated with socioeconomic or other characteristics collected in the census, which may not be possible with registration data alone.

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

[Section II of “Developing the recommendations on sex and gender”, ECE/CES/GE.41/2024/9]

Age (core topic)

Information on date of birth should be collected to obtain information on age. This yields more precise information than collecting data on exact age at the census reference time. Collecting information on the date of birth allows for the tabulation of data in two ways: by year of birth and by completed years of age. Date of birth also allows age to be calculated relative to points in time other than the census reference time.

Since age is one of the most important variables collected in a census, used in many tabulations and analyses, information on age must be as complete and accurate as possible. If information on age is missing, imprecise or contradictory, imputation based on other individual or household entries should be undertaken.

In countries where the exact date of birth may be difficult to collect for a significant proportion of the population, the census questionnaire could allow calendar quarter or season of the year to be substituted. However, in census questionnaires with specifically designated response boxes for day/month/year, such write-in responses as season of the year would not be codable. In some cultures, newborn children may be considered to have age 1: in countries where this practice is common, care must be taken to distinguish these cases.

Impossible ages, such as children older than their parents, should be edited. If age in years is collected, attention must be given to parents incorrectly reporting their infant's age in months. Additionally, care should be taken in collecting and assuring the quality of information on the age of older persons, since misreporting can be more common at the older ages.

Children, young persons and older persons are age groups often requiring special focus in thematic analyses of census data. Any census characteristic in which age is expected to play a role (such as socioeconomic characteristics) should be readily cross-classified against age. Countries should ensure that the definitions and classifications used in the census meet the needs of likely users of data on these groups.

Legal marital status (core topic)

Legal marital status is defined as the conjugal status of each individual in relation to the marriage laws or customs of the country (often referred to as the *de jure* status).

Information on the legal marital status of each person should be collected at least for persons aged 15 years and over. However, since the minimum legal age (or the customary age) for marriage varies between countries, and since the population may also include young persons who have been married in other countries with lower minimum ages, it may be necessary to employ a lower age threshold for the collection of information on legal marital status.

The following basic classification of the population by marital status is recommended:

- (1.0) Never married

- (2.0) Married
- (3.0) Widowed and not remarried
- (4.0) Divorced and not remarried.

All persons living in consensual unions (see paragraph xx) should be classified as 'never married', 'married', 'widowed' or 'divorced' in accordance with their *de jure* (legal) status.

In countries with legal provision for registered/legal partnerships or marriage of same-sex or same-gender couples (depending on whether the legal provisions apply to sex or to gender), additional categories may be included in the category of the 'married', for example:

- (2.1) Spouse of a different sex (or gender)
- (2.2) Spouse of the same sex (or gender).

Alternatively, the classification may be expanded, for example, as:

- (1.0) Never married
- (2.0) Married
 - (2.1) Spouse of a different sex (or gender)
 - (2.2) Spouse of the same sex (or gender)
- (3.0) Registered or other legal partnership
 - (3.1) Partner of a different sex (or gender)
 - (3.2) Partner of the same sex (or gender)
- (4.0) Widowed and not remarried
- (5.0) Divorced and not remarried.

In some countries there may be a policy or user need to distinguish male same-sex couples and female same-sex couples. This can be achieved by considering the combination of sex and legal marital status according to this expanded classification.

The term 'spouse' may be replaced, in collection instruments and/or in dissemination products, by terms appropriate to the language and the culture of each country, such as 'husband/wife'. Many languages lack a gender-neutral word for 'spouse', or the word may carry certain connotations that may affect understanding or willingness to answer. Thorough testing for acceptability and impacts on data quality should be conducted, both when introducing any expanded classification to account for same-sex or same-gender partnerships, and when choosing terms to be used in questionnaires and for dissemination.

A separate category for 'legally separated' may be necessary in countries where the legislation includes provisions for this status, as distinct from 'married' or 'divorced'. Some countries may also wish to identify separately within the 'married' category, those persons who are remarried.

Unless a separate category is used for annulled marriages, individuals whose marriages have been annulled should be classified according to their marital status prior to the annulled marriage.

De facto marital status (core topic)

De facto marital status is defined as the status of each individual in terms of their actual living arrangements within the household being enumerated, regardless of that person's legal marital status. Information on this topic should be collected for persons of the same age categories as those for whom information on the legal marital status is collected.

The recommended classification is:

- (1.0) Person living with spouse or partner (registered or in a consensual union) having usual residence in the same household
- (2.0) Person not living with spouse or partner (registered or in a consensual union) having usual residence in the same household.

Two persons are taken to be partners in a consensual union when: they have usual residence in the same household, they are not married to, nor in a registered/legal partnership with, each other, and they have a marriage-like relationship to each other. People in such a relationship are also known as 'cohabiting partners' or a 'cohabiting couple'.

Some countries may wish to facilitate analysis of **non-cohabiting** consensual unions; that is, where the criteria above are fulfilled with the exception of having usual residence in the same household, in which case countries should add to the above classification (3.0) 'Person with spouse or partner (registered or in a consensual union) **not** having usual residence in the same household'.

An optional distinction may be made within category (1.0) between (1.1) 'Person living with spouse or partner of a different sex (or gender)' and (1.2) 'Person living with spouse or partner of the same sex (or gender)'.

Information on *de facto* marital status can also be derived from information collected on topics related to household and family characteristics of persons, characteristics of family nuclei and characteristics of private households, based on the relationship to the reference person or the full household relationship matrix where used. Where such a matrix is not used, a specific question on living arrangements needs to be asked (in censuses employing direct enumeration).

In countries where census information is derived from administrative registers, data on consensual unions may not readily be available.

Total number and sex of children born alive (non-core topic)

Information on the total number of children born alive can be collected in the census in countries in which such information is needed to estimate fertility using indirect techniques. In countries with unreliable or incomplete registration of births, census information on this topic can be useful for assessing the completeness of the registers and for estimating levels of lifetime fertility of older cohorts.

This topic can be sensitive for mothers who have experienced stillbirths. This should be considered carefully in the testing programme. If included in the census, information on total

number of live-born children should be collected for all women aged 15 years and older. In populations where significant fertility occurs at younger ages, the lower limit should be adjusted accordingly.

The data collected on total number and sex of live-born children should, in principle, include all children born alive during the lifetime of the women concerned up to the census date (that is, excluding fetal deaths and stillbirths). Adopted children should not be included. The number recorded should comprise all live-born children, whether born within the present marriage or other form of partnership or a previous one, and whether born within a union or outside of one, within the country or abroad, and regardless of whether or not such children are still alive at the census reference time, or where they are living.

Date(s) of legal marriage(s) of ever-married women: (i) first marriage and (ii) current marriage (non-core topic)

Information on dates/duration of marriage can be valuable for fertility statistics, and extends the knowledge that can be derived from data on number of live-born children. In the case of women who have been married more than once, information may be obtained on the dates of both the first marriage and the current marriage.

For women who are widowed, separated or divorced at the census reference time, 'date of/age at/number of years since the dissolution of first marriage' should be collected. Information on dissolution of first marriage (if applicable) provides the data necessary to calculate 'duration of first marriage' as a derived topic at the processing stage. In countries in which duration of marriage is reported more reliably than age, tabulations of children ever born by duration of marriage yield better fertility estimates than those based on children born alive classified by age of the woman. Data on duration of marriage can be obtained by subtracting the age at marriage from the current age, or directly from the number of years elapsed since the marriage took place. Some countries may find it useful to also collect the order of the current marriage.

Date(s) of the beginning of the consensual union(s) of women having ever been in consensual union: (i) first consensual union and (ii) current consensual union (non-core topic)

Information on dates/duration of consensual union, as well as information on dates/duration of marriage, can be valuable for fertility statistics and extends the knowledge that can be derived from data on number of live-born children. In the case of women who have been in consensual union more than once, it is suggested to obtain information on the dates of both the first and the current consensual union. Information on dates/duration of consensual union(s) can be combined with the information on the date(s) of legal marriage(s).

It should be recognized that the beginning, and thus the beginning date, of a consensual union may be imprecise.