

## Table 6

Table 6 presents population by religion, sex and urban/rural residence.

**Description of variables:** Data on religion are one of the types of statistics used to analyse ethnic composition of populations. However, the problems of obtaining the data are so numerous and the classifications vary so considerably from one country or area to another, that little international comparability is possible. The data have their greatest utility at the national level where the concepts and connotations are clearly understood.

The data in this table may pertain to either religious affiliation (membership) or religious belief, according to the type of question asked at the census. The classification also provides for separate identification, as appropriate, of persons adhering to ethical or philosophical systems which do not necessarily involve a belief in a higher being but which have been included by some countries in their tabulations.

The urban/rural classification is that provided by each country or area. National definitions of urban population are displayed in the regular issue of the Demographic Yearbook in the notes for table 6.

**Reliability and limitations of data:** No special reliability codes have been used in connection with this table. Statistics on population by religion and sex are subject to the same qualifications as have been set forth for population statistics in general.

Errors in national census data can arise at any stage of the collection, processing or presentation process, and these errors may limit the quality and international comparability of census statistics presented in the Demographic Yearbook. Two major types of errors in census data are often distinguished: first, coverage errors, which lead to the over-enumeration or under-enumeration of the population in the census, and second, content errors, which affect the accuracy of the recorded information for the covered population. Because coverage errors may occur more frequently among some population sub-groups than others, coverage errors may affect not only the absolute number of persons in any given category but also their relative distribution. Levels and patterns of coverage and content errors differ widely among countries and even, at times, from census to census for a specific country. Further limiting the international comparability of census statistics are variations among countries in the concepts, definitions and classifications used in their censuses.

The nature of statistics on religion makes them very difficult to compare. As has been pointed out above, it is known that the data represent religious belief or religious affiliation; the latter may be of recent origin or dating from childhood. No criterion is used by the enumerator to determine church membership and none is possible to verify belief. In some countries, respondents have the statutory right to refuse to answer the question on religion. Therefore, the statistics in this table must be used only as rough indicators of the distribution of populations by broad religious designations.

Variations in the amount of detail in the tabulations are another deterrent to comparability. Where only the totals by major religions are given it is impossible to know of what denominations or sects the totals were comprised. On the other hand, when detailed denominations are given, it is difficult to classify these sub-groups into major religions, since many sects are of purely local importance and, hence, are unknown outside national boundaries. Tabulation according to a standard nomenclature would help to solve this difficulty.

In making historical comparisons, it should be noted that data on religion presented in this and other issues of the Demographic Yearbook are similar to those presented in some earlier issues of the Yearbook but are not strictly comparable to data on religion presented in the Demographic Yearbook 1956. For further information on the nature of the non-comparability with the earlier data, see the technical notes to table 29 of the 1979 Demographic Yearbook.

The comparability of data by urban/rural residence is affected by the national definitions of urban and rural used in tabulating these data. These definitions vary considerably from one country or area to another.

**Earlier data:** Population by religion has been shown previously in issues of the Demographic Yearbook featuring population census statistics as the special topic. The last year it was published was 1993. Data were presented by urban/rural residence beginning in the 1971 issue.