



POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES

Demographic and Social Statistics, UNITED NATIONS STATISTICS DIVISION
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/default.htm>

The United Nations Statistics Division: Important player in World Programmes of Population and Housing Censuses

Background

Under the different mandates of the World Programme, the United Nations Statistics Division as the Secretariat of the Statistical Commission, has played a pivotal role in the coordination of the World Programme by: setting of standards and methods including the preparation of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*; providing technical assistance in census operations; and the compilation and dissemination of census results from countries and areas. This is done in collaboration with the Regional Commissions and other international, regional and sub-regional organisations.

For over six decades, the Statistical Commission has supported national census-taking worldwide through the establishment of the World Programmes on Population and Housing Censuses. Related recent actions taken by the Commission, are reflected in a resolution by the Economic and Social Council in support of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses (resolution 2005/13) urging Member States to carry out a population and housing census at least once in the period 2005-2014.

Some aspects of the world situation at the time that the Statistical Commission was formed were very different to those existing today. For example, many areas that are now sovereign states and Member States of the United Nations were then described as "Territories and Dependencies". In addition, in a number of areas, only the non-indigenous population was counted during censuses. These different aspects have implications for population counts.

Development of census methodology

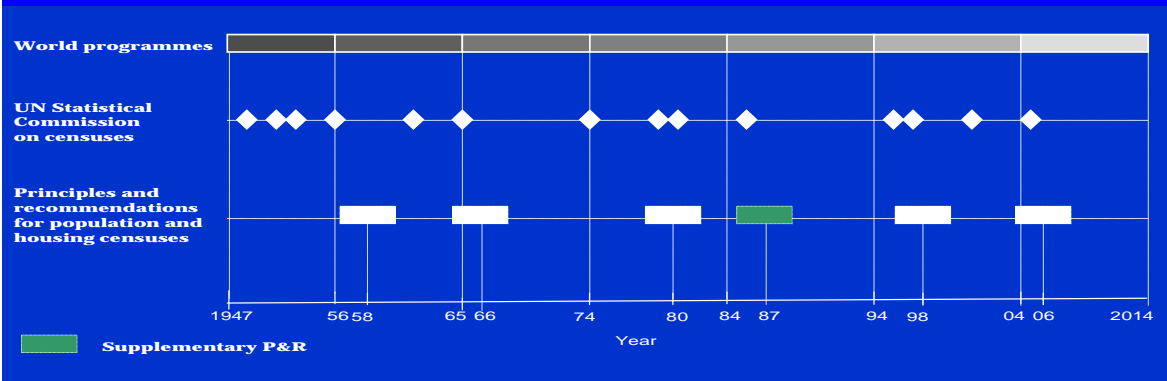
The Division has continued to play an indispensable role in the development of standards and methods related to census taking. This includes the production of technical handbooks and manuals on various topics pertinent to census planning and census-taking:

(i) *Principles and Recommendations*

As part of the World programme, for each census decade, the United Nations Statistics Division regularly prepares and updates standards and methods of census-taking. For the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the

The critical role of the United Nations Statistics Division in the World Programmes of Population and Housing Censuses

Timeline



Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session, requested that the United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with Regional Commissions and experts from Member States, revise and update the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, taking into account lessons learnt from the previous round of censuses and emerging issues. For instance, revision 2 of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* provides revised international standards on concepts, definitions and classifications pertinent to some topics; a set of recommended tabulations; an elaboration of alternative approaches to census-taking compared to the traditional approach; and has a comprehensive section on promotion and effective dissemination of census results.

(ii) Handbooks and manuals

In addition to the Principles and Recommendations, the United Nations Statistics Division produces a series of more detailed census guidelines including handbooks and manuals which are based upon national experiences and technological and methodological developments in census-taking. Such guidelines include handbooks on: *Population and Housing Census Editing*; *Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses*; *Geographical Information Systems and Digital Mapping*; the *Collection of Fertility and Mortality data*; and a technical report on the *Collection of Economic Characteristics in Population Censuses*.



Technical assistance

An integral part of the World Programme is the provision of technically sound advice that builds upon the existing strengths of national statistical/census offices while considering ways to

strengthen overall national statistical capacity in the process of conducting censuses and intercensal national sample surveys. The programme also encourages the sharing and exchange of national experiences through international, regional and sub-regional exchange programmes, workshops and advisory services.

A major goal of the advisory services is to identify common solutions to technical and organizational problems that many countries confront in the planning and conducting of censuses or large-scale national surveys. In this context, a fully fledged team of inter regional and technical advisors in the Statistics Division provided technical assistance, for decades, in areas such as census mapping, planning, management, data processing and in designing and carrying out large-scale national sample surveys.

A critical aspect of the 2010 World programme is for the United Nations Statistics Division to support effective and creative use of information and communication technology (ICT) while working within a wide range of ICT capabilities of national statistical and census offices. This will be achieved through developing guidelines and sharing experiences such as in the use of the internet in census data collection and dissemination, and also through the preparation of technical documents as described above. In addition, regional and sub-regional workshops on various technical areas of census-taking, and dissemination will be conducted as part of technical assistance to countries.

Dissemination of Census data

Dissemination of census data both at the national and international levels is paramount. It is against this background that the Statistical Commission at its 36th Session urged Member States to disseminate census results in a timely manner.



At the international level, the United Nations Statistics Division has been collecting from

countries and disseminating socio-demographic data since 1948. Data from more recent census round is available on line at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/default.htm>. For the early rounds of the World Programme, dissemination of national statistics was mainly through paper publications. Since the 1980 round of censuses a far wider range of media have progressively become available as portrayed in the table below.

Types of media for dissemination of census results by round of censuses

While paper publications are still common and necessary for the dissemination of census results, electronic media are increasingly becoming more widespread. In addition, two media have, in

recent decades, become of very limited use, namely the magnetic tape and the floppy disc. Responding to, and maximizing the benefits of varied dissemination media, has provided a challenge to countries, the United Nations Statistics Division and other players in finding appropriate mixes of media to maximize the dissemination of census data in acceptable, user friendly formats and in a timely manner.

In recent years an added spectrum of dissemination is the compilation of metadata a database, by the United Nations Statistics Division, describing national censuses as well as questions asked during censuses. Such information will continuously be updated and will be disseminated through internet.

| Medium | Before 1974 | 1975 to 1984 | 1985 to 1994 | 1995 to 2004 | 2005 present |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Paper copy | +++ | +++ | ++ | + | + |
| Microfiche.film | + | ++ | | | |
| Magnetic Tape | + | ++ | + | | |
| Floppy disc | | + | +++ | + | |
| CD-ROM | | | ++ | +++ | ++ |
| Internet | | | + | ++ | +++ |
| DVD | | | | + | + |