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Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2013/235. It provides updated information on the progress of the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme since the issuance of the previous report of the Secretary-General on demographic statistics ([E/CN.3/2013/15](#)). It contains information on the first Expert Group Meeting on Revising the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* for the 2020 round of censuses, in terms of deliberations, conclusions, timeline for the revision and expected output. It also announces the release of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* [E/CN.3/2014/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2013/235. The report: (a) provides an overview of the developments related to the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme during the period 2010-2013; (b) summarizes the work on the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*; and (c) provides information on the release of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*.

II. 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme

National implementation of population and housing censuses

2. The 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session and adopted by the Economic and Social Council by its resolution 2005/13. The World Programme recognizes population and housing censuses as one of the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making. The 2010 World Programme, in particular, aims to ensure that each Member State conducts a population and housing census at least once in the period which spans from 2005 to 2014 and disseminates the results widely.

3. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat has monitored the implementation of population and housing censuses by countries and areas throughout the census round. As an update to the comprehensive report submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session (E/CN.3/2013/15) and according to the information available at the end of November 2013, 205 countries or areas in the world have already conducted a population and housing census, 22 countries or areas plan to have a census by the end of the census round and 8 countries or areas do not have a plan to conduct a census in this round. This means that more than 91 per cent of the world population has already been enumerated in the census round. By the end of the census round, it is estimated that the coverage will increase to 97 per cent. The information on census dates for countries and areas is available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/2010_PHC/censusclockmore.htm.

III. Revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses for the 2020 census round*

4. In preparation for the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the Statistical Commission, at its forty-third session, welcomed a suggestion for the early initiation of work for the third revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (see E/2012/24, chap. I, sect. B). The call for international guidelines for countries to efficiently plan and conduct population and housing censuses emanates from the need to: (a) provide methodological and operational guidelines to national authorities in charge of producing population and housing counts; and (b) ensure the comparability of population and housing statistics at the international and regional levels. In the same context of the next census round, the Statistics Division intends to submit a draft text of the Economic

and Social Council resolution on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme at the forty-sixth session of the Statistical Commission, in 2015.

5. In that context, the Statistics Division organized the Expert Group Meeting on Revising the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, held in New York from 29 October to 1 November 2013. The objective of the Meeting was to start the process of revision of this international statistical standard for the 2020 round of population and housing censuses. More than 50 participants representing developing and developed countries from all the world's regions, as well as regional and international organizations, attended the Expert Group Meeting.¹

6. The final report of the Expert Group Meeting is available from the website of the Statistics Division. Some of the conclusions and recommendations that emanated from the Meeting are detailed below.

7. Presentations and discussions at the meeting confirmed the substantial successes of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses, which spanned from 2005 to 2014. For example, since the launch of the United Nations population and housing census programmes in the early 1950s, the 2010 census round appears to be the most successful round in terms of the number of countries that have conducted at least one census. Furthermore, the 2010 census has evidenced the unprecedented use of improved technology in all aspects of the census operation, mainly to improve the efficiency of census operations, increase the overall response, enhance the quality and timeliness of the data and meet public demand related to new lifestyles and privacy concerns. Countries have also become innovative in their methods for compiling comprehensive socioeconomic statistics at the small-area level, with potential consequences for the definition of the census. There is also reported intercountry collaboration on census operations. Challenges persist, however, including the fact that some countries have still not conducted a census for the 2010 round owing to postponements. Other noted challenges include census costs, the politicization of the census, inadequate technical capacity, concerns with data quality, and the inadequate dissemination and utilization of census results.

8. Participants recognized the continued increase in the cost of the census coupled with financial constraints as the reason why many countries have postponed their censuses, while others have adapted alternative methodologies to the traditional census. Consequently, participants stressed that a cost-benefit analysis of censuses, although very complex, should be undertaken and that countries should be encouraged to do so. It was also mentioned that census data were not used as widely as they should be, thereby limiting the benefits.

¹ The participants included experts from Brazil, Canada, China, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Malaysia, Namibia, Oman, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa, Suriname, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, the State of Palestine, the African Development Bank, Eurostat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Steering Group on Population and Housing Censuses of the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics. The Statistics Division served as the secretariat.

9. In terms of the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the following are some of the salient outcomes of the discussion at the Expert Group Meeting:

(a) The preamble needs to be expanded to provide a succinct summary of lessons learned in the 2010 round of censuses, primarily those related to major achievements and obstacles, thus leading to the rationale for adapting the international standards for census taking;

(b) Part three, on census operations and management, should be switched with part two, on census topics, as that would provide a more consistent flow between the definition and essential features of the census and its implementation;

(c) As far as census methodologies are concerned, it is necessary to elaborate in greater detail the strengths and limitations of existing methodologies. In particular, an expanded discussion on the emerging method of register-based census is expected;

(d) Changes in the definition and essential features of a census are expected to better reflect the key features of population and housing censuses;

(e) Given the extensive use of advanced technologies in all phases of the census operation, participants proposed consolidating into one chapter all issues related to the use of technology in population and housing censuses that would cover all the phases of the census, rather than elaborating these technologies under each of the specific chapters;

(f) Against the backdrop of data dissemination and utilization being the weakest parts of the census operation, participants noted that data dissemination techniques and methods had changed significantly during the 2010 census period owing mainly to improvements in technology, thereby making it possible for countries to respond to the demands of data users by providing census products in electronic media. In this context, participants requested the enhancement of guidelines on data dissemination and utilization in the *Principles and Recommendations* in order to cover conventional practices, including archiving and preserving census data and related documentation, as well as providing access to microdata and data for small areas and small populations. Participants, however, expressed concerns about preserving the confidentiality of data and proposed that the revised part on census data dissemination and utilization expound on methods for disclosure control aimed at safeguarding data confidentiality and privacy;

(g) The Meeting benefited from the presentation by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the revision of the concepts of employment, workforce and activity that were adopted by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in October 2013. At the Meeting, it was concluded that the Working Group on Population and Housing Census Topics should rely on the input of ILO in revising the definitions, topics and classifications for the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations*;

(h) As a result of the significant proposals for the expansion of and additions to the revised international census guidelines, participants expressed concern over the length of the *Principles and Recommendations* and suggested that changes be made cautiously and that not all suggestions need to be included.

10. In terms of the process, participants agreed that the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* would be undertaken through the formation of three working groups and five subgroups. The working groups and subgroups will review the text of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2*,² and make changes and updates based on the discussions, conclusions and recommendations from the Expert Group Meeting, as well as discussions and exchanges within each working group and subgroup.

11. The participants, working in groups and subgroups, developed a detailed division of labour among themselves and agreed on the following timetable:

(a) The first draft of the text of the revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* will be submitted by members to the Chairs of the working groups by 31 January 2014;

(b) The Chair of each of the working groups will submit to the Statistics Division a consolidated draft text by 28 February 2014;

(c) The Statistics Division will consolidate all drafts by 31 March 2014;

(d) The Statistics Division will organize the second Expert Group Meeting by the end of April 2014, during which the draft will be finalized, with the understanding that it will be submitted to the Statistical Commission in February 2015 for official adoption, together with the final report of the Expert Group.

12. Participants further noted the following: (a) the third revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* will be submitted to the Statistical Commission for adoption in February 2015; (b) a set of tabulations has been posted on the website of the Statistics Division, cross-referenced to the core topics that are contained in the printed version; and (c) an addendum to the printed version is possible, depending on the outcome of the ongoing debate on the United Nations post-2015 development agenda, which might have an impact on population and housing censuses in the 2020 round.

13. At the Meeting, it was noted that the Statistics Division would provide full and continuous support to the Expert Group, both in secretarial and substantive terms.

IV. *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*

14. Subsequent to the report of the Secretary-General on demographic statistics submitted to the Statistical Commission at its forty-fourth session, in February 2013 (E/CN.3/2013/15), the Statistics Division finalized the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*, the major international statistical standard for civil registration and vital statistics. The *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*, is now available online in English.³ The Statistics Division plans to hold a series of regional and subregional

² United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XVII.8

³ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.13.XVII.10. Available from <http://unstats.un.org/unsD/demographic/standmeth/principles/default.htm>.

workshops to facilitate the implementation of these recommendations in national statistical systems.

15. In addition to the production of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*, the Statistics Division maintains a civil registration and vital statistics knowledge centre (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/vitalstatkb>) to facilitate the international exchange and sharing of knowledge and information on civil registration and vital statistics. The knowledge centre documents and disseminates methodological guidelines, research articles and country practices and activities in the area of civil registration and vital statistics.
