



Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/CL4.SIT/2020/WG.10/Report
29 March 2021
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Report

Regional Workshop on Measuring SDG Indicators from Population and Housing Censuses and Civil Registration Data in Arab Countries Beirut - Lebanon, 17-19 November 2020

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), UNFPA Regional Office of Arab States, UN-Habitat, and the Gulf Cooperation Council – Statistical Centre Council (GCC-STAT), organized a Regional Workshop on “Measuring SDG indicators from Population and Housing Censuses (PHC) and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Data in Arab Countries” in Lebanon during the period of 17 to 19 November 2020.

The workshop addressed the following topics: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and indicators that can be directly measured or estimated using PHC or CRVS data; the utilisation of PHC and CRVS for monitoring the goals at the subnational level, and the value of these data sources for the disaggregation of SDG indicators. The workshop concluded with a panel discussion on the training needs of Arab countries in measuring SDG indicators using nationally produced data (censuses and CVRS) and with a set of recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in collaboration with UNSD, UNFPA-ASRO, AITRS, UN-Habitat, and the Gulf Cooperation Council - Statistical Centre Council (GCC-STAT).organized virtually a workshop on “*Measuring SDG Indicators through Population and Housing Censuses and Civil Registration Data*” during the period 17 to 19 November 2020. The workshop aimed to introduce the technical report produced by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in collaboration with UN Regional Commissions.

OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Participants expressed appreciation and gratitude for the efforts made by the organizers of the workshop and its importance in terms of timing and content. Through its seven sessions, the workshop introduced the “*Technical Report on Measuring SDG Indicators from Population and Housing Censuses and Civil Registration Data*”; it also addressed global and regional programs in support of 2020 round of PHC and CRVS; methods of computing and disaggregating SDG Indicators from PHC and CRVS data; the use of geospatial information and GIS for generating and disaggregating SDG indicators using such data; as well as strategies for maximizing the utilization of PHC and CRVS data sources and capacity building needs of members countries.

In light of the presentations and discussions of the workshop, the meeting concluded with the following key notes and recommendations:

1. Participants welcomed the *Technical Report on Measuring Sustainable Development Goals Indicators through Population and Housing Census and Civil Registration Data*, prepared by the UN Statistics Division and the UN regional commissions as a methodological material relevant to the needs of Arab countries;
2. Participants were informed of the global and regional programmes on population and housing censuses and civil registration and vital statistics system and the necessity to expand the civil registration framework to include legal identity due to its importance in calculating indicator 16.9.1 (Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age), as well as regional efforts to prepare a regional strategy on CRVS in Arab countries (2020-2024);
3. Participants acknowledged the importance of using PHC and CRVS data and geospatial information in measuring SDG indicators and providing small area disaggregated statistics and that a total of 44 indicators can be computed from these sources. Moreover, these are the main sources for estimating and projecting the denominators for many population-based SDG indicators (about 90 indicators):

4. The workshop also noted that, in principle, PHC and CRVS data offer considerable advantages over surveys in terms of their potential for disaggregation by sex, age, ethnicity, educational level, labour force status, migratory status, disability status and geographic location at small areas level;
5. The workshop outlined that there are certain limitations in terms of using PHC and CRVS for compiling SDG indicators, and the main limitation of PHC is the fact that censuses are usually carried out only once every 10 years which limits their capacity to produce data that need to be updated annually. Hence, it is important to complement census data sources with other sources such as household surveys and administrative records;
6. Participants discussed the idea of adjusting census questionnaires to produce relevant SDG indicators;
7. Participants mentioned the importance of focusing on developing methodologies on PHC and civil registration data gathering in countries in conflict;
8. Participants asked the organizing bodies to conduct more programs / training workshops to build statistical capacity in the field of producing SDG indicators through PHC which are difficult to measure, especially in Arab countries that are still facing challenges in this area;
9. Participants suggested that ESCWA, in coordination with the relevant organizations, transfer the experiences of Palestine and Egypt in implementing the methodology for measuring poverty at the level of small geographic areas by using microdata from censuses and surveys;
10. Participants reviewed the methodology for the delineation of cities and urban and rural areas endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its fifty-first session, which was held in March 2020. They highlighted that, after further testing at the national level, guidance, support and training will be needed to allow the statistical offices to integrate and implement this new methodology in the reporting of the relevant SDG indicators;
11. National statistical offices were called upon to make use of microdata from PHC for monitoring SDGs and measuring and disaggregating its indicators at the national and sub-national levels as well as to maximize the utilization of geospatial information from censuses in measuring SDG indicators, especially indicators 11.2.1 and 11.7.1;
12. Participants welcomed the methodology of computing the Population Development Composite Index (PDCI) and called for intensifying efforts for statistical capacities building with the aim of producing timely and high-quality data in order to compute the index. This will provide a more accurate picture for decision-makers on population and development issues in Arab countries;

13. Participants emphasized the need to make their regional experiences available through the platforms and websites of international organizations, with the aim of exchanging Arab countries' success stories in measuring and disaggregating SDG indicators through PHC and CRVS data.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

3. The meeting was organized in seven main sessions, each concluding with a discussion on the issues raised.

A. Session I: Global and Regional Programmes in Support of 2020 round of Population and Housing Censuses (PHC) and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)

4. Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, Chief of Demographic Statistics in the United Nations Statistics Division in New York, began the session by underlying the essential components of civil registration and vital statistics and how the principles and recommendations framework can be complemented with the Handbook on Population and Housing Census. He explained then that the purpose is to provide examples to the authorities for the best way to collect data from these sources, and how the guidelines from the Handbook can help on how to best connect housing population and ensure that civil registration and vital statistics occur as they happen. Moreover, he recommended expanding the civil registration framework to include legal identity due to its importance for computation of indicator 16.9. He also encouraged to generate small area statistics. Additionally, he stated that the mandate of UNSD is to promote implementation of framework and support to national and regional capacity.

5. Mr. Ismail Lubbad, Statistician and Demographer for the Statistics Division at UN ESCWA, reaffirmed and elaborated on the role of ESCWA in implementing the project on “Undertaking PHC and CRVS in the Arab region” through capacity development activities at the regional and country levels. Specifically, the project aims to produce SDGs (2016-2020) in the fields of: censuses and technology, civil records and vital statistics, population indicators, poverty and living standards indicators, and promoting the process of conducting censuses and civil record (2020-2021). Mr. Lubbad mentioned the ESCWA regional ongoing work in preparing a regional strategy in CRVS for the years (2021-2050).

6. Whereas Ms. Renee Sorchik, explained how UNFPA has been supporting countries using the 2020 Census Strategy by providing technical guidance and using innovative census technologies. Her recommendation is the need for further efforts to strengthen national statistical capacity to produce disaggregated national data through census technical training, advocating mapping and using GIS and geospatial displays and small area estimations on census and survey data. Ms. Renee noted the importance of knowing the completeness and quality of data registration to understand and support under-registration.

B. Session II: Introduction to Technical Report on Measuring SDG Indicators through PHC and CRVS Data

7. The second session comprised of a presentation by Mr. Seiffe Tadesse, Statistician and Demographer at UNSD in NY, who introduced the technical report measuring SDG indicators through population and housing census and civil registration data. He noted the importance of PHC and CRVS in providing information for all population groups in a country and monitoring the SDGs in a reliable, accessible and timely population and demographic data. The information collected through these sources can be disaggregated by small population groups and small geographic areas. He presented the main challenges in the use of PHC and CRVS data. Finally, he recommended the necessity to provide suggestions on topics/questions that might be added to the PHC questionnaires.

C. Session III: SDG indicators that can be measured from PHC and CRVS Data

8. The third session began with a presentation by Ms. Meryem Demirci, on methods of computation of SDG indicators from population and housing census and civil registration data. According to Ms. Demirci, only 40 indicators can be calculated of which 11 indicators require data on demographic characteristics and 12 indicators need data on economic characteristics.

9. Throughout the session, participating Arab countries presented their applied methods in calculating SDG indicators from PHC and CRVS. Starting with Palestine, that undertakes a census every ten years (last one being in 2017 highlighted the main challenges that face implementation of censuses ranging from lack of 3G, the ownership of population registers is not under the Palestinian Authorities, and so on. Despite that, however, Palestine was able to deliver several SDG indicators based on CRVS and PHC.

10. Representative of Bahrain's National Statistical Office assured on the importance of the workshop and stated that a division on sustainable development goals was established in the Information and eGovernment Authority – responsible for measuring SDG indicators through multiple sources. Partnership among the health ministry and others was established. About 23 SDG indicators from Goal 3 are computed from administrative records and four indicators from censuses. Some of the challenges that Bahrain perceives are the need to improve health indicators and work to fulfil the unavailable indicators. Additionally, there is a need for more training and building expertise in this area, especially for new indicators. Finally, more work should be done on more health surveys or to continue working on health surveys periodically.

11. Similarly, Jordan's representative reported that several agreements have been established between the Department of Statistics (DOS) and various institutions and ministries that are partners according to the National Statistics Strategy (2018-2022) which made it easier for the Department of Statistics to provide access to administrative statistical data at these ministries and institutions that have a role in monitoring some sustainable development indicators. The last Population and Housing Census, conducted in 2015, provided data on multiple SDG indicators in the field of population, education, health, environment/energy/water, employment, and technology/communication.

12. Morocco's representative mentioned that every ten years Morocco undertakes a PHC, last one in 2004. The presentation highlights the importance of using administrative records in measuring SDS indicators,; mainly, in its ability to obtain a regular access to information, to provide data for measuring indicators at a lower cost compared to some private surveys that involve additional costs, and to obtain statistics and detailed data at the level of geographical small areas. However, some challenges were identified such as the ability to produce timely data, especially with regard to civil records; high cost of collecting data, especially with regard to population censuses; ability to produce high-quality data; to disaggregate the indicators according to the required dimensions; coordinate with the various actors of the national statistical system (ministries, research institutions, NGOs).

D. Session IV: Producing Proxy Estimates and Composite Indices for SDG Indicators from PHC

13. This session started with a presentation by Ms. Meryem Demirci on the methods of computation of SDG indicators and how they differ in terms of type of data needed, methodological approach for producing best estimate, and the level of details of data. She also differentiated between the indicators that require individual data and the ones that need data from multiple topics.

14. Ms. Iman Abu Aldhab, representative of UNFPA-ASRO elaborated on how the UNFA Arab States Regional Office (ASRO) initiated a new composite index to quantify the progress of the implementation of based SDGs within the context of the International Conference of Population and Development CPD Beyond 2014 review and the post 2015 development agenda. After identifying the conceptual framework, Ms. Iman Abu Aldhab presented the selection of indicators, methods of calculating the index scores and the methods used for statistical validation. Two recommendations were concluded at the end of the presentations; first is that the Population and Development Index is an informative and policy tool people-centred SDG, and that a National Statistical System is needed to routinely collect and disseminate data for the population composite development index.

15. Egypt's representative, in his presentation, noted the importance of having data from various country sources to make indicators available according to census standards and detailed data. The main point raised during the discussion is the availability of data and the reduction of information gap by combining it from several sources. Essentially, Egypt stated that they are trying to conduct surveys to measure some changes related to poverty, as four poverty maps have been focused on, along with shedding light on the rural community and their remoteness from centres and services and linking them with census, income and data on spending.

E- Session V: Disaggregation of SDG indicators through PHC and CRVS data

16. Mr. Seiffe Tadesse, Statistician in UNSD introduced a presentation on "Disaggregation of SDG indicators through PHC and CRVS data" where he concluded that the use of census data provides opportunities for disaggregation of SDGs (by various demographic/social/economic characteristics and geographic areas) and hence contribute towards improved monitoring of the SDGs at the global, national and subnational levels. Moreover, he added that it is important to link relevant SDG indicators with the policy's needs of national and local governments that can offer

the capability to monitor the situation of various population groups and the disparities among them, drive policy reform, and allocate resources effectively towards the socioeconomic development of a country.

17. UN-Habitat representatives summarized in their presentation an overview of the people-based definition of cities and rural areas for international statistical comparison. Mr. Donatien Bugy and Mr. Dennis Mwaniki noted the importance of having a harmonized definition to have relevant, timely, and location-specific data for informed actions. They also mentioned that around 1/3 of the SDG indicators can be measured at the local level. Essentially, they presented a background on the importance of dividing the indicators into urban/rural. They touched upon the situation in our Arab society in providing data according to urban and rural areas and with this they explained how the definition and classification of the indicator according to urban and rural areas is of great importance.

18. Ms. Isabel Molina from the Department of Statistics at the University of Carlos III de Madrid presented a short guide for small area estimation in household surveys as an illustration to poverty mapping in Palestine with expenditure survey and census data. She noted that Gaza has much larger poverty rates and gaps. Moreover, there were no great differences between men and women, although women have slightly greater estimates for about 70% localities in West Bank.

F- Session VI: Producing Proxy Estimates and Composite Indices for SDG Indicators from PHC

19.. Mr. Roberto Bianchini, UNSD consultant, noted that census data should be collected with reference to the place of residence and place of enumerations. He affirmed that geospatial information supports the production and dissemination of SDG indicators and census data. He also stated that what is needed to implement this kind of data is integrated between: geocoded census data (geographic coordinates, unique identifiers), GIS data and tools (statistical geographic areas, software), earth observation (urban and rural, parcels, land, forest, agriculture), and mobile data (social interactions, population density, mobility, spending patterns). He affirmed that census data geocoded by points allow to aggregate data at different spatial levels with accuracy using GIS tools. Moreover, census data geocoded by locality or enumeration areas/district allow data disaggregation to small geographic area, but the issue is that it is complex as it is an error-prone process. Overall, he concluded that geospatial data is important for small areas statistics.

20. Mr. Dennis Mwaniki, representative from UN-Habitat, highlighted in his presentation the importance of geospatial information at the global perspective. He mainly focused on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. Additionally, he stated that all SDG indicators have a link to space, but some rely directly on Earth Observation and Geographic Observation methods for measurement.

21. Representative from Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) stated that the implementation of the census is a rare case due to the exceptional circumstances imposed by the Israeli occupation measures, resulting in many challenges and obstacles. Despite all that, the use of modern technology such as the tablets, and electronic application developed for each census phase did contribute to saving time and effort, increasing data quality, consistency, classification

and ease of analysis and strengthening field work management and control. He also stated that the process of registering vital statistics and updating them in the population registry was done by Palestinian citizens and leading, often, to a lack of completeness of registration. Finally, he added that the PCBS seeks to provide data on SDG indicators required to the civil registry, especially with regard to the indicators 17.19.2 and 16.9.1.

22. Representative of Institute of National Statistics in Tunisia, focused on the use of geospatial information and PHC data in measuring Land Use Efficiency Indicators. Furthermore, she elaborated upon the computation method of the land consumption to population rate.

23. Qatar's representative reported that the country is working on Qatar vision 2030 that aims to promote SDGs in its economic, social, and environmental elements. He also emphasised the challenges faced by SDGs with regard to computation such as getting to the data, quality of statistics and evaluation methods, getting the records at the local level, and finally integrating statistics from administrative record in the national statistical systems. He suggested the following recommendations: increase training courses and workshops focusing on the computation of SDG indicators using Geospatial Information; exchange of member countries' expertise; create a platform to share and exchange insights on how best to calculate the indicator; use global goals for SDGs to best monitor the quality of the indicator computed.

G- Session VII: Strategies for maximizing the utilisation of PHC and CRVS data sources

24. In the last session of the meeting, Ms. Meryem Demirci from UNSD presented a list of recommendations for maximizing the utilisation of PHC and CRVS data in measuring SDG indicators and national and subnational level. Her conclusions comprised adjusting census questionnaire with a comparatively small investment to expand its ability to capture information relevant to the monitoring of as many SDG indicators as possible; and modifying census reports and dissemination tools with a view of presenting SDG indicators, disaggregated by key policy groups and small geographic areas. She concluded that the objective is to improve uses of census results by national/subnational governments, policy makers, researchers and other users.

25. Throughout the closing remarks, several key points were highlighted from Tunisia, Bahrain, Egypt and Yemen on their current and future plans concerning measuring SDGs through CRVS and PHC data. One common emphasis was the need to share the regional experiences and success stories of the countries that participated, which are available on websites or platforms on international organizations. The discussion focused on several propositions: for example, for Bahrain it was establishing a legal framework for accessing and protecting individual records and making sure to communicate with users to better understand the priorities of national and local governments for implementing SDGs and preparing reports at the sub-national level. As for Tunisia, they highlighted the fact that cooperation with government agencies is needed, as part of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Committee, to assess the quality of vital records in terms of completeness, validity, accuracy, availability and timeliness. Additionally, the ability to analyse the quality of census data and civil registration data to produce SDGs needs to be enhanced especially to properly codify the underlying causes of mortality. Whereas discussions and closing remarks for Egypt revolved around the measures that can be adopted to improve the use of vital records of births, marriages, (causes of) deaths to calculate the SDGs. In fact, in the event that the

country makes changes to the death registration registry system, contact needs to be made to the civil registration authority of births and (causes of) death to make sure that the information is sufficient to monitor the related SDG indicators. Moreover, a dialogue was initiated for Egypt to amend the census questionnaires to meet the data needs to the SDG indicators and linking census data with geospatial information. Finally, Yemen was asked on the ways the authorities complete the civil registry data and develop the collection and use of this data under conflict. Furthermore, steps were discussed on how to conduct census or alternatives under the current circumstance.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. Venue and Date of the Meeting

27. The workshop was held virtually using the online platform “Kudo” at the UN-House (UNESCWA) in Beirut, Lebanon during the period 17 - 19 November 2020. The meeting was attended by sixty-seven participants from national statistical offices from sixteen Arab countries, as well as twenty experts representing ESCWA, UNSD, UNFPA-ASRO, AITRS, UN-Habitat, and the Gulf Cooperation Council – Statistical Centre Council (GCC-STAT). The list of participants is available in annex I.

B. Opening

28. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director of the Cluster 4: Statistics, Information and Technology at UN ESCWA, opened the meeting. He welcomed the participants and highlighted the importance of measuring SDG indicators data from population and housing census and civil registration. He pointed out that population and housing censuses are one of the main operations and probably the costliest that every national statistical system has but which provides valuable information to use for different statistical purposes. He acknowledged the progress that the region has made on this topic. He stated the importance of complementing housing census and other sources data through big data as it constitutes an important source especially for the purpose of high demand for the 17 SDGs, disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, nationality, disability and all other aspects. Mr. Riecan noted that complementarity and continuity between different sources offer certain remedy on how best to proceed without increasing the cost. He concluded about the importance of the technical paper developed by UNSD.

29. The Head of the Demographic Division at UNSD in New York, Mr. Srdjan Mrkic, pointed out the importance of the workshop and elaborated on the two programmes that UNSD has been following for over six decades. He stated that the civil registration system brings regular, reliable, and accurate small area statistics which is important for SDGs. Moreover, he introduced the technical report on measuring SDG indicators and how it was developed by all the regional commissions. He affirmed that it aims to achieve better understanding between data and strengthen national capacity for assessing data availability of civil registration. The report, additionally, provided potential challenges for collecting data for SDGs.

30. Ms. Hala Youssef , (Regional Advisor (data and population policies))affirmed that private indicators have essence and importance when it comes to areas to make sure that no one is left behind and providing rights to ensure social equality and equity.

C. Agenda

31. Participants adopted the following agenda:

- Opening and administrative matters
- Global and regional programmes in support of 2020 round of Population and Housing
- Introduction to Technical Report on Measuring SDG indicators through PHC and CRVS Data
- SDG indicators that can be measured from PHC and CRVS data
- Producing proxy estimates and composite indices for SDG indicators from PHC
- Disaggregation of SDG indicators through PHC and CRVS data
- Open Discussion on the needs of Arab countries for training in the measurement of SDG indicators using PHC and CRVS data
- Closing session

Annex I

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