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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## Report

### **Second meeting of the Task Force on the Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries, 2020 Census Round Cairo, 22-23 January 2017**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt, held the second meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries, 2020 Census Round, in Cairo on 22 and 23 November 2017.

The meeting was held over five main sessions. Participants discussed the latest technological developments in data collection, a study on publishing data from population and housing censuses, working papers on undertaking population and housing censuses using multiple data sources (electronic and traditional), developments in implementing censuses in the 2020 round and lessons learned in that regard at the regional and international levels, and the workplan of the 2017 census task force. The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations.

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## **Introduction**

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in collaboration with the Regional Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt, held the second meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries, 2020 Census Round, in Cairo on 22 and 23 January 2017.

### **I. OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. The second meeting of the Task Force concluded with the following recommendations:

(a) Document census experiences through national offices in Arab countries, and benefit from the experiences of Egypt and Jordan in using tablet computers and other technological methods in the various census stages;

(b) Benefit from global experiences, especially that of Poland, in data collection through various means, taking into account cost and quality factors and country specificities;

(c) Take into account disparities in capability between countries and their situation at the time of adopting various data collection methods, such as electronic methods or those based on administrative registers or multiple records, requiring joint efforts between organizations and countries in completing in-depth preparation, on the one hand, and efforts by organizations in preparing and evaluating requirements for shifting from traditional censuses to multiple-source censuses, on the other, including administrative registers;

(d) Enhance the capacity of census cadres and equip them with the necessary skills to select and manage external resources aiding in implementing census processes, using modern techniques;

(e) Prepare studies on emerging issues such as conducting censuses during crisis and instability, using census data in sustainable development indicators, and post enumeration surveys for electronic censuses;

(f) Continue implementing the ESCWA plan for the task force of the 2020 round of the population and housing censuses in Arab countries, in collaboration with partners (Regional Office of UNFPA, Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics, Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf), and present the plan to the task force for comment;

(g) Provide technical support to Arab countries on population censuses, in collaboration with relevant United Nations and regional organizations;

(h) Urge countries to conduct post enumeration surveys and evaluate the findings using different methods, and assess the use of census results in research and planning processes;

(i) Improve statistical capacity to develop and implement strategies on publishing census results;

(j) Enhance dialogue between census data producers and users, including by gauging the opinion of data users when formulating questionnaires, and organize workshops and conferences to launch results;

(k) Customize table tabs, especially for indicators on ethnicity, migratory status and disability, in line with country specificities;

(l) Include sustainable development indicators in census questionnaires to the greatest extent possible.

## II. TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

3. The meeting was held over five main sessions. Each session concluded with a discussion on key issues.

### A. FIRST SESSION

4. The first session covered using technology in censuses. The census task force for the 2020 round gave a presentation on the topic, focusing on its achievements and on the experiences of several countries in conducting censuses.

5. Mr. Ismail Lubbad, Statistician at the ESCWA Demographic and Social Statistics Section of the Statistics Division, reviewed the task force's achievements. He compared the number of Arab countries that had conducted censuses between 1990 and 2010 with the drop in countries conducting censuses in the 2010 round. He considered the census data collection methods used between the 2010 and 2020 rounds, especially the use of technology or administrative registers, and publication strategies for census results. He also reviewed the challenges facing Arab countries in census planning, and the importance of regional and international technical cooperation.

6. The representative of Jordan presented his country's experience in the 2015 population and housing census, focusing on various mechanisms, especially electronic methods. He said that the 2015 census had seen a qualitative leap in census implementation and in data work in Jordan, since technology had been used at all stages. He reviewed the various stages of census preparation and divided them into several categories, including preparation, developing digital maps, identifying census enumeration areas by office; and processing technology tenders covering infrastructure and implementing enterprise; technical processes that include questionnaire design, guidelines, and training and tests; administrative and financial processes, including expected costs, and human resources and logistical support; and field processes, including providing human resources and distributing them over work areas, and other field requirements. He outlined the challenges faced by the Department of Statistics of Jordan when conducting the electronic census, notably the lack of previous comprehensive experiences in conducting electronic censuses at the regional and international levels, and the weak expertise of Department personnel in implementing electronic censuses thus requiring assistance from private sector enterprises. He also focused on the strengths of the electronic method in terms of keeping pace with fast developments in modern techniques, extracting instant results that expedited reaching final findings compared with censuses using paper questionnaires, better application of quality standards and regulations covering procedures and data compared with traditional methods, and guaranteeing data privacy and security at all stages (collection, transfer, processing, storage and dissemination). He concluded by stressing the need for a qualitative leap in implementing the Department's work to ensure that all future surveys and censuses were electronic.

7. The representative of the Real Software Company gave a presentation on the electronic programme the company designed for some Arab countries, such as Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (Sharjah). He said that the programmes ensured data privacy as a prerequisite for agreements between partners and staff responsibility, stressing the importance of coordinating between all stakeholders in the census process, especially between field staff and operation room staff, and the need to train staff and researchers to use technology. The representative of Sharjah gave a presentation on the emirate's 2015 population and housing census using tablets and digital maps, focusing on preparation, implementation, oversight and quality control. He indicated the use of the self-enumeration method to receive questionnaires from some families over the Internet, and the formation of a taskforce in the communications centre to help them complete the questionnaires and check data quality. Centres for operation control, field work and data checking had also been established. He concluded by reviewing the census results, including electronic dissemination through a database, analytical reports, digital maps of buildings' electronic installations, and using the current census to prepare for the 2020 census that is expected to be partially or completely conducted using data from administrative registers in the emirate.

8. The representative of Egypt gave an overview of preparations for the 2017 census in Egypt. He reviewed the census' preparatory and implementation procedures, implementation measures and the technology system used. He said that the preparatory process included forming committees, such as a communications committee and a high commission for the census and preparing maps. He reviewed the census trials and the shift from censuses using paper questionnaires to electronic censuses. Implementation measures covered fieldwork structure and its stages. The census technology system included technology infrastructure, applications, maps, technical equipment, and technical services, and assistance and support for users.

9. The representative of Palestine reviewed the Palestinian experience in implementing the first stage of the 2017 population, housing and establishments census using modern technology – the first census in Palestine to use tablet computers and modern technology. He said that the data collection method relied on comprehensive interviews in all counting units using a long computerized questionnaire on a tablet. He enumerated key reasons for using technology and geographic information systems (GIS), such as time, effort and cost savings, fast result publication, the application of automated screening during data collection thus improving their quality, and the ability to monitor field work and staff. He summarized the census preparatory process, which included preparing information technology infrastructure, updating census maps in line with the Palestinian Localities Guide 2017, preparing census and application models, and implementing trials and a pilot census. He reviewed the various census applications and systems used in Palestine, and result dissemination methods. He concluded by mentioning key challenges such as current political circumstances, lack of technology and GIS expertise to implement the general census (which resulted in contracting an external company), and deficits in the estimated budget.

10. The representative of the Sudan gave a presentation on the sixth population and housing census in the Sudan, covering measures to shift from paper questionnaires to electronic censuses. He reviewed ongoing preparations, including forming an expert group, establishing a partnership between the National Information Centre and the National Statistical Office, setting up information centres in states to support the census, providing electronic requirements and covering their costs, and requesting a technical consultation from the UNFPA to review requirements, budgets and activities. He added that two censuses would be conducted in the Sudan: a housing census, and an agricultural census.

11. The representative of Algeria gave a presentation on using technology in data collection for the 2018 general population and housing census in Algeria. She focused closely on each key stage of the census, covering preparation, implementation, and data analysis and dissemination, as well as field work preparations. She considered technology use in the design stage, in logistics provision and in implementing data collection methods, and developing tailored software to that end. In conclusion, she outlined key challenges, such as training human resources, ensuring data privacy, taking into account language aspects when entering data, and the time required to test all applications and programmes, while focusing on rapid response measures to resolve technical difficulties during field work.

12. The first session concluded with discussions on the following key issues:

- Coordinating with all partners at all stages of the census;
- Consulting with data users;
- Coordinating and communicating between field staff and operation room staff;
- Exchanging expertise between countries;
- Training staff and researchers to use technology programmes developed for the census;
- Using technology during all census stages to improve data quality and accuracy;
- Ensuring data privacy.
- Raising public awareness on technology use in the census.

## B. SECOND SESSION

13. The second session covered the dissemination and use of census data, Arab countries' experiences, and the importance of publishing individual census data.

14. Mr. Ahmed Hussein, a statistics expert, presented a study on disseminating census data to highlight emerging methods in that field, and the quality of products required by decision-makers and policymakers. He stressed the importance of benefiting from census results in national development planning, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and providing the indicators adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session held in March 2016. The study reviewed key experiences of developed countries across the world in publishing the products of population and housing censuses to better identify those that could be presented to users in the 2020 census round. The study affirmed the need for countries to develop strategies to publish census products before completing data collection processes. He underscored the importance of consulting users to provide products in line with their aspirations and those of decision-makers, researchers, academics and civil society organizations. He set out some recommendations on achieving a qualitative leap in census product dissemination.

15. The representative of Jordan reviewed his country's experience in publishing data of the 2015 population and housing census. He stressed the importance of statistical data in formulating policies, developing and evaluating plans, decision-making, evaluating and monitoring performance, measuring progress at different stages, conducting international comparisons, promoting scientific and academic research, convincing donors to provide assistance, and building trust with data users. He considered statistical data publication policies that focused on not politicizing statistics, on disseminating quality data and making them available to all social groups, and on monitoring the needs of data users and the ability to access data through the latest data publication technology. He covered methods for information provision and publication, including statistical reports, newspapers, blogs, conferences and information banks. He tackled the challenges and obstacles facing census data users, such as data not meeting user needs, difficulty in accessing information, doubts surrounding data quality and methodology, low statistical awareness, weak coordination and trust, and insufficient material and human resources. He said that the latest technologies were used to formulate the 2015 Jordanian census and implement it at all stages, including in geographical preparations, GIS use, interviews, and data collection in the field. Using the latest technologies to conduct censuses permitted the timely publication of data.

16. The representative of Tunisia gave an historical overview of censuses in the country where 12 censuses had been conducted since 1921, including five carried out by the National Institute of Statistics (1975, 1984, 1994, 2004 and 2014). He said that the general population and housing census was the main source of official statistics on the population and various geographic data, and provided accurate statistical data for development work at the local, national and regional levels. He considered the various consultation stages on data publication, including internal consultations on the weaknesses of previous censuses in the area of data dissemination and use. He stressed the importance of consultation with the national census committee on the needs of relevant indicators, of cooperating with UNFPA to prepare strategies on census data publication, and of using GIS to disseminate data. He reviewed the publication schedule, including data collection, disseminating the initial census results followed by the detailed findings, publishing key analytical publications on the contents of the questionnaire, and distributing a sample of census publications and other related publications.

17. The representative of Morocco gave an overview on housing and population censuses in his country, on a census indicator and map database, and on national and regional reports and publications, focusing on the importance of using data in decision-making. He said that before independence (1921-1951), the Moroccan censuses had covered population counting only, and had been conducted at irregular intervals. Following independence (since 1960), censuses had been conducted every 10 years and included, in addition to population data, demographic, social and economic indicators. He added that technology had been employed to publish the 2004 census data, using compact discs or an online database.

18. Mr. Ragui Assaad gave a webex presentation on the publication of individual census data using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series of the University of Minnesota. He said that the programme provided researchers with free individual data from various years and countries, and aimed to protect, coordinate and integrate census data across the world and facilitate access to them. He stressed that the programme took into account international principles and standards on individual data privacy.

19. The second session ended with a discussion on the following key points:

- The importance of coordinating between data users and producers and all stakeholders;
- The need to tackle awareness and media issues in census processes;
- The necessity of ensuring data quality before publication;
- The importance of using technology to disseminate accurate and timely data.

### C. THIRD SESSION

20. The third session considered the various methods of census data collection, including a presentation on a report covering the readiness of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to implement population and housing censuses using administrative registers in the 2020 round: challenges and opportunities, and the 2011 Polish census using multiple methods.

21. The representative of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf presented a paper on the 2020 unified registration census project in GCC countries. She said that the project to use administrative sources and conduct a unified and coordinated census in GCC countries was one of 11 statistical projects under the Centre's statistical strategic plan 2015-2020. She reviewed coordination issues between GCC countries on census data (time reference), the data basket based on the third revision of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for the Round of the 2020 Censuses, the theoretical basis of censuses, output tables, and a detailed preparatory plan for the period 2015-2022. She considered the technical support provided by the Centre, including holding meetings of the unified census committee 2020, organizing national and regional workshops, and preparing technical papers.

22. Mr. Janusz Dygaszewicz, Director of Programming and Coordination of Statistical Surveys at the Central Statistical Office of Poland, presented a paper on using administrative registers in population and housing censuses. He reviewed the Polish experience in extracting data and indicators from multiple sources. He considered the transition from traditional to modern censuses, and the numerous preparatory and implementation stages of population and housing censuses.

23. The third session concluded with a discussion on the following key issues:

- The importance of multiple data sources to provide all indicators;
- Evaluating census data sources before adopting them;
- Conducting an evaluation of administrative registers as a source of census data;
- The need to include disability indicators as part of census main topics.

### D. FOURTH SESSION

24. The fourth session included a roundtable discussion on census issues, such as censuses and sustainable development indicators, the link between censuses and population registers, developments in the third revision of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for the Round of the 2020 Censuses, and censuses in conflict-affected areas.

25. Mr. Ismail Lubbad presented a paper on general population and housing censuses and sustainable development indicators. He stressed the need to categorize SDG indicators by income, sex, age, ethnicity and race, migratory status, disability and geographic location, among others, in line with the Fundamental

Principles of Official Statistics (General Assembly resolution 68/261). He said that 78 SDG indicators depended on calculations of the total population, and that censuses should cover 52 topics (26 fundamental topics and 26 non-fundamental topics). He added that censuses directly contributed to calculating demographic and social indicators related to the SDG indicators.

26. Mr. Marwan Khawaja, Chief of the ESCWA Demographic and Social Statistics Section of the Statistics Division, presented a paper on the link between censuses and population registers. He said that evaluating the comprehensiveness and coverage of death statistics had previously depended on indirect methods using census data and indicators. Results were used to develop life tables rather than measure mortality. Alternative methods included linking censuses to population registers; in other words, linking data from two or more sources such as censuses and registers. That method had attracted increasing interest because of big data. He reviewed the challenges of linking processes, including coverage in censuses and registers, data quality, incomplete data, and data privacy.

27. Mr. Ismail Lubbad presented a paper on the third revision of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for the Round of the 2020 Censuses to focus on new developments and recommendations recently discussed at the United Nations. He considered census methodology, population and housing census planning, organization and management, census processes, and topics covered in population and housing censuses. He said that the third revision had been prepared to include modern techniques in information technology and mapping, financial costs, changes in international concepts and classifications, and international comparisons. He considered traditional census methodologies, those relying on registers, and those using both. He reviewed the following related recommendations: allocating specific tasks to external sources (maps, training, data collection methods, printing, data entry, advertising, etc.), ensuring that statistical offices were responsible for the final product from external sources, for overseeing and benefiting from external expertise to build staff capacity, and for guaranteeing quality control. He stressed that the quality control programme employed a methodology to document all types of mistakes, and its measures aimed at determining solutions, lessons learned and recommendations for future censuses. He tackled topics that had been added to the revisions, including the availability of resident parking spaces in buildings and access to buildings, and the revision of classifications including bathing facilities (separate, within the dwelling, outside the dwelling, shared), building type (residential or non-residential), construction material of outer walls, floors and ceilings (wood, bamboo, mud, etc.), and rental costs (free, partial or complete rent). He added that designing the questionnaire and incorporating the internationally recommended topics should take into account a country's national and local needs as provided by the census, data comparability at the international level, topic relevance, and availability of national resources to conduct a census.

28. Participants discussed challenges in conducting a census in conflict areas, including having to halt census measures because of the security and political situation, as was the case in Yemen. Censuses were replaced with surveys in Libya, where short questionnaires were used. It was also necessary to coordinate and collaborate with United Nations agencies and other organizations to ensure the success of the census. Participants also discussed migration and displacement as issues that should be resolved. They agreed on the need to convince politicians on all sides of a conflict to conduct a census, and to ensure collaboration between relevant organizations with military camps to facilitate the census.

#### E. FIFTH SESSION

29. The fifth session covered the workplan of the 2017 census task force, focussing on the following:
- (a) Respecting the privacy of all countries, especially concerning migration;
  - (b) Documenting and evaluating statistical work, especially efforts relating to censuses;
  - (c) Exchanging expertise to achieve a qualitative leap in statistical systems and not rely on foreign experts;



- (d) Highlighting the importance of collaboration between countries and of transferring regional expertise through the census task force for the Arab region and the website;
- (e) Standardizing concepts between Arab countries and ESCWA;
- (f) Dividing countries by their census methodology to support and benefit them;
- (g) Measuring data quality and user satisfaction;
- (h) Selecting indicators that take into account the region's particularity;
- (i) Agreeing that censuses are a main source of data;
- (j) Preparing a paper on indicators that can be measured through censuses;
- (k) Sharing training programmes between countries to participate and benefit;
- (l) Exchanging technical support, information and implementation mechanisms between countries;
- (m) Following technological developments in statistical work;
- (n) Referring to studies, surveys and registers for data to achieve the SDGs, which cannot be provided through censuses only;
- (o) Focusing on the following five topics in the 2020 round: using administrative registers, the role of social networks, tablet computers, the Internet, and disseminating processed individual data;
- (p) Discussing the impact on statistical work and censuses of the Arab region's instability caused by political conflict, a lack of security and migration, resulting in work delays and resorting to other sources for its completion;
- (q) Stressing the need for international collaboration in providing technical support and training;
- (r) Underscoring the importance of commitment and collaboration to ensure the success of statistical work in the Arab region.

30. The list of documents distributed to participants is set out in annex II to the present report.

### **III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

#### **A. VENUE AND DATE OF THE MEETING**

31. The second meeting of the Task Force on the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries was attended by participants from 12 ESCWA member States, representing national statistical offices and possessing practical and applied knowledge in population and housing censuses. Representatives of the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf and Real Soft also attended, in addition to an international and a regional expert, an expert from the Arab Institute for Training and Statistical Research and experts from UNFPA in Cairo. The list of participants is set out in annex I to the present report.

#### **B. OPENING**

32. Mr. Abu Bakr El Gendy, President of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt, opened the meeting. He welcomed participants, saying that Egypt was in the process of implementing a census

electronically given the importance of technology in collecting high-quality and accurate data. He mentioned the collaboration between Egypt and Jordan, which resulted in benefits from the Jordanian experience in that field.

33. Mr. Luay Shabaneh, Regional Director of the UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States, welcomed participants. He focused on the importance of commitment to international and professional standards to ensure the success of statistical work. He stressed the importance of the current meeting, which coincided with countries' work to implement the 2020 round, and to discuss related issues such as technology use and administrative registers. He underscored the need to transparently exchange experiences between countries to benefit from the positives and avoid the negatives. He considered the impact of population movements in the Arab region caused by the political situation on statistical work in general, and on censuses in particular. He stressed the commitment of UNFPA to supporting censuses in general, and the 2020 round in particular, in collaboration with all stakeholders.

34. Mr. Marwan Khawaja closed the opening session with a statement in which he thanked the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics of Egypt and the UNFPA Regional Office in Cairo for their collaboration in organizing the current meeting that had been held pursuant to the recommendations issued at the first meeting of the Task Force on the 2020 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in Arab Countries (Amman, 8-9 November 2015). He said that censuses, civil registration and vital statistics were all priorities for the Section, indicating several major challenges in the Arab region facing statistical work and affecting the preparation and implementation of censuses. He stressed the importance of collaboration between Arab countries to benefit from expertise in developing statistical work.

#### C. AGENDA

35. Participants adopted the provisional agenda as follows:

##### **Opening of the meeting Meeting goals and events**

##### **Using technology in censuses**

- Achievements of the census task force of the 2020 round of population and housing censuses in Arab countries;
- Presenting country experiences.

##### **Publishing and using census data**

- Study on publishing census data;
- Arab countries' experiences;
- Publishing individual census data.

##### **Methods for collecting census data from multiple sources**

- Report on GCC countries' willingness to implement a population and housing census using administrative registers in the 2020 round: challenges and opportunities;
- Presentation by Ms. Duaa al-Harban, Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf;
- Conducting censuses using multiple sources: the 2011 Polish experience.

**Roundtable discussion on issues and developments relating to censuses**

- Linking between censuses and population registers;
- Developments in the third revision of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for the Round of the 2020 Censuses;
- Censuses and sustainable development indicators;
- Censuses in conflict areas.

**Conclusion and way forward**

- Workplan of the 2017 census task force;
- Conclusion and recommendations.

Annex\*

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