

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL**

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/SD/2010/IG.1/7(Part III)
20 August 2010
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Statistical Committee
Ninth session
Beirut, 13-15 October 2010

Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda

**PROGRESS ACHIEVED IN THE FIELD OF STATISTICS SINCE THE EIGHTH SESSION
OF THE STATISTICAL COMMITTEE****PROGRESS MADE BY THE TASK FORCE ON THE 2010 ROUND OF POPULATION
AND HOUSING CENSUSES IN THE ESCWA REGION****Summary**

The Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses was established pursuant to the recommendation made by the Statistical Committee of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) at its sixth session, which was held in Beirut, from 6 to 8 October 2004.

The present report provides an overview of the activities undertaken by the Task Force since its inception, including organization of several meetings, studies and other accomplishments. It addresses obstacles preventing the Task Force from achieving a number of its objectives, and the vision that will guide its work in the future.

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Introduction

1. The Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses was established pursuant to the recommendation made by the Statistical Committee at its sixth session held in Beirut from 6 to 8 October 2004, in which it called upon ESCWA to form a regional task force in charge of coordinating the efforts of countries of the region in planning and conducting population and housing censuses.¹

2. The objective of the Task Force is to support the resolution adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission, in March 2005, to launch the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses and implement it during the period from 2005 to 2010. The World Programme aims at achieving the following three objectives: (a) identifying a set of international principles and recommendations for census-taking; (b) conducting one census at least in member countries during the period from 2005 to 2014; (c) disseminating the results of the census in a timely manner. The Programme also aims at promoting the use of agreed statistical classifications for the collection and dissemination of census data.

I. TASK FORCE MEETINGS

3. The Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses has held six meetings in the period from 2005 to 2009. The meetings were attended by representatives from national statistical offices as well as by experts from ESCWA, the United Nations Statistics Division and other regional and international organizations, in addition to a number of regional and international experts. Those meetings are the following:

- First meeting: Cairo, 12-13 November 2005;
- Second meeting: Abu Dhabi, 20-21 May 2006;
- Third meeting: Beirut, 10 November 2006;
- Fourth meeting: Cairo, 5-6 September 2007;
- Fifth meeting: Beirut, 23-24 March 2009;
- Sixth meeting: Beirut, 1-3 December 2009.

A. FIFTH MEETING

4. Following is background information on the fifth meeting of the Task Force and a summary of its objectives and recommendations.

(a) *Background information*

5. ESCWA organized the fifth meeting of the Task Force in Beirut, on 23 and 24 March 2009. The meeting was attended by 13 participants, including representatives of national statistical offices with extensive practical experience in conducting population and housing censuses, in addition to several statistical experts.

(b) *Objectives*

- (i) To revise the Arabic translation of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2 (PRPHCR2), and make the necessary amendments;
- (ii) To address and discuss the role of the media in census-taking;
- (iii) To discuss the organization and conduct of city censuses;
- (iv) To exchange the relevant successful experiences and expertise among ESCWA member countries.

¹ ESCWA, *Report of the Statistical Committee on its sixth session, Beirut, 6-8 October 2004*, paragraph 3 (I): "Call on ESCWA to form a regional task force concerned with coordinating the efforts of the countries of the region with regard to population and housing censuses, with the objective of unifying national censuses".

(c) *Recommendations*

6. The meeting concluded with a number of recommendations, most importantly to disseminate experiences of member countries in connection with all the phases of population and housing censuses, and to complete the revision of the Arabic version of the PRPHCR2. The recommendations of the meeting are reproduced below:

(a) Encouraging member countries, especially those which have conducted the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, namely Egypt, Palestine and the Sudan, and those which have launched the preparatory works for the 2010 round, namely Iraq and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, to post their experiences in all phases of the population and housing census on the ESCWA Web page entitled Census Net Forum; and requesting ESCWA to establish an electronic link with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in order to enable member countries to become familiar with the experiences of other countries and to view the periodic UNSD Newsletter;

(b) Finalizing the Arabic version of the PRPHCR2; in that connection, the meeting recommended that Parts I, II and III of the PRPHCR2 be evaluated by Palestine, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, respectively, and that the technically and linguistically revised final Arabic version of the PRPHCR2 be submitted no later than May 2009 to Qatar, which had assumed its translation;

(c) Requesting Qatar to revise the Arabic translation of the PRPHCR2 and to distribute the revised version to the members of the Task Force, no later than June 2009, in order for them to review the revision and send their comments thereon to Qatar; and requesting ESCWA to coordinate and follow up the revision of the PRPHCR2 so that it will be ready for use no later than September 2009;

(d) Preparing a regional supplement to the PRPHCR2 which reflects the particular characteristics of the countries of the region; in that regard, a task force was formed, comprising Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Yemen, to draw up the proposed supplement and have it ready for discussion at the sixth meeting of the Task Force;

(e) Developing statistical work, including censuses, in ESCWA member countries, and requesting ESCWA secretariat to include that matter as an item on the agenda of the ninth session of the Statistical Committee.

B. SIXTH MEETING

7. Following is background information on the sixth meeting of the Task Force and a summary of its objectives and recommendations.

(a) *Background information*

8. ESCWA organized the sixth meeting of the Task Force on in Beirut, from 1 to 3 December 2009, in cooperation with the UNSD. The meeting was attended by 18 participants who have vast practical experience in conducting population and housing censuses, in their capacity as representatives of national statistical offices in 12 ESCWA member countries, in addition to several statistical experts.

(b) *Objectives*

9. The primary objective of the meeting was to discuss the Arabic translation of the PRPHCR2, and make the necessary amendments thereto; to exchange the relevant successful experiences and expertise among ESCWA member countries; and to discuss the future work plan of the Task Force.

(c) *Recommendations*

10. The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations, most importantly to complete the revision of the Arabic version of the PRPHCR2; to enhance cooperation among member countries in various statistical areas, in particular population and housing censuses; and to prepare an evaluation report on the work achieved to date by the Task Force and the vision guiding its future work, in order to submit it to the Statistical Committee at its ninth session, which will be held during the third quarter of 2010. Those recommendations are reproduced below:

(a) Emphasizing the need for consultation and coordination among national institutions involved in census-taking; and raising awareness of census data users from various sectors, including research centres, universities, civic organizations, the public and decision makers, through their involvement in the census-taking preparatory process since its early stages, in order to determine their needs in relation to census data and to enhance their role in the process;

(b) Stressing that the population and housing census constitutes a national process concerning all segments of society, not a mere statistical project single handedly organized and implemented by the national statistical office; therefore, calling on national statistical offices to establish strategic partnerships with public, private and civic sector institutions, as well as with the academia and regional and international agencies and organizations;

(c) Adopting comprehensive quality control techniques during the various stages of census-taking, primarily that of field data collection, on a daily basis by using available tools;

(d) Requesting the Task Force members to submit to ESCWA, no later than 17 December 2009, their feedback on the work achieved to date by the Task Force, including information on its achievements, obstacles to its objectives and the vision guiding its future work;

(e) Requesting the Chairman of the Task Force to cooperate with ESCWA secretariat in preparing a mid-term assessment report (2005-2009), on the work achieved to date by the Task Force and the vision guiding its work for the period 2010-2014, to be submitted to the Statistical Committee at its ninth session in 2010 for consideration and adoption;

(f) Inviting statistical offices in member countries to cover the expenses related to the participation of their representatives in the meetings of the Task Force; and inviting those countries to host future meetings of the Task Force by rotation on the basis of their alphabetical order, given the difficulties facing the Task Force in funding the organization of its meetings and the participation of its members;

(g) Inviting ESCWA and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics to organize in 2010 and 2011 training courses on population and housing censuses in relation to the multiple uses of compiled census data;

(h) Requesting one party to revise and correct the three parts of the PRPHCR2; and calling on ESCWA secretariat to make final amendments to the Arabic translation of the PRPHCR2, so that it may be ready for use in early 2010;

(i) Requesting ESCWA to convey a message of thanks, on behalf of the Task Force members, to Qatar, in recognition of its efforts invested in translating the PRPHCR2 into Arabic, and a message of thanks to Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia, in recognition of their efforts invested in conducting the PRPHCR2 translation.

II. TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES

11. During the period under review, the Task Force carried out the following activities:

(a) Pursuant to the recommendations of the first meeting of the Task Force, four working groups were established with a view to reviewing the PRPHCR2, as follows:

Working group	Topic	Tasks	Countries
One	Housing censuses and their characteristics	Proposing components of housing characteristic issues for the 2010 round, on the basis of lessons learned from the 2000 round	Bahrain, Egypt (chairman), Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Saudi Arabia
Two	Basic components of the principles and recommendations for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses and related outcomes	Determining the basic issues for formulating principles and recommendations for the 2010 round of population censuses	Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Oman, Palestine (chairman), and Yemen
Three	Information and communication technologies and reliance on outsourcing	Studying the use of ICT, including optical character readers and handheld devices, in data collection	Egypt, Oman, Palestine and the United Arab Emirates (chairman)
Four	Modern approaches and means used in undertaking censuses	Formulating ideas on new methodologies for administering censuses, including rolling censuses	Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon (chairman), the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen

(b) Pursuant to the recommendations of the fourth meeting of the Task Force, the following three working groups were formed to revise the Arabic translation of the PRPHCR2:

- Group one, Palestine, to revise Part I;
- Group two, Jordan, to revise Part II;
- Group three, Saudi Arabia, to revise Part III.

III. TASK FORCE ACHIEVEMENTS

12. The Task Force achieved many studies conducted by its experts. It also assisted representatives of a number of national statistical offices in the preparation of country papers on the experience in census organization. The main activities carried out by the Task Force during the period under review are presented below.

(a) *Studies and working papers*

- (i) Suggested amendments to the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1;
- (ii) Use of the set of questions raised by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics;
- (iii) Rural and urban areas: national and international definitions;
- (iv) General population and housing census: a statistical project or a nationwide process?

(b) *Presentations and country papers*

- (i) The experience of Qatar in the use of the geographical information system;
- (ii) The experiences of Oman and Palestine regarding the role of the media in census-taking;

- (iii) The experience of Egypt in relation to lessons learned from conducting the 2006 census;
- (iv) The experiences of Egypt and Jordan, and their recommendations with regard to the use of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) in census data processing;
- (v) The experience of Egypt in relation to the use of the Intelligent Character Recognition software in the 2006 general census, lessons learned and recommendations to use that technology;
- (vi) The experience of Oman in outsourcing in census-taking;
- (vii) The experience of Oman in organizing a general census through the use of handheld devices and in monitoring data quality for the 2010 census;
- (viii) The experience of Jordan in planning city census;
- (ix) Lessons learned from the use of the set of questions raised by the Washington Group in censuses in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Oman;
- (x) The experience of Palestine in the use of the set of questions raised by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics;
- (xi) The experience of the Sudan in conducting the 2010 round of population and housing census;
- (xii) The experience of the Sudan in the use of scanners and Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software;
- (xiii) The experience of Yemen in conducting the 2004 general census of population, housing and establishments;
- (xiv) The experience of Saudi Arabia in relation to the preparatory work for the 2010 census;
- (xv) The experience of Qatar in relation to the preparatory work for the 2010 census;
- (xvi) The experience of Palestine in preparing Census Info;
- (xvii) The experience of the Syrian Arab Republic in survey and census data quality control.

(c) *Major achievements of the Task Force*

- (i) Preparing a regional paper on amendments and proposals for revising the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses;
- (ii) Completing the translation and revision of the PRPHCR2;
- (iii) Conducting a number of studies, and enabling the exchange of experiences, knowledge and good practice in organizing and implementing general population and housing censuses, which was of great benefit to member countries; following are some examples:
 - Iraq and Saudi Arabia benefited from the experience of Egypt in using modern technology (optical character recognition and Intelligent Recognition software);
 - The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council exchanged experience and knowledge in using of technology and statistics for the 2010 general census, through their participation in the meetings of the Task Force;
 - Several countries represented in the Task Force examined lessons learned from the 2000 round and their impact on census-taking during the 2010 round;
- (iv) Activating and updating the Census Net Forum with a view to enabling member countries to access all documents and activities of the working groups on population and housing;

- (v) Reinforcing ties among census specialists representing member countries in the Task Force, thus enabling them to closely examine each other's experiences, gain expertise on all census-related topics, and enhance communication during daily activities;
- (vi) Becoming familiar with the experiences of member countries that had conducted a census, and benefiting from modern techniques adopted by those countries in data input, collection and processing, as well as in result dissemination;
- (vii) Benefiting from the participation of experts in the Task Force meetings, in particular to transfer the experiences of countries that have made strides in the use of modern techniques for census data collection, processing and dissemination; and also benefiting from the papers submitted by those experts on such specific areas as post-enumeration survey counting, pre-test experience, rural and urban, and other matters;
- (viii) Standardizing a number of statistical concepts and terms used in different countries.

IV. OBSTACLES PREVENTING THE TASK FORCE FROM ACHIEVING SOME OF ITS OBJECTIVES

13. The Task Force has faced several obstacles to the achievement of some of its objectives, including the following:

(a) Finding the financial resources necessary for the participation of experts and the preparation of studies;

(b) Following up the implementation of recommendations relating to the preparation of the following:

- A theoretical study on rolling censuses;
- A performance assessment questionnaire for the working groups;
- A paper on metadata;
- A regional supplement to the PRPHCR2.

V. VISION GUIDING THE FUTURE WORK OF THE TASK FORCE UNTIL 2015

14. During the sixth meeting of the Task Force, participants agreed on the following vision for the future work of the Task Force:

(a) Commitment by ESCWA member countries to support the work of the Task Force, through the following measures:

- (i) To provide the Task Force with the necessary financial support, by funding the participation of their candidates;
- (ii) To provide the Task Force with the necessary technical support, by responding to its needs and those of the countries in terms of studies, expertise and modern technologies in the various areas of census-taking;
- (iii) To ensure countries commitment in defining their representatives in the Task Force as the census administrators and preferably ensuring continuity of their membership;
- (iv) To host the meetings of the Task Force on a rotation basis;

(b) Cooperation between ESCWA secretariat and member countries in preparing a matrix on the working mechanism of the Task Force during the upcoming period, which shall include meeting venue, date, arrangements, agenda items and other matters;

(c) Examining the possibility of setting a standard year for census-taking in the region in 2020, and identifying the advantages of and obstacles to such a measure; or considering holding censuses at close intervals in countries with similar settings, in order for them to benefit from each other's experiences;

(d) Drafting a report on the status of census systems in member countries, including used methodologies, forms, tools and equipment, with the objective of enhancing national capabilities in the field of censuses, by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each country. To that end, member countries are advised to prepare a comprehensive paper on their experiences in census planning and implementation, and submit it to ESCWA secretariat along with all relevant technical documents, as a preliminary measure towards standardizing statistical techniques and tools used for population and housing censuses. They are also advised to post those papers on the Census Net Forum;

(e) Requesting member countries to upgrade the skills of their human resources in all areas of statistics, by organizing local training sessions on different statistical areas and inviting member country representatives to attend them. ESCWA is invited to oversee the training of local technical personnel;

(f) Establishing a skills upgrading programme for the upcoming period to be conducted through ESCWA and in cooperation with member countries and specialized agencies of the United Nations; and formulating an outline of the programme to be annexed to the report that the Task Force shall prepare and submit to the Statistical Committee at its ninth session in 2010. Each member country is responsible for identifying its training needs;

(g) Preparing a regional supplement to the PRPHCR2 which reflects the specificities of the region and addresses its experiences in census-taking, in particular with regard to the methodologies and technologies used therein. Member countries are invited to prepare the components of the supplement with the assistance of their national statistical offices.

15. The materialization of the vision guiding the future work of the Task Force requires the implementation of the following additional measures:

(a) To focus on the census documentation process;

(b) To analyse and use data, and conduct analytical studies that serve as a basis for the development of policies and programmes in the public and private sectors;

(c) To prepare scientific studies on the techniques used in conducting censuses, improving quality and diversifying means of cooperation among stakeholders, and request countries with vast experience in that area to undertake the preparation of training material and knowledge transfer to other member countries;

(d) To diversify data dissemination techniques, including the geographic information systems technology;

(e) To use census data in the preparation of population projections;

(f) To invite a group of international statistical organizations to attend all the Task Force meetings, with a view to benefiting directly from their representatives.
