

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the
2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses**
New York, 22 – 26 August 2005

**Report of the Expert Group Meeting on the 2010 World Programme on
Population and Housing Censuses**

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A. Introduction

A. 1. Background and objective of the Meeting

1. The United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses was convened in New York on 22 – 26 August 2005. The Expert Group Meeting was organized by the Demographic and Social Statistics Branch of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The purpose of this Expert Group Meeting was to fulfill the mandate given to it by the United Nations Statistics Commission at its 36th session, in March 2005, in regard to updating and revising the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

2. The Expert Group Meeting had three major objectives:

- (i) To set the general outline of the revised set of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses;
- (ii) To agree on the timeframe, the division of responsibilities and the organizational framework in regard to drafting the text of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*;
- (iii) To identify topics that need to be taken into consideration for inclusion and elaboration, as well as emphasizing the output oriented approach to censuses by agreeing on a set of tabulations that need to be produced for the smallest geographical area.

3. The meeting was attended by experts from:

- (i) Twenty-four countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Ethiopia, India, Ireland, Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Philippines, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Thailand, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the United States;
- (ii) Five United Nations regional commissions: Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); and
- (iii) Four regional organizations and institutions: Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), el Mercado Común del Sur (MERCOSUR), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT),

- (iv) Ten international organizations and institutions: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Labor Organization (ILO), UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Division, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (HABITAT), United Nations Statistics Division, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Bank.

A.2. Opening Remarks

4. The Expert Group Meeting was opened by the Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, Mr. Paul Cheung, who focused on: (1) Re-examining old beliefs and practices of census-taking, while at the same time maintaining the spirit of it; (2) The need for the revision *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* to identify and recommend a set of statistics that need to be produced at the lowest geographical level for the same point in time; (3) Reiterating the crucial importance of the four essential features of a population census: individual enumeration, universality, simultaneity and periodicity.

A.3. Structure of the meeting

5. In setting the scope of the deliberations for the Meeting, the United Nations Statistics Division presented two papers; one on general outline of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* and the other on updating census topics. These were followed by the presentations of chairpersons of the working groups synthesizing the issues that had been identified as in need of revision by each of the groups: Working Group 1 on Standards, Frameworks and a Core Set of Outputs, Working Group 2 on Census Planning and Management and the Working Group 3 on Promotion of Censuses: Making Value Visible. The regional commissions also submitted their reports in regard to implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, in general and in regard to the update and revision of recommendations for population and housing censuses, in particular.

6. The Meeting was organized as a combination of plenary sessions and working group sessions. The three plenary sessions set the scope of the meeting, followed by four sessions of the working groups and two plenary sessions discussing the working groups' reports. The final plenary session adopted the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting.

7. The Working Group 1 on Standards and Frameworks and Core Set of Outputs considered at length the determination of core topics and their commonality across the world. Rather than deciding on a list of core topics, taking into account the heterogeneity of needs across countries, the group agreed to take a thematic approach and provide clear rationales and guidelines to countries on how to decide what may be most useful to collect given their specific needs on each theme. It was agreed that within each theme to be included in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, information would be discussed and presented in a hierarchical or cascading

structure. The minimum set of information needed by a country to cover a given theme would be presented first, followed by a discussion of additional items that may also be collected through a census.

8. Working Group 1 deliberated extensively on the possible new topics for inclusion in the updated *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, such as environment, information and communication technology, agriculture and maternal mortality and deaths due to AIDS. It also discussed possible revision of some exiting topics.

9. Working Group 2 on Census Planning and Management identified and deliberated at length on the following issues: the definition and the essential features of population and housing censuses; alternative approaches to producing detailed tabulations at the lowest geographical level; methodology used for population and housing censuses; necessity and importance of censuses; integrated data collection and dissemination; the role of information technology planning and managing population and housing censuses; quality of the census and how to assess it; contracting out operations and activities for the population and housing census; issues related to funding of censuses and the design of census questionnaires.

10. Working Group 3 on Promotion of Censuses: Making Value Visible focused on providing a basis for revising and updating the sections of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* with respect to dissemination of results, census products and data utilization. The group discussed at length the need for the revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* to add additional elaboration in regard to census data dissemination as it found that not all the aspects are covered in full in the current version. The Group also discussed and agreed on specific proposals for updating the text of relevant chapters of the current version of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

11. The plenary sessions that followed the groups' discussion deliberated at length on the discussions of the groups and the conclusions and recommendations are presented below.

12. The first two plenary sessions of the meeting were chaired by Ms. Rosemary Bender of Canada, the third by Ms. Susan Linacre of Australia, the fourth by Ms. Paula Monina Collado of the Philippines and the fifth and the sixth by Ms. Rosemary Bender of Canada. The sessions of the three working groups were chaired by Ms. Susan Linacre, Mr. Akira Takami of Japan and Ms. Paula Monina Collado, respectively. The Rapporteur for the meeting was Ms. Valerie Nam of Jamaica, and the rapporteurs for the three working groups were Mr. Sylvan Roberts of the Secretariat of the Caribbean Community, Mr. Victor Alfredo Bustos of Mexico, and Mr. Gerald Haberkorn of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

B. Conclusions and Recommendations

B.1. General recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting

13. Experts acknowledged the reports and recommendations of the United Nations Symposium on Population and Housing Censuses, New York, 13-14 September 2004 and the United Nations Expert Group Meeting to Review Critical Issues Relevant to the Planning of the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses, New York, 15-17 September 2004, as well as the establishment of the Expert Group on 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, mandated by the United Nations Statistical Commission.

14. Experts requested the United Nations Statistics Division and Regional Commissions to continue the work in support of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses and its goals as endorsed by the United Nations Economic and Social Council, namely:

- (i) Conducting at least one population and housing census in every country/area in the period 2005-2014;
- (ii) Producing an updated version of the United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses;
- (iii) Providing a platform for comprehensive exchange of experiences, countries' participation, technical assistance, information and data dissemination.

15. In that context, the meeting endorsed the activities up to date, such as establishing and operating the inter-active Discussion Forum and email system for the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses, the on-line collection of questionnaires for the 2000 round of censuses, the special issues of the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* on population censuses, and the development of the Census Metadata Database.

16. Participants recognized the results of the work to date on the revision of the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* within the United Nations Statistics Division and Regional Commissions of the United Nations and decided to take them fully into account for the purpose of this meeting.

17. Experts acknowledged the need for updating and revising the current set of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* in the context of the 2010 round of censuses, while at the same time recognizing the crucial importance of these principles and recommendations for the successful implementation of the 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses. The revision and update include incorporating elaboration of issues that emerged in the 2000 round of censuses and emphasizing the paramount importance of outputs.

18. Consequently, participants endorsed the inclusion in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* of a core set of topics to be collected and of outputs that every country should produce at least once in the period 2005-2014. This core set of outputs, designed with the potential of presenting a detailed national profile at the lowest geographical level at a point in time, is required

for national policy and distribution of resources, research and advocacy, for monitoring of goals which form the basis of the recommendations of major international conferences and for improved national and international comparability.

19. Since a vast majority of countries use a population census to produce this set of detailed statistics for the lowest geographical level, the revised set of principles and recommendations will strive to provide guidance on conducting this complex operation. Aside from the conventional population censuses, many of these tabulations may be generated from administrative registers, surveys with rotating samples and other alternative approaches that need to be adequately presented in the Principles and Recommendations. The 2000 Round of Censuses had shown that a few countries had undertaken these approaches. The meeting agreed that the United Nations had a responsibility to recommend and describe those methods and techniques that are thoroughly tested for their quality, reliability and robustness.

20. Participants outlined the need for the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* to remain, aside from essential principles and standards, a living document throughout the 2010 census round, thus leaving it open for fine tuning and addition of relevant features as necessary.

21. As for the follow-up work of working groups, the meeting adopted the initiative of the Working Group on Census Planning and Management to focus in the coming period on specific issues such as outsourcing of census operations.

22. The meeting also endorsed a plan to solicit input of countries in providing descriptions of methods /approaches including their legal and technical ramifications and proposed that the Technical Subgroup on Alternative Designs coordinate a short section on conventional and alternative approaches at the end of Chapter 1 of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, while the full documentation provided by countries will be posted on the United Nations Statistical Division 2010 World Programme website. In this process the Technical Subgroup will develop an approach and a format that results in the description and criteria to describe the national statistical exercise that potentially generates population and housing statistics at the lowest geographical level while identifying the extent to which this national exercise meets the four essential features of a population census, the necessary conditions for implementing that specific method, and Internet links providing additional information and other parameters, as needed. Such census designs as conventional population censuses, register-based population censuses, a combination of administrative registers and sample surveys, sample surveys with rotating samples, and other combinations of conventional censuses and surveys and the like, will be described.

23. The meeting decided that the Technical Subgroup on Integrated Data Collection and Dissemination of the Working Group on Census Planning and Management fulfilled its terms of reference and its members will continue to contribute through the Working Group on Census Planning and Management.

24. The meeting adopted the following draft action plan for completing the work on the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*:

Step 1.

- (i) The text of the principles and recommendations is available on the internet in editable (Microsoft Word) format at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/cwp2010/docs.htm>.
- (ii) Chairs of working groups will indicate the text with no proposed changes as soon as possible, but not later than 15 September 2005.
- (iii) Members of the Expert Group that are incorporating changes will download the respective parts of the text and use Microsoft Word track changes option to introduce the new text.
- (iv) Members of the Expert Group that are submitting completely new text need to indicate its appropriate location with respect to the current paragraphs.

Step 2.

- (i) All members of the Expert Group that are contributing the text will send it to their working group for review and comments, with no more than a two-week deadline.
- (ii) After incorporating comments from group members, the text is sent to United Nations Statistics Division for consolidation not later than 15 October 2005.

Step 3.

- (i) United Nations Statistics Division consolidates all the comments, changes and new contributions, thus producing the first draft.
- (ii) Simultaneously, United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with Technical Sub-group 1.3 introduces the proposals of core topics and tabulations.

Step 4.

- (i) First draft is submitted to the Drafting Group by the end of November 2005.
- (ii) Drafting Group provides comments and suggestions that are processed by the United Nations Statistics Division by mid-January 2006.

(iii) Second draft is circulated to the Expert Group as a whole by the end of January 2006.

(iv) Comments and suggestions submitted by end of March 2006 are incorporated by the United Nations Statistics Division.

Step 5.

(i) Final draft is submitted to the Expert Group by mid-May 2006 in preparation for the Expert Group meeting scheduled for June 2006 and expected to review and approve the final version of the revised principles and recommendations.

25. The United Nations Statistics Division will produce a detailed and elaborated guidelines for the process described above and dispatch it to all the members of the Expert Group no later than by 2 September 2005.

B.2. Outline of the revised set of United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*

26. The meeting concluded that there may be a need to change the current organization of the text of some parts of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* to make it more consistent and comprehensive, and decided to refer the matter to the Drafting Group for further consideration.

27. It was also agreed that there is a need for a Preamble at the beginning of the book that will, in a succinct and condensed manner and using plain language, outline the importance and necessity of detailed statistics at the lowest geographical level in general, and the conducting of a population and housing census, in particular, this being the most used vehicle for collection of detailed statistics and for many countries represent the very foundation of their national statistical system. The Preamble should elaborate on the paramount importance of confidentiality and privacy of individual data collected by the population censuses, as mandated by the United Nations Statistical Commission's *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*.

B.3. Conclusions and recommendations on specific topics

B.3.1. Definitions, essential features and uses of population and housing censuses

28. The meeting concluded that there is a need for outlining the basic recommendation regarding the production of a set of detailed tabulations/outputs at the lowest geographical level as of the same point in time. The United Nations Statistical Commission, in its deliberations, has considered three broad statistical activities as inter-related and essential for the study of population and housing, namely (1) those of population and housing censuses; (2) household surveys; and (3) administrative registers.

29. In the part of this chapter that elaborates on uses of population censuses, the meeting concluded that there is a need to emphasize the use of census results for components of the society other than the government, such as civil society and for monitoring internationally agreed development goals and poverty mapping. The meeting also concluded that there is a need to provide a complete guidance related to role of population censuses in national statistical systems and to include further elaboration of the relationship between the population and housing census and agricultural census.

30. The meeting concluded that there is a need to provide in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* a more specific definition of place of usual residence indicating the duration of stay and how to treat special population groups such as students or workers living away from their household. There was also an agreement on the need to clearly outline the distinction between the censuses that are based on a place of enumeration or *de facto* construct as opposed to the *usual residence* (sometimes called *de jure*) construct. This is required to resolve some confusion that may arise from the use of the term *de jure* (meaning “of the law”) to erroneously imply that the count does not or should not include residents of an area who do not have the legal entitlement to reside in the area.

31. The meeting recommended that the revised version of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses needs to elaborate on the importance of inter-temporal comparability, that is, the comparability of two population censuses that are usually ten years apart. Recognizing that the primary purpose of a population and housing census is to provide a statistical representation of a country at a point in time the text should emphasize the need to avoid unnecessary change in classifications, content of the questionnaire, processing systems, tabulation programmes, and geographical boundaries.

B.3.2. Planning, organization and administration of population and housing censuses

32. The meeting concluded that there is a need to develop a brief section on outsourcing of census operations. Furthermore, the meeting recommended that United Nations Statistics Division explore the possibility of developing a special annex to the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* that will focus on practices related to outsourcing of census operations in the 2000 round of censuses. There are many issues related to outsourcing that need special attention including: the benefit of acquiring skills not readily available in national statistical offices; avoiding investment in skills not core to the national statistical offices (e.g. implementing a public relations campaign; detailed design for specialized information technology) while not outsourcing the core activities of the statistical agency, issues regarding confidentiality and privacy, potential cost-savings, overall effectiveness of outsourcing, to name a few. It was noted that many countries have experience in outsourcing elements of the census. It was also noted that any guidelines must recognize the importance of national legislative and commercial practices in deciding the precise methods used for drafting tenders and contracts.

33. Census procedural reports are an essential tool to ensure quality in all the phases of the census operations and the meeting expressed the need to have an elaboration on procedural reports, including examples, either in the main body of the text of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* or in a separate appendix.

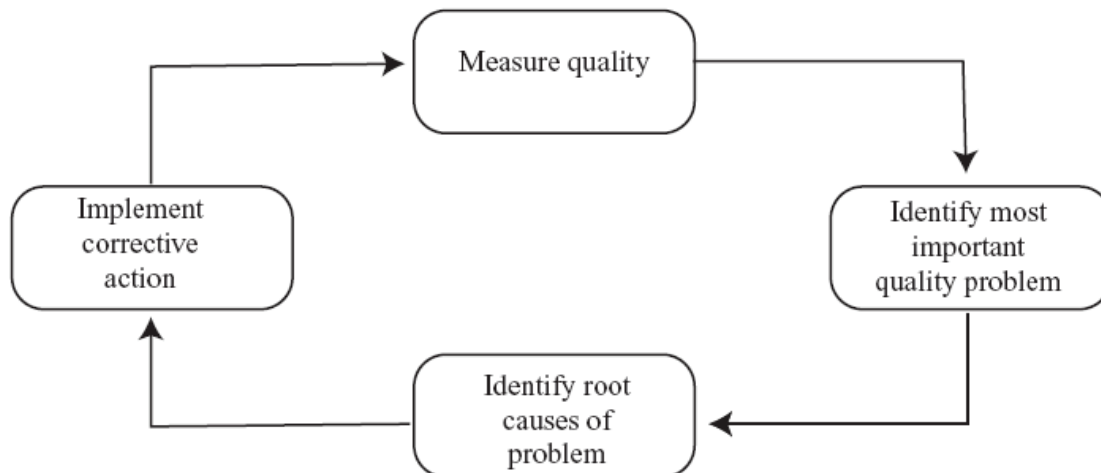
34. The meeting recommended that the revised set of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* elaborate on the use of information technology in all the phases of the census, especially the experiences related to the automatic capturing and coding of census data. It was felt that there is a need for consideration of expectations that information technology in itself can greatly facilitate census operations and data processing. In reality, information technology requires careful planning, testing and extensive training, thus there is a number of preconditions, both human and financial.

35. The meeting recommended reviewing and adding text on funding for the population and housing censuses, with a focus on the importance of beginning the process of resource mobilization early for both national and international sources. The meeting noted that it is primarily the responsibility of national governments to allocate sufficient resources for the taking of a census, while at the same time exploring variants of involving private sector in the process.

36. It was also concluded that there is a need to develop separate sections on stakeholders' consultations and census publicity, from the premise that both consultation and census publicity must be continuous processes emphasizing that the population census is a national priority.

37. In relation to the tabulation plan, the meeting concluded that the specific reference to stakeholders' consultation in preparation of the tabulation plan should be introduced, as well as the elaboration on the dissemination of results in online database format, as this dissemination vehicle allows the users more flexibility in tailoring the outputs.

38. The meeting proposed that the elaboration of quality assurance in population census, as presented in the *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.15 Rev.1, be adequately summarized in the text of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, given the importance of quality assurance, as illustrated:



39. The meeting recommended that the two United Nations handbooks on population census management and geographical information systems be used as guidance in elaborating issues related to census cartography. It was outlined that one of the essential components for the quality assurance relates to comparability of spatial boundaries over time.

40. The meeting concluded that the part on questionnaire design should include discussion of the mode of capturing the data (noting that there are now many modes available including personal interview (using hard copy forms/personal data assistants/CAPI), self enumeration (using paper forms or internet collection) and hybrid systems incorporating elements of several of the above. It is important that the questionnaire design component stresses the need to assess the opportunities and risks of each approach and the need for the questionnaire design process to be fully integrated within the overall design process.

B.3.3. Use of post-enumeration surveys in population and housing censuses

41. The meeting concluded that, despite the fact that Post Enumeration Surveys represent a burden in some cases, they are a useful instrument for assessing the overall extent of coverage and content of the census. Thus, there is a need to publicize the usefulness and the merits of these surveys, as well as list the preconditions these surveys must meet if they are to yield results (time between the census and the PES must be minimized, for example).

B.3.4. Units, place of enumeration for population and housing censuses

42. The meeting noted that in some cases several categories of population do not fall within the scope of population census, despite meeting the conditions for usual residence, such as refugees and asylum seekers. The revised set of recommendations should provide clear guidance and recommend including these populations in the census.

43. Efforts to ascertain the legal residence status of those being enumerated may have a negative impact on the accuracy of the population census. The meeting considered that the census should include people who meet the census criteria regardless of their migration status and recommended that the question on legality of stay in the country should not be incorporated in the census and that the census publicity campaign should clearly emphasize this approach.

B.3.5. Topics to be investigated in population and housing censuses

44. The meeting noted that in every round of censuses statisticians face the same dilemma: adding a new question that will provide an important glimpse in the life of the society against overburdening the census questionnaire and the public, thus jeopardizing the success of the census. Consequently, the meeting concluded that guidance should be given with regard to adding new topics after meeting the core.

45. The meeting adopted the recommendation that the presentation of topics should be based on thematic approach. This refers to identifying a broad theme, elaborating its importance, providing a justification for its inclusion in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, providing the description of the core topic and the possible additional topics as well as issues related to the dissemination of these topics.

46. The meeting considered the oral report of the Working Group on Standards and Frameworks and a Core Set of Outputs that presents detailed elaboration of the need for introducing new topics, such as maternal and general mortality, disability, security of tenure of the dwelling occupied by the household, agriculture, environment, and availability and use of ICT. The report also presents a number of topics that need updates and revisions. This report will be attached to the final Expert Group Meeting's report for reference and follow-up.

B.3.6. Promotion of user-producer dialogue

47. The meeting concluded that this chapter in the current version of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* is not properly located and decided to break it into several components placed in the appropriate chapters.

B.3.7. Census products and services

48. The meeting recommended that this chapter undergoes reorganization and changes to discuss census publications, mapping products, interactive digital outputs, customized products and services and popular publication and special audiences' reports.

B.3.8. Census data utilization

49. The meeting decided to introduce a new section on census data utilization and encourage the proactive role of the census office to promote the use of census data and to

undertake a census promotion program to include the training of a wide range of census data users.

50. The meeting recommended the addition of a subsection on ethno-cultural groups and indigenous peoples in cross-cutting social issues. It also suggested to emphasize development indicators, including these related to poverty, and internationally agreed development indicators.

B.3.9. Final provisions

51. Recalling the Report of the Statistical Commission at its 36th session where the Commission noted with concern that The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa is not undertaking activities directly related to population and housing censuses in Africa; Recalling the grave concern and dismay expressed by the African countries on the Report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa that it had no plans for the 2010 round of population and housing censuses; Noting the resolution by the Advisory Board on Statistics in Africa in May 2005 in Addis Ababa that the census be firmly put on the agenda of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; Concerned by the lack of progress and preparation at the regional level, and seized by the urgency of this matter and its potential negative impact on this world endeavor, the meeting resolves that:

- (i) United Nations Economic Commission for Africa hosts a meeting for census experts in time for preparing the report in December;
- (ii) United Nations Statistics Division assists with all its might to ensure that the expert group meeting occurs well before the planned December 2005 report;
- (iii) Member states submit their status reports in preparation for such a meeting;
- (iv) The international community is requested to provide the necessary assistance for this meeting to happen.

52. Experts requested that these conclusions and recommendations adopted by this Expert Group Meeting as mandated by the Statistical Commission be submitted to the same Commission for information at its 37th session.