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## **France's Rolling Census**

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A “rolling census” represents an alternative to the classic model of the census by means of a continuous cumulative survey, covering the whole country over a long period of time (generally years), rather than a particular day or short period of enumeration. Annual surveys may be conducted over the full course of the year or in a particular month or other shorter timeframe.

The two main parameters of a rolling census are the length of the period of enumeration (which is linked to the frequency of updates required) and the sampling rate (which depends on the available budget and the geographic levels required for dissemination purposes). For example, it is possible to build a sample framework in order to produce national results with one annual survey, regional results by cumulating three annual surveys, and small areas results by cumulating five years.

The necessary conditions to successfully implement a rolling census are to be considered on several levels:

- on a technical point of view, a good background and practise of sampling and modelling techniques;
- a sampling basis of high quality in order to allow sampling on very small units (villages or addresses in towns) and reliable extrapolations : in towns, a master address file updated every year is indispensable; and
- a large consultation about the new method and its expected results with major stakeholders and users: government, national and local administrations (who, in the French case, are also fully involved in the process of collecting data), the research community, etc.

The main advantage of this approach is the higher frequency for updating data: a traditional census provides an update every five or ten years, whereas a rolling census provides annual updates. Another advantage is to smooth the burden of the census, (it should be considered that it seems difficult to reduce the global costs) instead of the high cost and labor requirement of a traditional census. Furthermore, it is possible to improve the process year after year, and to test new technologies. The central disadvantage is that this approach no longer provides a simultaneous snapshot of the whole population, complicating comparisons between areas due to different enumeration times, even if data collected at different dates are adjusted to have the same reference period.

Rolling censuses respect the essential features of a census:

- individual enumeration: every year an individual file is produced at three levels: individuals, dwellings and households, allowing cross tabulations;
- simultaneity: data collected at different dates are adjusted to the same reference period; and
- universality: the universality of rolling census is guaranteed by the exhaustiveness of sampling basis (e.g. in France, a master address file updated with postal files

and building permission files, and checked with the communes) and the sampling rate (e.g. in France, the total sampling rate is 70%, cumulated on five years).