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**Population and Housing Censuses in the ESCWA Region:  
Overview of the Past Census Decade and  
Considerations for the 2010 Census Resolution\***

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## **SUMMARY**

This paper describes the process of census-taking among ESCWA countries and the capacities of these countries to report census results to the UN and other intergovernmental organizations. It also focuses on some of the issues that could be addressed in the draft resolution of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

So far, with the exception of Lebanon, all ESCWA countries carried out or are planning to conduct a population and housing census before the end of 2006. Countries have the expertise and knowledge in the various stages of the organization and management of a census; this was further strengthened by ESCWA during the last biennium as capacity building efforts were implemented on the different stages of census operations. Particular emphasis was also given to the core census topics including disability.

ESCWA countries were successful in reporting the results of their census to the UN and to other inter-governmental organizations; however efforts are needed to reduce the time lapse between the process of census taking and the release of data.

Among the critical issues to be considered in the draft 2010 resolution on population and housing census are the following: a) promoting the dialogue between users and producers; b) considering census-taking as an integral part of the overall national statistical system; c) enhancing the utilization of information technology in census-taking; d) publishing detailed census results while providing users with the raw data; and e) maintaining statistical activities during inter-censal period.

## **I. CENSUS-TAKING IN THE ESCWA REGION DURING THE PAST CENSUS DECADE (1995-2004)**

1. With the exception of Lebanon whose last census was undertaken in 1932, all countries of the ESCWA region conducted or are planning to carry out a census before end of 2006. Two countries namely Bahrain and Oman have completed their census; five countries namely Iraq<sup>1</sup>, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Yemen will carry out their census by end of 2004, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates in 2005 and Egypt in 2006. (See annex 1)

2. The topics included in the census of countries cover largely the issues that were highlighted in the UN Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses. They include questions on geographical and internal migration, basic characteristics of household and family, demographic and social characteristics, fertility and mortality, education, economic characteristics, international migration and disability. However how these topics are phrased in questions and how these questions are being asked remain yet to be strengthened. Although few countries (namely Jordan, Syria and Yemen) have covered disability into their censuses in line with the revised definitions introduced by the Washington group, ESCWA countries need to further develop their questionnaire on this topic, and train the enumerators on the way to ask the related questions.

3. This paper assesses the capacities of ESCWA countries to report census results to the UN and other intergovernmental organizations, and identifies issues for consideration in drafting the resolution on the future 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

## **II. CAPACITIES OF ESCWA COUNTRIES TO REPORT CENSUS RESULTS TO THE UN AND OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

4. Most ESCWA countries have the knowledge base and the acquired technical capacities to undertake population and housing censuses. Egypt for example has a long history of census taking since 1882. ESCWA in addition contributed to increasing the knowledge of countries in this area through capacity building initiatives in the management and organization of censuses. In particular during the past biennium and under the umbrella of UNSD-ESCWA project on Strengthening Statistical Capacity in ESCWA countries, several training workshops were organized on different subjects of census operations, and participants made use of the recommendations while preparing for their censuses. For example, recommendations of economic characteristics and disability questions were included in the early draft of census questionnaires of Jordan, Syria and Yemen.

5. The capacities of ESCWA countries and in specific those of the GCC countries, to report results of their censuses to the UN and to other intergovernmental organizations, are to be further strengthened. Countries continue to provide census data to UN in various products such as printed publications and electronic format, however there is a certain lapse between the operation of census taking and the release of the data to end-users. By the time the data is disseminated and made accessible to researchers and policy makers, it might have become rather outdated. This can be attributed to different factors, most importantly the lack of

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<sup>1</sup> The census might be postponed pending the prevailing security conditions

human and financial resources necessary for the efficient, timely and cost-effective reporting of census results.

6. ESCWA countries provide users with the necessary metadata for the interpretation of published data, but the definitions, concepts and methodological approaches used sometimes differ considerably among ESCWA countries, making interregional comparisons a difficult task. Hence, comes the necessity that ESCWA countries abide by the international standards and classifications as recommended by UN specialized agencies. A clear understanding of the different concepts is fundamental for the correct measurement and applications of the definitions. For instance, it is crucial to set the boundaries of economic activity in order to know who are in the category of employed persons, and who are in the category of the unemployed persons.

### **III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION IN THE DRAFT RESOLUTION ON THE FUTURE 2010 WORLD POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS PROGRAMME**

7. Bearing in mind the critical issues of the 2000 round census on the high costs of censuses, and the public perceived vision of the importance of census operations, we can identify a number of issues that could be considered while drafting the resolution on the future 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme. These include:

#### **- Promoting the dialogue between users and producers of census data**

8. At all stages of the census, the needs of users and the constraints of producers must be considered. An in-depth dialogue between users and producers of census data provides the opportunity for users to ensure that their initial data needs are met and included in the census. Producers of data also benefit from this dialogue because they gain understanding of user needs, become aware of the issues to focus in setting census questions, thus delivering more useful products.

#### **- Considering census-taking as an integral part of the national statistical system.**

9. Census-taking should be considered as integrated with other statistical activities including sample surveys and administrative records. These data collection methods should be viewed as complementary to the provision of national data that is necessary for undertaking in-depth research and for the formulation of population and development policies and strategies. A population and housing census would provide the frame for sample design and for conducting surveys.

#### **- Enhancing the utilization of information technology IT in census-taking.**

10. With the rapid development of technology, countries are encouraged to the use of information technology, which help expedite census activities, minimize on error, improve the quality of census results and improve the efficiency in disseminating the results in a cost-effective and timely manner. The utilization of the Geographic Information System (GIS), for example, can considerably assist in the planning and management of census operations, as well as in the tabulation, presentation, analysis and dissemination of census results.

**- Increasing regional coordination in building the national capacities to plan, conduct and analyze censuses.**

11. The exchange of experiences among countries allows the possibility of exploring new techniques in the planning, collection of data, analysis, dissemination and utilization of census results. The variety of expertise would allow for fruitful and practical exchange. As an example, Egypt developed a training programme on the various phases of census and shared it with Yemen, Qatar and Syria.

12. Moreover, ESCWA, having reviewed the proposal for active involvement of member states in the United Nations 2010 World Programme on Population and Housing censuses, accords a special importance to the idea of consolidating the efforts of member states and facilitating the exchange of experience between them. ESCWA is committed to encourage its member states to become involved in this programme, and will brief them on this issue during the sixth session of the ESCWA Statistical Committee, to be held in Beirut, 6-8 October 2004.

**- Disseminating detailed census results and providing users with the raw data (of at least 10% of the census frame).**

13. Countries should be encouraged to publish detailed census results and not just the basic census findings, in order to allow researchers to undertake in-depth analytical studies. Access to raw data is sometimes necessary for researchers who may want to undertake studies involving statistical correlation procedures between the different census variables. The data generated from a census is a public good and should be made available to interested users. However, the provision of the complete raw data emanating from a census is rather impossible because of the giant electronic file involved (particularly of countries with a large population size) and because of the fear that this data might be misused in addition to the fact that confidentiality of individual data might be at risk. Thus, it is generally advised to provide interested users with around 10% of the complete census raw data, as a representative sample that enable the conducting of in-depth research.

**- Maintaining statistical activities during inter-censal period.**

14. The current changes in the size and characteristics of the population, as well as the demands for additional detailed social and economic data, brought the need to conduct inter-censal sample surveys. Countries are encouraged to conduct specialized surveys during the inter-censal period to collect detailed information on many topics, which could not be collected in a full-scale census.

## Annex 1

### DATES OF POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES IN ESCWA MEMBER STATES

Country	80 round	90 round	00 round	
	1975-1984	1985-1994	1995-2004	
			completed	planned
Bahrain	1981	1991	2001	
Egypt	1976	1986	1996	2006
Iraq	1977	1987	1997	Oct. 2004
Jordan	1979	1994		Oct. 2004
Kuwait	1975, 1980	1985	1995	2005
Lebanon			1996 *, 1997 *	-
Oman		1993 **	2003	
Palestine			1997 **	-
Qatar		1986	1997	-
Saudi Arabia		1992		2004
Arab Syrian Republic	1981	1994		Sept. 2004
United Arab Emirates	1975, 1980	1985	1995	2005
Yemen		1986, 1988, 1994		Dec. 2004

\*: Large scale sample survey

\*\* : First national census

- : No information about the date for fielding a census