



United Nations Statistics Division

## **UNITED NATIONS REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE 2020 WORLD PROGRAMME ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES: INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND CONTEMPORARY TECHNOLOGIES**

*Virtual Workshop, 27, 28, 31 January and 1 February 2022*

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

1. The Workshop was jointly organized by United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and took place online on 27, 28, 31 January and 1 February 2022. Over one hundred fifty participants from Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Togo, Tunisia, international organizations and UNFPA regional and country offices participated in the workshop.
2. Participants expressed their appreciation to the UN Statistics Division and the African Centre for Statistics of ECA for organizing the workshop. The majority of participating countries found the workshop very timely as they are in the middle of preparations to conduct their 2020 round of censuses and the workshop offered the platform to learn from the experience of participating countries that already conducted their respective national population and housing censuses.
3. The workshop took note of, and expressed appreciation for, the global and regional activities aimed at executing the 2020 World Programme of Population and Housing Censuses as presented by the workshop's organizers, namely the UNSD and the ECA. The participants welcomed this initiative, both for providing internationally adopted methodological framework for conducting population and housing censuses and for directly supporting efforts to enhance national capacities in the field of census-taking and implementation of international standards. The workshop paid particular attention to the relationship between the population and housing censuses and the compilation of the Sustainable Development Goals indicators and the African Union Agenda 2063. It concluded that census statistics are critical for producing indicators of these international and regional agendas.
4. The workshop emphasized that many national statistical offices or census agencies are facing many challenges in conducting their censuses during the Covid-19 pandemic and had to postpone their censuses operations, scheduled in 2020 and 2021, at least once already. The workshop also noted that, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a number of countries faced significant challenges in preparing and conducting censuses due to a variety of reasons, primarily financial

constraints and political instability. The arrival of the pandemic put them in even more difficult position in planning their 2020 round of censuses, as some countries have already completed census mapping and purchased electronic devices for data collection yet were not in a position to conduct enumeration. Almost all participating representatives of the countries that did not yet conduct a census in the 2020 round underlined the uncertainty related to funding census operations as the major challenge and obstacle. Due to these financial constraints and the Covid-19 pandemic, some countries were unable to carry out their enumeration immediately after the mapping. Thus, a lot of time has elapsed between the two phases, which makes it necessary to update part of the enumeration areas, thereby resulting in additional costs.

5. In that context, the workshop noted with concern that the continuity of census taking in participating countries is jeopardized, as documented by a growing number of countries that are not able to conduct censuses in regular intervals. With regard to the timing of the census in participating countries, the workshop noted that census dates are scattered all over the current census decade (2015-2024) which has adverse effects on regional and international comparison of national census statistics.
6. Participants noted with particular interest the list of core topics for population and housing censuses as recommended by the *Principles and Recommendations* and concluded that for the most part the topics scheduled to be collected in participating countries correspond to the internationally recommended ones. The workshop took note of the list of internationally recommended topics, definitions and classifications for population and housing censuses as presented in the revised set of the Principles and Recommendations. The workshop concluded that certain concepts – such as, definition of place of usual resident, disability and the new definition of work pose special challenges, and therefore there is a need for further guidance on these topics.
7. The experts noted the importance of collecting information on recent fertility and household deaths in the 2020 round of censuses in countries which do not have reliable civil registration and vital statistics. In this context, collecting information on exact date of birth and death events rather than asking questions about the occurrence of events during a reference period is advantageous in terms of analyzing the changes in the level and pattern of such events during the pandemic, particularly for countries that do not have reliable registers for such events. For example, when the question on household deaths (recommended core census topic for the 2020 round of censuses) is included in the questionnaire, the information on date of deaths in addition to name, age and sex of deceased persons should be collected and a reference date covering a 12-month or longer period should be used.
8. The workshop noted with satisfaction that all the countries in the region have engaged in digital mapping, going as far as positioning the infrastructures and all the households of enumeration areas. In addition, a number of countries have successfully used Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) in conducting their censuses and many other countries are planning to conduct their 2020 round of censuses using this technology. The participants highlighted the importance of building the capacity and expertise of the national statistical offices and using an incremental approach to the adoption of new data collection technologies thorough first experiencing this technology in other statistical activities.

9. The workshop noted that participating countries intend to employ different methods for conducting population and housing censuses in the 2020 round; these included the traditional paper-based canvasser approach and the use of combined paper-based and tablet/smartphone-based data collection. Recognizing the advantages of the use of contemporary technologies for conducting population and housing censuses, primarily the use of tablet computers and geospatial technologies, the workshop encouraged those participating countries that are still considering their main data collection method to take into consideration these technologies while making the final decision. The essential motive for the use of CAPI and portable devices lies in the fact that it results in cost savings, faster processing of data and improved quality of resulting statistics.
10. The workshop noted with satisfaction the successful South-South cooperation between countries in the implementation of the 2020 round of censuses characterized by the sharing of experiences and the loans of electronic data collection devices for mapping and enumeration. Therefore, the workshop recommends the continuation and strengthening of South-South cooperation in the implementation of the 2020 round of censuses.
11. The workshop highlighted the need to mitigate the negative impact of budget deficits to conflicts and the COVID-19 pandemic in the implementation of the 2020 round of censuses. Thus, in a number of countries (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger) the pursuit of the implementation of the census is seriously hampered by insufficient mobilization of resources and/or the prevailing insecurity in certain regions. Consequently, the workshop recommends the conduct of urgent and high-level advocacy with bilateral and multilateral donors for the mobilization of substantial resources in support of the continued implementation of the 2020 censuses impacted by the context of insecurity and/or the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, the workshop recommends the provision of technical support adapted to insecure areas for data collection and for hybrid censuses in conflict areas where enumerators cannot reach because of safety issues.
12. The participants appreciated the current initiatives by the regional development partners (ECA and UNFPA) in the use of electronic devices and satellite imageries in conducting 2020 round of censuses. They noted in particular support made by the regional partners in sharing electronic devices among countries, establishing geographic information systems and promoting the use of electronic dashboards for monitoring field enumeration operations. The use of technology, in particular the use of mobile tablets, has become a feature of the 2020 census round in Africa. The expansion in mobile connectivity across Africa and the availability of Global Positioning System (GPS)-enabled mobile devices provide new opportunities for African countries to conduct digital censuses.
13. The workshop clearly underscored the fact that mapping is one of the critical phases of the census, both in terms of planning and execution. While considerable experience in the application of Geographical Information System (GIS) has been acquired in the 2010 census round, there is still a need to specifically focus on this census component due to the extensive workload and complexity. The workshop noted that all participating countries will use GIS

technology and collect GPS location information for the purpose of mapping operations, monitoring the field enumeration and dissemination of census results, for the 2020 round of censuses. In that context, the workshop recommended that during the mapping exercise, efforts are made in identifying areas of the country that are lacking either consistent supply of electricity or internet access, in order to ensure that appropriate backup measures are taken during census fieldwork, especially when mobile devices are used.

14. Participants expressed the importance of establishing a centralized system for management, monitoring and controlling operational activities to ensure census coverage and data quality. Such a system could provide capabilities for real-time monitoring, tracking, and communication among field staff. It was also noted that such a system can be efficiently used if it is established as a part of field operations in an integrated manner with other systems used for data collection, staff recruitment and logistics. Participants specifically outlined the importance of using para-data for management and monitoring of field operations.
15. The workshop outlined the importance of coordinating with health authorities to enhance safety protocols to mitigate against the spread of COVID-19 during the conduct of the population and housing census. The coordination should be directed at: i) producing guidelines on how to prevent/mitigate COVID-19 during field operations; ii) train field staff with the procedures while performing field work, including in the use of PPEs and other precautionary actions; and, iii) develop special procedures for areas under lock-down and special population groups difficult to enumerate and for institutional households.
16. The participants pointed out that more and more countries are integrating agricultural and livestock components in the population and housing census in accordance with the recommendations of the FAO World Programme for the Census of Agriculture (WCA) 2020. In view of the many operational difficulties encountered in the integration of these components (increasing the length of the questionnaire, high burden on respondents, complexity of procedures, lengthening of data collection processes, etc.), workshop participants advised countries not to combine agricultural censuses with population and housing censuses. However, countries may collect information in their population and housing censuses that would facilitate the preparation of the frame of agricultural holdings in the household sector, as recommended by the Principles and Recommendations (paras 1:44-50). In addition, the workshop recommends approaching the FAO to discuss this issue in order to arrive at consensual recommendations to be addressed to the countries.
17. The participants recommend that such workshops be frequent and that the UNSD/ECA team document country practices in terms of methodology and definitions used, topics covered and contemporary technologies used for mapping and data collection. This may assist countries in planning their future censuses and in strengthening South-South collaborations.