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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT
OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL TASK FORCE
ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES
BEIRUT, 23-24 MARCH 2009

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) convened the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in Beirut, from 23 to 24 March 2009.

Discussions focused on revising the Arabic translated version of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2” (PRPHCR2); the role of the media in censuses; the organization and conduct of censuses in cities; and the exchange of relevant successful experiences and expertise among ESCWA member countries.

The meeting concluded with a number of recommendations, most importantly the recommendation to exchange experiences among member countries in connection with all the phases of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses and the completion of the revision of the translated Arabic version of PRPHCR2.

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Introduction

1. In accordance with the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Fifth meeting of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Beirut, from 23 to 24 March 2009.

I. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The meeting concluded with the following recommendations:

(a) The meeting recommended that member countries exchange experiences in all the phases of population and housing censuses on the ESCWA Web page entitled “ESCWA Census Net”, especially those countries that have conducted or have started preparing for the 2010 round population and housing censuses, namely Egypt, Palestine, the Sudan and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. It also recommended that ESCWA establish an electronic link with the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) to enable ESCWA member countries to familiarize themselves with the experiences of other countries and to view the periodic UNSD Newsletter;

(b) The meeting recommended that the Arabic version of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2” (PRPHCR2) be finalized. In this connection, the meeting recommended that Parts One, Two and Three of PRPHCR2 be evaluated by Palestine, Jordan and Saudi Arabia respectively; it also recommended that the technically and linguistically revised final Arabic version of PRPHCR2 be submitted no later than May 2009 to Qatar which had assumed the task of its translation;

(c) The meeting requested from Qatar to revise the Arabic translation of PRPHCR2 and distributing the revised version to the members of the regional task force no later than June 2009 in order for them to review the revision and send their notes thereon to Qatar, with ESCWA undertaking the task of coordination and follow-up so that PRPHCR2 will be ready for use no later than September 2009;

(d) The participants agreed on the importance of the preparation of a regional supplement to PRPHCR2 to reflect the particular characteristics of the countries of the region. In this regard, a task force was formed, comprising Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan and Yemen, to draw up the proposed supplement in order to have it ready for discussion at the Sixth Meeting of the Regional Task Force;

(e) The meeting considered ways to develop statistical work including censuses in the ECWA member countries and recommended that this topic be discussed at the next session of the Statistical Committee and requested the secretariat of ESCWA to include it in the agenda of the ninth session of the Statistical Committee;

(f) The Sixth Meeting of the Regional Task Force will be held in Oman; its agenda and date will be agreed upon later. The tasks expected to be undertaken at the Sixth Meeting are summarized in annex I.

II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

3. Mr. Ali Bin Mahbub, Chairman of the Regional Task Force, reviewed the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses, pointing out that most of them were implemented including the one regarding the formation of three working groups to revise the Arabic translation of PRPHCR2 as well as the others concerning population and housing censuses. Moreover, the recommendation on conducting a number of studies on country experiences in censuses was implemented.

4. The role of the media in the censuses of Oman was reviewed, with emphasis on the goals and methods of the census media campaign. Oman benefited effectively from the private sector which produced census posters and signs; it also involved in campaign officials, tribal chiefs, religious instructors, youth, commercial centres, and all those concerned with academic, educational, cultural and social activities. For example, the Minister of Information assumed the chairmanship of the Information Committee.
5. The information campaign for the 2010 census round in Oman adopted a methodology different from that used in 2003; it stressed the expected census results and took advantage of the timely availability of accurate figures. The information campaign also included all kinds of media – television, radio, press, public debates and other means such as press conferences, placards, information material, as well as awareness-raising campaigns in mosques and schools. All these activities made a significant contribution to the information campaign. There is no doubt that the Omani information campaign has shed light on the significance of linking census data to municipal data.
6. A presentation on the Omani preparations for the 2010 census covered the actions preceding the conduct of the census, which included awareness-raising, selection and training of human resources, producing forms, checking residence numbers, choice of required technology and the software to be used in entering and verifying data.
7. In accordance with the recommendations of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, the meeting discussed the collection of data on disability. The definition of disability provided by the Washington Group was also discussed in light of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) adopted at the meeting of the Washington Group which was held in October 2008 in Manila, the Philippines. Moreover, the meeting addressed the significance of disability data and their measurement as well as a number of questions on disability included in census forms and surveys.
8. The meeting discussed the Arabic translation of PRPHCR2. Participants made general remarks about the lack of correspondence between the Arabic and English versions in paragraph and table numbering as well as about the translation of some terms. The meeting stressed the need for both versions to be identical, especially with regard to pagination and numbering of paragraphs and tables.
9. As the three working groups (Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia) concerned could not complete the required revision, the meeting requested them to finalize the translation and send it to Qatar no later than May 2009.
10. Participants discussed the experience of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) in the preparation of a manual on the recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians concerning the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing. The participants reviewed the objectives and topics of that manual; the relationship between a census and a programme of action; the possible time frame for the census; and the difference between a global and regional census guide, pointing out the significance of the regional one.
11. Participants discussed the need for ESCWA member countries to have a regional supplement to PRPHCR2, stressing the importance to take into consideration the particular characteristics of ESCWA member countries.
12. Jordan made a presentation on its experience in conducting city censuses, which were unprecedented in that country. It described the city census undertaken in 2007 in Aqaba, in view of its economic and touristic significance. The city of Aqaba census was intended to be used in drawing up plans for the implementation of investment and development projects in that city. The presentation also addressed the census methodology and the definitions used, including the definitions of housing; training of personnel; duties of officials; verification and accuracy of data; and dissemination of census results.

13. Participants discussed the integration of gender into national statistical systems and censuses. A presentation briefly addressed the significance of gender statistics and their definition as well as how to integrate gender into national statistical systems. A number of examples from member countries were presented. The presentation concluded by presenting a number of proposals for the integration of gender statistics in population censuses.

14. Discussions also addressed the experience of the Sudan in conducting population and housing in 2010. The country's fifth census was conducted in 2008. The presentation dealt with preparatory work, including the financial aspects of the use of technology in forms and data collection. It also addressed the role of the Central Bureau of Statistics in follow-up work and quality control was discussed.

15. Egypt made a presentation on its experience, referring to the lessons learnt and the recommendations implemented with regard to the use of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) in population and housing census. The presentation addressed four important points: the smart system of data entry; pre-tests; challenges faced in preparation and implementation; and the lessons learnt. The representative of Egypt also spoke about the importance of technology in improving data quality, accessibility and availability.

16. Annex III contains a list of the documents distributed at the meeting.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE OF THE MEETING

17. The Fifth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses was attended by 13 participants with practical experience in censuses representing national statistical offices, along with a number of expert statisticians (see annex II).

B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

18. The opening statement was made by Mr. Ali Bin Mahbub, representative of Oman and chairman of the Regional task Force on the 2010 Round on Population and Housing Censuses. He stressed the need for cooperation and sharing experiences among countries in all spheres of statistics, particularly the preparation and implementation of censuses.

19. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Chief of the Statistics Division at ESCWA, welcomed the participants and stated that censuses, though difficult and costly, constitute a fundamental tool in collecting data on populations and countries.

C. AGENDA

20. The meeting considered the following agenda:

1. Opening of the Fifth Meeting of the Regional task Force on Population and Housing Censuses.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Consideration and discussion of topics:
 - (a) Follow-up of the recommendations of the Fourth Meeting of the Regional Task Force;
 - (b) Experience of Oman regarding the role of the media in census-taking;
 - (c) Round-table meeting on the Arabic Translation of the "Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2";

- (d) Formation of a working group to prepare “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses” for ESCWA;
 - (e) Use of the set of questions raised by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics;
 - (f) Planning a census for a specific city;
 - (g) The Sudan’s experience in conducting population and housing census in 2008;
 - (h) Integration of gender into censuses;
 - (i) Lessons learnt and recommendations suggested regarding the use of Optical Character Recognition (OCR) based on the conduct of the 2006 population and housing census of Egypt;
4. Conclusions and recommendations.

Annex I

**TIME FRAME FOR THE ACTIVITIES OF THE REGIONAL
TASK FORCE UNTIL ITS SIXTH MEETING**

Activity	Time
Revision of the Arabic translation of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2” and provision of relevant observations to the State of Qatar	May 2009
Correction of the Arabic translation (in Qatar) and distribution of corrected copies to those concerned	June 2009
Ready state of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2”	September 2009
Conceptualization of regional recommendations for a regional supplement to the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2”	To be ready three months before the date of the Sixth Meeting
Sixth Meeting of the Regional Task Force	October 2009

Annex II*

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Annex III

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Symbol	Title
E/ESCWA/SCU/2008/2	Why to have regional guidelines for population and housing censuses
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/REV.2	—
	Oman – Census 2010: Pre-Census – Building Counting
	Sudan 5 th population census
ECE/CES/STAT/NONE/2006/4	Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing