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## Statistical Commission

### Fifty-fifth session

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Item 3 (l) of the provisional agenda\*

### Items for discussion and decision: population and housing censuses

## Population and housing censuses

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2023/325 and past practices, contains information on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, which encompasses the years 2015 to 2024. The report presents a review of the 2020 World Programme based on the information provided by member countries. It describes the activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat to support the 2020 World Programme during 2023. It summarizes the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, presents lessons learned to date and provides insight into the potential direction of the 2030 World Census Programme. The report contains information on the ongoing work on the revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* for the 2030 round.

The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking and to request the Division to continue to monitor the impact of the pandemic and to develop methodological guidelines to assist countries in planning and conducting population and housing censuses in the forthcoming 2030 round. Points for discussion and decisions by the Commission are contained in paragraph 37 of this report.

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\* E/CN.3/2024/1.



## I. Introduction

1. The 2020 round of population and housing censuses was launched by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2015/10 on the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme on 10 June 2015. The Council urged Member States to conduct at least one population and housing census under the 2020 World Programme, covering the period from 2015 to 2024, taking into account international and regional recommendations relating to population and housing censuses and giving particular attention to advance planning, cost efficiency, coverage and the timely dissemination of, and easy access to, census results for national stakeholders, the United Nations and other appropriate intergovernmental organizations in order to inform decisions and facilitate the effective implementation of development plans and programmes.

2. In the same resolution, the Council requested the Secretary-General to prepare international statistical standards, methods and guidelines to facilitate activities for the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, to ensure coordination of activities among stakeholders in assisting Member States in the implementation of the Programme and to monitor and regularly report to the Commission on the implementation of the Programme.

3. The Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat subsequently undertook the preparation of the methodological framework for population and housing censuses in the 2020 round. The framework was anchored by the revised *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*,<sup>1</sup> issued in 2015. It was accompanied by additional handbooks on population and housing census management,<sup>2</sup> census editing<sup>3</sup> including real time editing, registers-based population and housing censuses,<sup>4</sup> the use of electronic data-collection technologies<sup>5</sup> and the use of censuses in measuring international migration.<sup>6</sup> The work on the preparation of the technical report on measuring Sustainable Development Goals indicators through census and civil registration data<sup>7</sup> was finalized. With the support of the United Nations Population Fund, the third revision of the *Principles and Recommendations* and the second revision of the *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses* have been translated into Russian and French. Furthermore, with the same support, the guidelines on the use of electronic data-collection technologies and the handbook on measuring international migration through censuses were translated into Russian.

<sup>1</sup> *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 3* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.XVII.10).

<sup>2</sup> *Handbook on the Management of Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2* (United Nations publication, 2017). Available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesF/Series\\_F83Rev2en.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesF/Series_F83Rev2en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Handbook on Population and Housing Census Editing, Revision 2* (New York, 2019). Available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/seriesf\\_82rev2e.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/seriesf_82rev2e.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> *Handbook on Registers-based Population and Housing Censuses* (New York, 2022). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/publication/handbook-registers-phc.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *Guidelines on the Use of Electronic Data Collection Technologies in Population and Housing Censuses* (New York, 2019). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/handbooks/data-collection-census-201901.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Handbook on Measuring International Migration through Population Censuses* (New York, 2017). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/Standards-andMethods/files/Handbooks/international-migration/2017-draft-E.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *Technical Report on Measuring Sustainable Development Goals Indicators through Population and Housing Census and Civil Registration Data* (New York, 2022). Available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/documents/tr\\_on\\_sdg\\_in\\_phc\\_crvs.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/documents/tr_on_sdg_in_phc_crvs.pdf).

4. In addition, the Department developed and launched the population and housing census e-learning courses<sup>8</sup> and a repository of census dates, topics and questions from the 2000, 2010 and 2020 round of censuses to support national capacity-building efforts.

## **II. Reporting on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme**

### **A. National implementation of population and housing censuses**

5. The Department has monitored the implementation of population and housing censuses throughout the 2020 round of censuses. According to the information available<sup>9,10</sup> as at the end of November 2023, 183 countries or areas had already conducted at least one population and housing census, representing the enumeration of 81 per cent of the world's population. Thirty-five countries or areas plan to conduct a census by the end of the census round, although several of those censuses do not yet have confirmed dates. Most of these censuses were originally planned to take place earlier in the census decade but were postponed owing to a variety of factors but primarily to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Assuming all planned censuses take place by the end of the census round, the proportion of the world's population enumerated will have risen to about 91 per cent. By comparison, 93 per cent of the world's population was enumerated in the 2010 round. As the 2020 census round (2015–2024) is still ongoing, another year will be required to obtain a complete picture of the status of census-taking in this round. Eighteen countries or areas (half of them are in Africa and most of the others are in Asia) do not have a plan to conduct a census in this round.

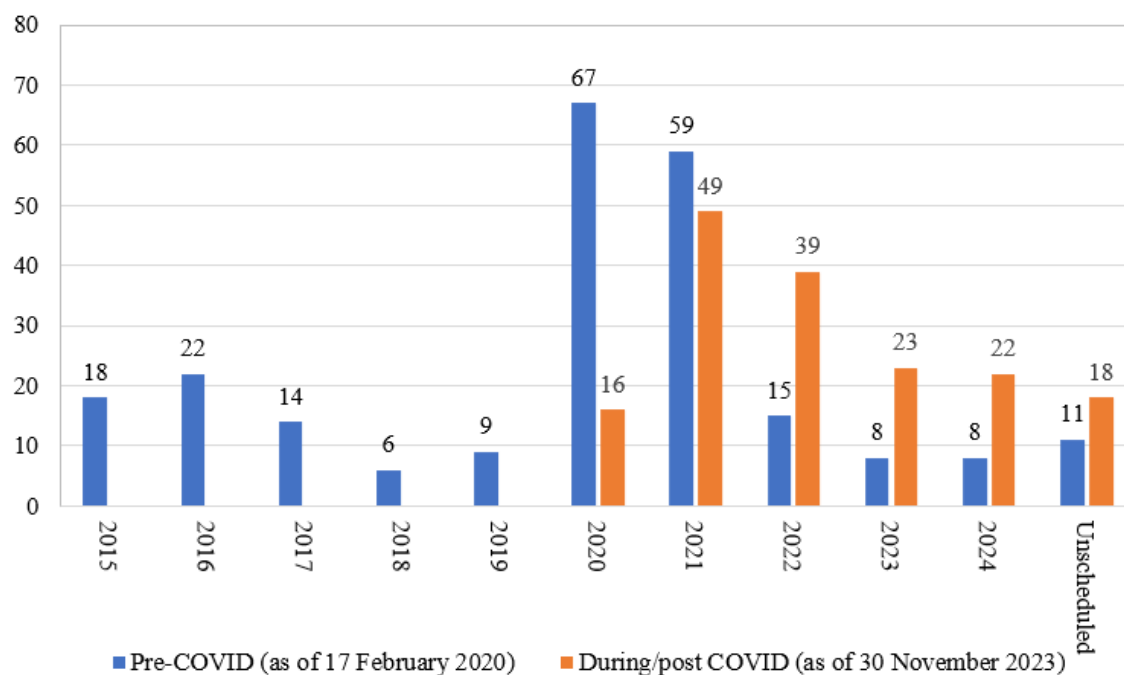
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<sup>8</sup> Population and Housing Census: Basic Training (Census Methodology and Data collection) and Advanced Training (Census Planning, Design and Management). Available at <https://learning.officialstatistics.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Information provided by the Statistics Division census topics database.

<sup>10</sup> Detailed and country-specific information on 2020 round census dates is available on the web page of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/censusdates.htm>).

Figure I  
**Number of countries or areas that have conducted, plan to conduct or have not scheduled a population and housing census in the 2020 round, by year**



6. The number of censuses conducted or scheduled to be conducted during the 2020 round of censuses is shown in figure I. According to initial scheduling and before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 and 2021 were supposed to be the peak census years, during which 67 and 59 population and housing censuses, respectively, were supposed to take place, accounting for more than half of all censuses in the 2020 round. However, owing to various factors, primarily the COVID-19 pandemic and, to a lesser degree, other issues, such as financial constraints, technical difficulties encountered in census preparation and political and social insecurity, a large number of censuses (about 60) were postponed from 2020 and 2021 to later years in the census round.

## B. Monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking

7. The Department, in its role as the secretariat of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, has been monitoring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking since 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization declared the virus responsible for a global pandemic.

8. With the aim of continuously monitoring and reporting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking, the Department has thus far conducted four surveys and is currently running its fifth survey. The first survey, conducted in March/April 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, targeted countries that had originally scheduled a census in the year 2020. The information collected in the survey provided a tentative understanding of the impact of the pandemic. The second survey, conducted in collaboration with the World Bank, was administered to all national statistical offices in September 2020. The survey was directed at countries that had originally scheduled a census in the year 2020 or 2021. Response was received from

119 countries, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the unfolding impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conduct of population and housing censuses. The third survey was conducted in December 2020/January 2021. The survey targeted 121 countries that had been expected to carry out a census in the year 2020 or 2021. Responses were received from 104 countries, providing evidence of the disruptions and challenges to census-taking, including the impact on preparatory census activities, field-based enumeration and census methods.

9. The fourth survey was administered in the period September–December 2022 to about 210 countries or areas that had conducted or planned to conduct a census in the 2020 round (that is to say, in the period 2015–2024). A total of 137 countries responded to the survey. The information collected in this survey provided an overview of the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the censuses in the 2020 round and of how national statistical offices had adapted their implementation plans in response to the pandemic. Results of the four surveys were shared with the Statistical Commission through the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme (E/CN.3/2022/8) and background papers.

10. The Department, as part of its activities undertaken to monitor the state of census-taking, conducted three expert group meetings.<sup>11</sup> These meetings helped to assess the adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme. The meetings were crucial in assessing the impact of the pandemic on the design of census operations and the challenges associated with producing timely and reliable small area statistics, as well as data quality issues caused by the pandemic and effects on census statistics and comparability of census data over time. The meetings addressed a number of key topics, including: (a) potential adjustments in census questionnaires to improve the relevance and quality of census data; (b) innovative approaches in designing census operations for reducing the adverse impact of the pandemic; (c) assessment of the quality of population and housing censuses with regard to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on process quality and output quality; (d) effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on data analysis and comparability; and (e) lessons learned from conducting censuses during times of crisis and recommendations for improving the resilience of future censuses and developing contingency planning for census conducted during times of crisis and uncertainty.

11. Based on information gathered from administered surveys, expert group meetings and other documentation, as well as direct contact with the national authorities in charge of population and housing censuses, it is evident that the pandemic has exerted a significant adverse impact on the conduct of censuses.

12. The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on census schedules. A significant number of countries that had planned to conduct their censuses relying on the traditional census or the combined census methodology had either to postpone census activities (see figure I above) or to extend the enumeration period owing to the impact of the pandemic. Postponements of the census reference date ranged from a few weeks or months to years. While countries that utilized the fully register-based methodology

<sup>11</sup> The first expert group meeting was conducted virtually from 9 to 12 February 2021. The documentation for this meeting along with the conclusions and recommendations is available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2021/egm-covid19-census.cshtml>. The second expert group meeting was held online from 2 to 5 November 2021. The documentation for this meeting along with the conclusions and recommendations is available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2021/egm-covid19-census2/>. The third expert group meeting was conducted in New York from 12 to 14 December 2022. The documentation for this meeting along with the conclusions and recommendations is available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2022/egm-covid19-census3/>.

faced little impact from the COVID-19 pandemic, delays in receiving administrative data due to the COVID-19 pandemic did affect a few countries that used the fully register-based methodology. Before the pandemic, a number of countries had faced challenges in preparing and conducting censuses due to a variety of factors including financial constraints and political instability. The arrival of the pandemic compounded the challenge faced by those countries in conducting their 2020 round of censuses as scheduled.

13. Similarly, countries that had planned to conduct their population and housing censuses using the traditional census or the combined census methodology had to take a number of actions to adapt to circumstances during the pandemic, including shortening the census questionnaires, modifying census procedures and adapting their data-collection modes, particularly to reduce direct contact with respondents.

14. The pandemic resulted in increased costs in a number of countries. A number of factors contributed to increased census budgets, including an additional budget for the procurement of personal protective equipment and COVID-19 pandemic-related protocols; enhanced publicity campaigns to inform the public, increase awareness and safety about COVID-19 and educate the population on new modes of data collection; developing online training not initially budgeted for; and enhanced contactless data collection (for example, computer-assisted web interviewing, computer-assisted telephone interviewing and self-response paper questionnaire); and updates to census maps due to postponement of the census date.

15. Adjustments to census processes and procedures undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic risk having undermined the quality of census data. For example, the extension of the duration of enumeration of the population and late changes to the design of field operations may have affected data quality. Similarly, the concept of “usual residence” may have had less relevance in the context of uncertainty unfolding during the COVID-19 pandemic for people who had changed their place of residence. The pandemic might also have made it more difficult to reach hard-to-count population groups, including people living in institutions who might have moved owing to the pandemic. The pandemic might also have affected 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. Building a well-designed quality assessment programme is thus even more important than before so as to properly assess the implications for data quality of having used new technologies or adjusted procedures for data collection during the pandemic.

16. Censuses conducted during the pandemic could also potentially reveal trends, changes and patterns in society not seen in previous census results, although to what extent those trends and changes would be significant are yet to be determined in many countries. Such new trends, changes and patterns will also have implications for census data comparability over time.

17. The circumstances of the pandemic that posed challenges to census-taking also created opportunities for innovation. In some cases, the pandemic accelerated existing initiatives for building capacity and the modernization of statistical processes. In this regard, several countries reported enhancing the use of technology in census processes, particularly for self-enumeration via the Internet and georeferencing, as well as utilizing administrative data sources for census purposes. Pandemic-related circumstances have also provided lessons for improving the resilience of censuses taken during times of crisis and for strengthening contingency planning for future censuses. Censuses face risks emanating from natural disasters, public health incidents and systems failure. To manage risks in census operations, effective preparation is needed for early and ongoing identification of risks and the

establishment of a risks register. Census managers should develop mitigation and contingency plans for various situations to effectively manage risks during operations.

18. At its fifty-third session, in March 2022, the Statistical Commission discussed the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme (E/CN.3/2022/8). In its decision 53/107, the Commission expressed concern regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the Programme and urged all Member States to conduct their population and housing census or produce census-like small area statistics, as soon as circumstances allowed, and to continue securing financial and human resources to that end.

19. The Department will continue to monitor, document and report on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the conduct of the population and housing censuses in the 2020 round, as well as the impact on the quality of resulting census statistics. In November 2023, when the present report was drafted, the fifth survey was still ongoing. Preliminary results indicate that a significant number of countries are making efforts to conduct a census before the end of 2024. Concerns remain, however, regarding census coverage and overall quality of both the census operations and the resulting statistics. Detailed results of this survey will be submitted as a background document to the present report.<sup>12</sup> The summary of the results will provide a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of 2020 round population and housing censuses.

### C. Evolution of census methodology

20. Census methodological approaches have evolved over the past few decades in response to concerns about rising costs, diminishing cooperation from respondents, new information needs and opportunities to take advantage of new technologies and alternative data sources. To meet these emerging and evolving societal and technological changes, census-taking has evolved from face-to-face interviewing and counting by hand to the use of multiple data-collection methods, including digital technology. While the large majority of all censuses conducted or planned in the 2020 round continued to be traditional censuses, the transition towards compiling census statistics from administrative sources is on the rise. An increasing number of countries in Europe and parts of Asia and Latin America are relying on a fully register-based census or the combined census methodology, which involves obtaining some of the census data from administrative sources and the remainder from field-based data collection. A combined census is often the first step towards a fully register-based census.

21. Based on information gathered from surveys and other documentation, the majority of countries (71 per cent of 158 responding countries/areas) applied or plan to apply the traditional census approach in the 2020 census round, whereby each household in the country is approached with a request to provide the relevant information. Approximately 28 per cent of countries/areas had used or would use registers, either producing small area census statistics from registers only (10 per cent) or complementing the registers with full field enumeration (13 per cent) or sample surveys (5 per cent).

22. Furthermore, the vast majority of countries undertaking any form of field enumeration (that is to say, through the traditional census, combining registers and

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<sup>12</sup> The background paper referred to in the present report is expected to be made available by the end of January 2024.



full field enumeration or combining registers and sample surveys, or the rolling census) used or intended to use a combination of enumeration methods. The multi-mode approach to census-taking has been used more widely in the 2020 round than in any previous census round. By far the most frequently used enumeration method was administration of face-to-face interviews using portable devices, primarily tablet computers (computer-assisted personal interviewing for field enumeration) (72 per cent), followed by face-to-face interviewing using a paper questionnaire (pen and paper interviewing) (42 per cent) and Internet self-enumeration (computer-assisted web interviewing) (38 per cent).

23. Reviews of national experiences show that there was significant use of contemporary technologies in all phases of the 2020 round of censuses, as countries aspired to increase overall response, quality and timeliness of census data. Technologies used included handheld devices (tablet computers and smartphones) and the Internet for data collection, with computer-assisted personal interviewing and computer-assisted web interviewing, respectively, being used as the data-collection applications.

24. Geospatial information and technologies have transformed the planning, implementation and dissemination of census data. The georeferencing of census data has improved the usefulness of census data for policy- and decision-making as well as for the dissemination of geocoded census data, including grid-based census outputs, which facilitate global comparisons. In parts of a country where enumeration is not possible, satellite imageries combined with existing data sources have enabled the estimation of population distributions for such areas. Geospatial information has improved efficiency in census operations. Such information has been valuable for logistics management, real time monitoring of census operations, optimizing workloads and routes of enumerators, and analysis of census data.

25. There was also an increase in web-based data dissemination of census results. Web-based interactive databases, in conjunction with geographic information systems, have improved the displaying and visualization, and hence the utilization, of census data. Countries reported that the implementation of new technologies was one of the most successful aspect of the census-taking conducted for the 2020 round.

26. As noted above, the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic motivated an increasing interest in the use of administrative data as an alternative source for generating census statistics or validating the information collected by the census. The Department has received queries regarding the use of registers as the basis for generating small area census statistics in the 2030 round of censuses.

27. In response to such demand, the Department initiated the preparation of a handbook<sup>13</sup> on the use of administrative registers for population and housing censuses. A draft handbook was reviewed in the context of an expert group meeting convened from 15 to 17 December 2021. The revised and finalized publication was submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session, in 2022, as a background paper. The handbook complements and builds upon the guidelines developed by the Conference of European Statisticians.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Handbook on Registers-based Population and Housing Censuses* (New York, 2022). Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/publication/handbook-registers-phc.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> See *Guidelines on the Use of Registers and Administrative Data for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.E.4), available at <https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2018/ECECESSTAT20184.pdf>; and *Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Administrative Sources in Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.21.II.E.13, available at <https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/360852>).



28. It should be noted that direct transition from the traditional census to a wholly register-based census is very challenging and, for most countries, unrealistic. Such a transition would need to be planned gradually, using a step-by-step approach. As there is no ideal blueprint or duration for this transition, and each country should therefore plan this process based on its initial assessment of the availability and quality of administrative registers as well as its assessment of the preconditions (political support, legal framework, user engagement, cooperation with register holders, an enabling institutional environment, and capacity) that must be met before changing the census methodology.

29. Administrative data, even if not universal but of relatively good quality for some census variables, may be considered an alternative source for improving census coverage and could be a potential source of information to be imputed for non-response. Administrative data can also be used to adjust the population count for non-responding households and as a quality check for the coverage of the census. Administrative records may be used for data quality control and complementary consistency checks of the data collected from the field and for filling gaps in existing census data.

30. It is likely that, in the 2030 round of censuses, significant changes will be seen in the way censuses are conducted. Technologies and methods for census-taking will likely change rapidly, leading to digital (paperless) censuses conducted using multiple data sources and multiple collection modes. Investment in technology and innovation in census data-collection methods and utilization of new data sources will be critical for achieving cost efficiencies in census operations. Countries will need to consider many factors and they should select the methods and technologies most appropriate for their own unique situation and data needs. What is appropriate for one country may be inappropriate for another. A balance will need to be achieved between resource, funding and data quality considerations and the factors of participation of the population and privacy concerns for successful census-taking. Best practices, lessons learned and open exchanges of information are needed in the move towards the 2030 census round.

31. Innovations achieved during the pandemic may very well position some countries to continue to innovate in preparation for their 2030 round census. Countries should be encouraged to test and expand the use of various methods of data collection, particularly online self-enumeration methods, and explore the potential use of administrative and other alternative sources of data; and development partners should support innovation at the country level. Data integration and use of geospatial technologies remain areas for further development in several countries. Countries should be encouraged to conduct studies on appropriate data-collection methods for different population groups, as well as on concepts and definitions related to census topics that have been found difficult and metrics and processes for assuring quality.

#### **D. Activities carried out by the Department in support of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme**

32. Under the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, it is acknowledged that population and housing censuses are one of the main sources of data for effective development planning and objective decision-making, particularly in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The aim of the Programme is to ensure that each Member State conducts a population and housing census at least once during the period 2015–2024 or otherwise produces small area census statistics and disseminates the resulting census statistics on population and housing in as comprehensive and holistic a manner as possible.

33. Through the Statistics Division, the Department organized activities<sup>15</sup> in 2023 to build national capacity for census-taking and to promote the implementation of recommendations of the Statistical Commission through the organization of regional workshops. From 12 to 15 May 2023, the Department co-organized the Regional Training Workshop on Transition to Register-based Approaches for Population and Housing Censuses in Ankara for the benefit of member countries of the Economic Cooperation Organization (Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan) as well as Belarus, Georgia, Mongolia and the Republic of Moldova. The regional training workshop<sup>16</sup> was organized jointly in collaboration with the statistics divisions of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries and the Turkish Statistical Institute.

34. The workshop training was based on the *Handbook on Registers-based Population and Housing Censuses*, authored by the Division, and the methodological publications<sup>17</sup> of the Conference of European Statisticians. The training workshop enhanced the technical capacity of the participants related to various aspects of the use of administrative data for census purposes and raised their awareness of the precautions necessary for a smooth transition to register-based approaches. Through the presentations and discussions on success stories, as well as a Turkish Statistical Institute study tour, their knowledge on practical aspects was increased. The training workshop facilitated sharing of national experiences and best practices by the participating countries and encouraged outlining the scenario for each country's transition to the increased use of administrative data for censuses. Each country team drafted a list of proposed actions which might be considered by their national statistical offices as a basis for developing a road map for their transition to the use of administrative data sources.

35. During the reporting period, a side event was organized on 2 March 2023, on the margins of the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, under the theme "Moving towards digital population and housing censuses in Africa". The side event<sup>18</sup> aimed at enabling the sharing of a global overview of the move to digital censuses and highlighting the work of the Economic Commission for Africa and its partners in disseminating experiences and lessons learned on implementation of the 2020 round of population and housing censuses in Africa. Recent technological developments have offered national statistical offices many opportunities to modernize their census operations, especially with regard to constructing digital maps, electronic capture of census data during the interview, real-time validation and dissemination of census results in an interactive manner. Against the background of the conducting of digital censuses by more than 20 countries across the African region during the 2020 round of censuses, the event provided a platform for a sharing of the experiences, challenges, lessons learned and good practices of Sierra Leone and the United

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<sup>15</sup> Details of activities carried out by the Statistics Division to build national capacity to conduct census and to assist countries in implementing international standards and recommendations for population and housing censuses, including information on schedules, subject matter and information on participating countries and partners, will be regularly posted on the website of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/index.cshtml>).

<sup>16</sup> The report of the workshop is available at [www.unescap.org/events/2023/regional-training-workshop-transition-register-based-approaches-population-and-housing](http://www.unescap.org/events/2023/regional-training-workshop-transition-register-based-approaches-population-and-housing).

<sup>17</sup> See *Guidelines on the Use of Registers and Administrative Data for Population and Housing Censuses* and *Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Administrative Sources in Censuses*.

<sup>18</sup> Information on the side event is available at <https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/events-details/un54sc-02032023-M-moving-towards-digital-population/>.

Republic of Tanzania, with a view to informing other countries' planning of their digital censuses. The event sought to stimulate discussion on how best to share experiences and best practices and improve South-to-South collaboration to support countries in their effort to move to digital censuses.

36. The Department organized a session focusing on population and housing censuses at the United Nations World Data Forum, held in Hangzhou, China, in 2023. The session, entitled "A new tomorrow for population and housing censuses? prospects for the 2030 census round and beyond", was organized under the thematic area of innovation and partnerships for better and more inclusive data. Held on 25 April, the session<sup>19</sup> was co-organized with UNFPA. Participants at the session reflected on the prospects of population and housing censuses for the 2030 round and beyond. Many countries have turned to, or are in the process of exploring, alternative approaches to generating population data, including register-based censuses and self-enumeration. This transition may be accelerated by COVID-19 pandemic-induced constraints to minimize face-to-face interaction with respondents. While the old notion of a universal population census may appear anachronistic in the age of digitization, artificial intelligence and citizen-generated data, most countries, including some of the wealthiest and those with the strongest governance structures, have retained their censuses and continue to invest in modernizing them. The session allowed national and international statistical organizations to share their experiences with the current census round and plans for transitioning to new census methodologies, highlighting key opportunities for leveraging innovation to produce relevant and cost-effective population data and meeting emerging needs of the user community.

37. The Department provided direct technical support to the Maldives Bureau of Statistics, upon its request. The technical advisory support was rendered in connection with the 2022 population and housing census of Maldives. During the period from February to April 2023, the Department supported the efforts of Maldives as it endeavoured to address the undercount of the population due to the fact that a significant number of structures and dwellings remained locked during the field operations of the census. Through weekly virtual meetings with census experts, the Division assisted Maldives in undertaking quality assessment activities. Since the country did not conduct a post-enumeration survey, administrative data sources were used for estimating coverage errors. Based on the outcomes of this activity, the Maldivian population and the foreign population were estimated for the census reference day, using birth and death registers as well as registers of Maldivians and Maldivians living abroad and records of foreign workers. The quality assessment procedures used relied mainly on demographic methods and comparisons of the results of the 2022 census with population estimates as well as with the results of previous censuses. The technical support continued until the release of preliminary census results.

38. The Department, together with UNFPA, the United States Census Bureau and the World Bank, continued to coordinate population and housing census-related activities through the International Committee on Census Coordination, which meets once every two months.

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<sup>19</sup> Information on the session is available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum/programme/>.

### III. Preparations for the 2030 round of population and housing censuses

39. With the 2020 round of censuses coming to an end in December 2024, the Department is gearing up its preparations for the 2030 round. In this regard, the Division has initiated the work of revising the existing version of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, the primary reference methodological publication providing guidance to national statistical authorities for planning, organizing, conducting and utilizing population and housing censuses. The current version of the publication will be thoroughly reviewed and brought in line with good practices and contemporary approaches to conducting censuses.

40. In preparation for the 2030 round, a number of issues related to methodology will need to be addressed. Among them is the essential need to provide guidance to countries that are planning to transition from the traditional census methodology to other methods involving the use of administrative data sources. It would be critical to address the importance of the integration of geospatial information with census data and promote the dissemination of geocoded census data, including grid-based census outputs. In terms of disaggregation, dissemination and utilization of census data, including for assessing progress towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international and regional commitments, it would be important to integrate the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in order to provide unambiguous guidance regarding confidentiality and privacy. Further, practical guidelines are required on how to set and monitor quality targets at specific points of the census process

41. The work of revising the *Principles and Recommendations* for the 2030 round is overseen by an expert group which was established for this purpose. The expert group consists of census experts from national statistical offices across all regions of the world, regional organizations and United Nations and other international entities which provide support to countries for the planning and conduct of censuses or produce international recommendations on topics collected in censuses. The work of revising the *Principles and Recommendations* is coordinated by the Division, which also serves as the secretariat for the revision process.

42. At its first meeting<sup>20</sup> (virtual) from 23 to 25 May 2023, the Expert Group set up seven task teams to carry out the work of revising components of the publication. The task teams correspond to seven themes identified by the expert group as critical for the revision: census planning, organizing and management; census methodologies and use of administrative data; geospatial information in census operations; quality assurance, indicators and assessment; data collection and processing; communication, dissemination and utilization; and recommended topics on population and housing characteristics. The task teams are currently reviewing parts of the text of the *Principles and Recommendations* and making changes and updates based on discussions. Revisions proposed by the task teams were scheduled to be reviewed by the expert group at its second meeting, from 13 to 15 December 2023. The next revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* will be submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-sixth session in 2025 for approval/endorsement.

43. The final report on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme will be submitted by the Secretary-General to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-sixth session in 2025. The final report will present

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<sup>20</sup> Information on the expert group meeting and its outcomes is available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/meetings/2023/egm-20230523/>.

the results of the monitoring of census-taking as at the end of the 2020 round in 2024. The 2030 World Population and Housing Census Programme will be launched during the fifty-sixth session of the Commission in 2025.

#### **IV. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission**

**44. The Commission is invited:**

(a) **To take note of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking, including postponements in the conduct of censuses and challenges in ensuring the quality of census planning, operations and the resulting census statistics;**

(b) **To urge Member States to implement the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme and conduct the national population and housing census or to otherwise produce census-like small area statistics, as soon as circumstances allow, and to continue to secure financial and human resources to that end;**

(c) **To urge Member States to assess the quality of their censuses, including those conducted during and in the aftermath of the pandemic, in terms of both their coverage and their comparability over time, taking into consideration the implications of changes in methods, procedures and technologies introduced as a result of the pandemic;**

(d) **To request the Statistics Division to continue to: (i) monitor the implementation of the Programme, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to draw up the lessons learned in conducting censuses during the pandemic; and (ii) develop methodological guidelines to assist countries in planning and conducting population and housing censuses in the forthcoming 2030 round;**

(e) **To recognize the preparations for the 2030 round of censuses and the work of the international expert group in preparing the fourth revision of the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*;**

(f) **To propose a resolution at the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, in 2025, to kick off the 2030 World Population and Housing Census Programme, spanning the years 2025 to 2034.**