

Side-Event at the 52nd Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission

**IMPLEMENTING THE 2020 WORLD PROGRAMME ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Thursday, 25 February 2021  
9:00 – 10:45 AM (New York time)

Virtual

Meeting organized by United Nations Statistics Division

**Background**

The worldwide social and economic disruption caused due to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to adversely impact the implementation of 2020 round population and housing censuses. National Statistical Offices (NSOs) are facing the challenge of producing timely, accurate and reliable small area census statistics during the pandemic. Countries conducting their census in the peak census-taking years of 2020 and 2021 using the traditional approach—whereby every household in the country is canvassed to provide information—are particularly under pressure to develop action plans to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on census-taking.

Since WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic on 11 March 2020, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in its role as the Secretariat to the 2020 World Programme on Population and Housing Censuses has been monitoring the impact of the pandemic on census-taking. It was expected that public health measures undertaken to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic (such as social distancing, restriction on mobility, etc.)—along with funding constraints due to reallocation of government budget to combat the pandemic and disruptions to procurement and distribution of census materials due to the attendant economic and social disruptions—might adversely impact the conduct of population and housing censuses.

The undertaking of field enumeration during the COVID-19 pandemic raises several concerns relating to data quality. Late changes in the design of field operations and extending the duration of enumeration of the population might create a high risk for the quality of census data. The concept of “usual residence” may have less relevance in the uncertainty unfolding during the COVID-19 pandemic for people who have changed their place of residence. The pandemic might also make it more difficult to reach hard-to-count people, including people living in institutions who may have moved due to the pandemic. The pandemic may affect the quality of census results relating to topics such as internal migration and labour force and schooling activities. Such impacts could reduce the comparability of census results from the current round with those from previous rounds.

The side-event will provide the opportunity to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking. It will give focus to the challenges in producing timely, accurate and reliable small area census statistics during the pandemic. It will discuss late changes in the design of field-based data collection necessitated by pandemic protocols and data quality issues. Briefing will be provided on support towards the 2020 round of population and housing censuses by UNSD as well as by other members of the International Committee on Census Coordination (ICCC) including the UNFPA, the International Programs of the US Census Bureau and the World Bank. The side event will feature the national experience of three countries in planning and conducting a population and housing census during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Programme

### **I. Opening and welcoming remarks**

*Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, Chief, Demographic Statistics, UNSD*

### **II. Briefing on support towards the 2020 round of population and housing censuses during the COVID-19 pandemic**

- **Briefing on UNSD activities in support of 2020 round population and housing censuses** – *Ms. Meryem Demirci, Interregional Adviser for Population and Housing Censuses, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, UNSD*
- **UNFPA Support to the 2020 Census Round under the COVID-19 Pandemic** – *Mr. Tapiwa Jhamba, Technical Adviser for Population Data and Research, Population and Development Branch, Technical Division, UNFPA*
- *Discussion*
- **Overview of (i) the results of the UNSD survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of population and housing censuses, and (ii) the conclusions and recommendations of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on the Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Conducting Population and Housing Censuses and on Census Data Quality Concerns** – *Mr. Seiffe Tadesse, Statistician, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch, UNSD*
- *Discussion*

### **III. National experience and lessons learned on conducting population and housing censuses during the COVID-19 pandemic**

- **Major Changes in the Design of Population and Housing Censuses due to the Covid-19 Pandemic in Malaysia** – *Ms. Nazaria Baharudin, Deputy Chief Statistician (Technical Development & Social), Department of Statistics Malaysia*
- **Implementing Population Censuses during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Singapore's Census 2020** – *Ms. Chia Sing SEET, Director, Census Office, Department of Statistics, Singapore*
- **Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Data Analysis and Comparability Over Time: Considerations for Canada and Census 2021** – *Ms. Karen Mihorean, Director General, Statistics Canada*
- *Discussion*

**Meeting link**

Microsoft Teams meeting

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