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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

## **REPORT**

### **SIXTH TASK FORCE MEETING ON POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES IN THE ESCWA REGION BEIRUT, 1-3 DECEMBER 2009**

#### **Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) with support of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) organized the sixth meeting of the Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, Round 2010 in Beirut from 1 to 3 December 2009.

The meeting aimed at discussing the Arabic translated version of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2” (PRPHCR2), making necessary modifications, exchanging relevant successful experiences and expertise among ESCWA member countries and discussing the future plan of the Task Force.

The meeting concluded with a number of recommendations, most importantly the completion of the revision of the Arabic translated version of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2”, the importance of cooperation between member countries in different statistical fields in particular population and housing censuses, the preparation of a report evaluating the work of the Task Force so far and its future vision to be presented to ESCWA Statistical Committee at its ninth session which will be held during the third quarter of 2010.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction .....	1	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
<b>I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	2	3
<b>II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION</b> .....	3-9	4
<b>III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK</b> .....	10-14	7
A. Date and venue of the meeting .....	10	7
B. Opening of the meeting .....	11-13	8
C. Agenda.....	14	8

## ANNEXES

I. List of participants.....	9
II. List of documents .....	12
III. Future vision for the next phase until 2015 .....	13

## **Introduction**

1. In accordance with the recommendations of the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Sixth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses in Beirut from 1 to 3 December 2009.

### **I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. The Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, Round 2010 held its sixth meeting at the United Nations House from 1 to 3 December 2009, and concluded with the following recommendations:

(a) The importance of consultation and coordination between national institutions involved in the implementation of censuses and raising the awareness of census data users from various sectors including research centres, universities, civil organizations, the public, and decision makers. Such contribution would be through involving them in the early stages of the preparation of population and housing censuses, within certain limits, to help determine their needs for census data and their role in the process;

(b) To emphasize that population and housing censuses are a national action rather than a merely statistical project prepared and implemented by national statistical offices. Therefore, the meeting encouraged central statistical agencies to create strategic partnerships with institutions from public, private, civil and academic sectors, as well as partnerships with regional and international organizations and bodies;

(c) To adopt comprehensive quality methodologies in all stages of the census, in particular in daily data collection using available means;

(d) To request the Force members to send their comments on the overall work of the Task Force to ESCWA, including any observations on achievements, obstacles and future vision, no later than 17 December 2009;

(e) To call upon the chairman of the Task Force to submit a report on the mid-term work (2005-2009) in cooperation with ESCWA secretariat. The report would include the assessment of the Task Force work to date and its future vision (2010-2014) and be presented to the Statistical Committee at its ninth session to be held in 2010 for consideration and adoption;

(f) Due to the difficulty of providing necessary funding to cover the costs of the Task Force meetings and expenses of participants, the meeting recommended that statistical bodies in ESCWA member countries cover the costs of the participation of their representatives, whereas ESCWA member countries would host meetings of the Task Force respectively in alphabetical order;

(g) The meeting recommended that ESCWA and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics organize training sessions in the field of population and housing censuses for 2010 and 2011, including the multiple use of collected data;

(h) After reviewing the translated version of parts I, II, and III of the PRPHCR2, participants agreed that one party reviews and corrects the three parts. In this context, the meeting recommended that ESCWA secretariat conducts the final revision of the Arabic translation of the manual to be ready to use by beginning of 2010;

(i) To call upon ESCWA to address a letter of thanks on behalf of the members of the Regional Task Force to Qatar in recognition of its efforts in translating the PRPHCR2 into Arabic, as well as to Jordan, Palestine and Saudi Arabia for their efforts in revising and correcting the translation of the three parts.

## II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

3. Ms. Fathia AbelFadil, Team Leader at ESCWA Statistics Division, reviewed the recommendations of the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Task Force on Population and Housing Censuses, Round 2010 as well as implemented recommendations. All recommendations were implemented except for the preparation of a regional supplement to PRPHCR2 to reflect the particular characteristics of the countries of the region. This issue was discussed during the round table on the future of the Task Force. It was agreed to include the preparation of the regional supplement of the manual in the future plan of the Task Force.
4. The representative of Palestine presented the experience of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in launching the “Census Info” database for the dissemination of data. The presentation included different dissemination means which comprise the traditional means such as paper printing and modern ones using state-of-the-art technology such as the Internet and online databases. The representative pointed to the uses of the “census info” in terms of identifying indicators, region and year as well as in view of its advantages in particular the easy dissemination of the census results, providing several indicators for different topics, which would enable the user to easily produce tables, graphs and maps representing the data. The “census info” database can be found on the following website of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/CensusInfo/>.
5. The Arabic translated version of the PRPHCR2 was reviewed. Discussions highlighted the observations of countries that revised the three parts of the translation, namely Palestine (Part I), Jordan (Part II) and Saudi Arabia (Part III). Main observations pointed to the importance of revising the translation of some texts, standardizing the use of the same translated terms, necessity to match the Arabic and English versions, standardizing the numbering of paragraphs and pages and making sure all paragraphs of the English version can be found in Arabic. In conclusion, it was agreed that ESCWA would take charge of the final revision of the manual which should be ready by the beginning of 2010.
6. Mr. Abd El Meneem Abu-Nuwar presented a working paper on the general census of population and housing: a statistical project or a national action. He clarified that the census is an integrated national work prepared, implemented, evaluated and used not only by agencies authorized by laws governing the field of statistics, rather by all official agencies, civil organizations, the private and academic sectors as well as the public. He stressed the importance of strategic partnerships between statistical agencies and all national authorities and agencies concerned with the implementation of the census. He also pointed to the importance of developing statistical systems and the documentation process through all phases of the census in order to maximize the benefits of the census. The document included the experience of Jordan in preparing and implementing the 1979 census to make use of its advantages and disadvantages and to exchange knowledge and learned lessons.
7. Mr. Ali Bin Mahboub, Chairman of the Task force, presented the experience of Oman in preparing the 2010 Census for Population and Housing which will be implemented in April 2010. The presentation tackled the early preparations for the census, as of September 2009, such as counting buildings and facilities, administrative, logistic, and technical preparations, selection and training of staff, modern technology and software, work mechanism, means of monitoring and quality control. He pointed to the way of following up field work, how to obtain census data, download data from the focal point to various workstations and how to ensure data validation, processing and analysis to disseminate the results as soon as the census is completed. Oman 2010 census is characterized by the use of satellites to photograph houses and facilities, the use of handheld devices in the collection and entry of data and the establishment of a focal point for quality control and work monitoring. The presentation detailed the tasks of the focal point in charge of quality control, which would contribute to ensuring the overall quality of various phases of the census, in line with international developments in the field of census planning and implementation. The centre tasks include the completion and encoding of incomplete/inconsistent/not completely encoded data through following up on the phone with those provided with a phone number, and implementing automatic revision of complete and coherent data with people having phone numbers, in order to abide by the accuracy and

credibility standards; providing technical support for staff implementing the census through the phone; providing technical support and follow-up for citizens adopting self counting methods; following up daily reports on rates of field work, calls, completion, and errors presented by supervisors, researchers, and census implementers.

8. During the meeting session, member countries presented their experiences in the preparation and implementation of censuses on population and housing, Round 2010. Presentations can be summarized as follows:

(a) The representative of Egypt presented the experience of his country in the field of preparation and implementation of censuses on population and housing for 2006. He mentioned that the actual counting was made according to the place people were in de facto the night of the census, regardless of the place of usual residence. The 2006 census was characterized by the implementation of the decentralization method in different phases of the census as well as the use of scanner, the Intelligent Character Recognition (ICR) and the automated encoding (transforming qualitative components into codes recognized by the computer), developing new training methods, and in this context scientific material for the census methodology and instructions was taped on video and CD-Roms to standardize concepts and definitions used in the census, and controlling the quality of work throughout different phases. The Egyptian experience included aspects that can be considered lessons to be learned namely, the activation of the role of preliminary results in the quick extraction of detailed results as to different characteristics, to provide detailed data taking into account speed, comprehensiveness, accuracy and transparency, use of geographic information system maps to achieve a high level of comprehensiveness, use of the expected estimated number of population, use of modern as well as the traditional training methods, activation of quality control throughout the different phases of the census, participation of citizens at the end of each phase through the use of the toll-free number, choosing collaborators in view of their pivotal role in the census, collaborating with the delivery committees within a definite time frame, choosing experienced staff from official authorities if possible, planning, organizing and managing a successful media campaign, and providing materials and publications in advance;

(b) The representative of Palestine addressed the population and housing census carried out in Palestine in November 2007. He pointed to the various stages of the census such as the preparatory phase, on-the-field work, data-processing, publishing and analysis. He stated that the methodology used in the 2007 census was very inclusive, based on de facto counting with some exceptions that take into account the particular situation of Palestine, collecting forms through direct interviews, updating paper charts before time, numbering buildings and residential units. The 2007 census was primarily characterized by the quality control mechanism that was used as of the preparatory phase up till the final one, in order to ensure better coverage, accuracy and reliability of data and verification of the quality of work. The presentation addressed some of the mechanisms used in the implementation of the 2007 census such as prior coordination with all stakeholders whether governmental agencies, different ministries, private sector, institutions, donor countries, data users, and prior coordination between technicians and staff working in data processing. Such coordination contributed highly in controlling quality, pre-screening all project tools and methodologies. The presentation included as well some aspects that could be considered lesson to learn from, such as the use of various means compatible with all categories of users for instance qualified data files, electronic atlas, statistical and the use of geographic information systems as well as the means of traditional publishing. It stressed the necessity to prepare the project in advance in order to analyse, disseminate and use the census data for the preparation of in-depth studies with recommendations related to housing, social and economic policymaking for the achievement of sustainable development, in addition to train and rehabilitate staff in government institutions to read and use statistical data in analysis, the necessity to use the census data and results in a timely manner, reduce the number of questions in various areas, focus on data that are not available in administrative records, and concentrate on and update administrative records at a later stage;

(c) The experience of Iraq was presented and discussed, it highlighted the tools and methodology adopted for the preparation of the 2010 pilot census of population and housing. Reference was made to the

different models of forms such as the form of inventories applicable to buildings, households, establishments, agricultural spaces, the form for population and housing, and the form for hotels and similar categories. The presentation covered the design of forms, which took into account the method of counting and data-entry using the scanner. Topics included in the forms were identified according to national priorities and needs, usability in international comparisons as well as national comparisons against previous censuses, and the relevancy of topics according to the situation in Iraq. Forms covered demographic and social characteristics, migration, disability, education, economy and marital status. Different guides were prepared such as the instruction guide on package counting, and preparation of lists, the instruction guide on the form for the inventory of buildings, households, establishments, population and housing, the guide on civil registration services, and administrative units, and the guide on the classification of scientific and professional disciplines, economic activity and nationality. The presentation included quality control of the various aspects of the census, including administrative, financial, regulatory and technical aspects, as well as the mechanism adopted in implementing the on-the-field phase, namely defining the borders of the location/village, identifying and numbering roads within this location, identifying blocs and dividing the areas of work, identifying the functions of associate directors, work of the supervisor and that of the counter within the location/village, and the various methods for the dissemination of the results, including modern methods such as electronic publishing and traditional methods such as statistical publications and reports. Main difficulties included dealing with the scanner and technical requirements;

(d) The representative of Saudi Arabia made a presentation on the preparations for the 2010 census. He noted that the Supreme Council for the Arab Gulf States decided at its twenty-second session held in Muscat, to undertake the census for each State of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 2010. Therefore, the Department of Public Statistics and Information in the Kingdom, started to cooperate with the rest of GCC States to implement the decision through a technical committee comprising specialists in censuses in the GCC, which is responsible for developing the technical basis necessary to conduct the census through the consolidation of the minimum number of topics to be included in the census such as population data (demographic and social characteristics), buildings and housing as well as environments surrounding houses, and establishments; standardization of evidence and classifications used in coding the census data in light of international guides and classifications (technical guide, economic activity guide, nationality guide, education guide); standardization of statistical concepts and terms; consolidation of the minimum number of outputs of the census conducted in member countries based on the proposed topics; getting acquainted and making use of media plans in member countries and standardizing media programmes. The presentation included initial processes for conducting the census in Saudi Arabia in terms of updating the guide of housing terms in order to provide the guide on the field and process its data on the computer; the process of numbering cities, districts, sectors and blocks in the cities of Saudi Arabia on the ground and on maps; estimation of the number of houses in each block and processing data on the computer; identification of the census topics and preparation of a form;

(e) The experience of the Sudan in the 2010 population and housing census implemented in April 2008 was presented and discussed. The report highlighted the different stages of the census, namely the legal authority, where a presidential decree was issued to determine the date of implementing the census, which agencies are in charge of implementation, constituent committees, budget, stage of preliminary preparations to conduct the census, including updated maps and administrative frameworks, identification of households, actual counting, compilation of forms, data analysis and publishing process taking into account the monitoring and quality control process at various stages. The presentation addressed training core trainers, supervisors, officers of administrative units, monitors, and counters, the design of short forms to obtain basic information on the entire population, and long forms with specific questions on demographic and economic characteristics;

(f) Qatar experience included preparations for the 2010 census. The presentation included the establishment of different committees such as a committee to prepare the forms, a committee to design tables and a committee to conduct a pilot census on the Internet. A unified form will be used for citizens and non-citizens;

(g) The meeting sessions included a presentation on the census web pages in Palestine, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Information presented comprised used definitions and classifications, publications, databases and forms, as well as how to use the Internet in the process of data entry. Palestine website can be accessed on the following address: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/census2007/default.aspx?lang=ar-jo>, that of Qatar on: <http://www.qsa.gov.qa/QatarCensus> and that of Saudi Arabia on: <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa:8080/census31>;

(h) The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic highlighted in his presentation quality control of censuses and survey data. He pointed to the importance of setting standards to measure and monitor field census data quality, as it is a matter of urgency, whether at the local or global level, in order to obtain high quality data and statistics that would form the basis of any plan or decision making process. He stressed the need to evaluate and monitor quality control through all stages of implementation, which include evaluation of questionnaires in terms of content, quality, drafting and format, consistency of data, comprehensiveness errors, non-response errors, and data and results standards. He also summarized the stages of quality control starting from monitoring the selection of topics in the preparatory phase, testing whether the developed designs meet the desired results and expected outputs during the design and testing phase, through ensuring the clarity of objectives during the operational stage, comprehensive documentation, and ensuring that counters assimilated their tasks through appropriate training and monitoring work. This is followed by testing the compliance with standard concepts and classifications during the processing phase for the dissemination of accurate and timely data and results;

(i) During the sessions of the last day, participants discussed the evaluation of the Task Force work: past activities, constraints and achievements. Discussions addressed main achievements and activities of the Force in term of meetings held, establishment of working groups in order to prepare ESCWA contribution to the revised version of the PRPHCR2, as well as the establishment of mechanisms for the coordination of population censuses in the region and creation of groups to review the Arabic translation of the guide, and the preparation of different studies and reports on national experiences in the preparation and implementation of censuses. Participants discussed some of the obstacles faced by the Force such as ensuring necessary financial resources to secure the participation of experts, prepare studies, and follow up on the implementation of recommendations. Discussions focused on the importance and need to support and strengthen the exchange of experiences, knowledge and good experience among member countries and other countries, to activate and update the electronic forum Census Net; and continue regional work in the field of population and housing censuses;

(j) Mr. Ali Bin Mahboub, the representative of Oman and Chairman of the Task Force, headed the round table to discuss the future work of the Force in terms of exchange of experience, knowledge and good practice in the preparation and implementation of population and housing censuses, the use of census data to assist in policy formulation, decision making and methods of disseminating data including the use of geographic information system technology, use of census data in the preparation of population projections and preparation of a project to support countries in the dissemination and use of census data. Participants agreed on several items of the future vision until 2015 (annex III).

9. A list of documents distributed on participants during the meeting is included in annex II.

### **III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

#### **A. DATE AND VENUE OF THE MEETING**

10. The sixth meeting of the Regional Task Force on the 2010 Round of Population and Housing Censuses was attended by 18 participants from ESCWA member countries, representing national statistical offices and with practical experience in censuses, along with two expert statisticians (annex I).

## B. OPENING OF THE MEETING

11. The opening statement was made by Ms. Fathia AbdelFadil, Team Leader at ESCWA Statistics Division. She welcomed participants and thanked them for responding to ESCWA invitation to attend the meeting. Ms. AbdelFadil commended the efforts made by participants to prepare work reports on national experiences in the preparation and implementation of the 2010 census.

12. Mr. Juraj Riecan, Director 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 population. He also expressed his appreciation for the work of the Force and its achievements particularly with regard to the translation of the PRPHCR2 into Arabic, as well as to experiences and lessons learned, exchanged and discussed during the meetings. He informed participants of the regrets of the UNSD for not attending the meeting in view of their engagement in other actions. He pointed to the UNSD contribution and financial support to organize this meeting.

13. Mr. Ali Bin Mahboub, representative of Oman and Chairman of the regional Task Force on the 2010 Round on Population and Housing Censuses, commended the efforts made by all countries members of the Task Force to succeed mainly in terms of translating the guide. Mr. Mahboub stressed the need for cooperation and experience sharing among countries in all spheres of statistics, particularly the preparation and implementation of censuses. He concluded by highlighting the importance of evaluating the work of the Task Force and the need to follow up and implement recommendations.

## C. AGENDA

14. The meeting adopted the proposed agenda, as follows:

1. Opening of the Sixth Meeting of the Regional Task Force.
2. Adoption of the agenda.
3. Consideration and discussion of topics.
  - (a) Follow-up of the recommendations of the Fifth Meeting of the Regional Task Force;
  - (b) The experience of Palestine in launching Census Net;
  - (c) Round table on the Arabic translation of the “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2”;
  - (d) Census of population and housing: statistical project or national work;
  - (e) The experience of Oman in preparing for population and housing censuses;
  - (f) Experiences of countries in preparing and implementing population and housing censuses;
  - (g) Evaluation of the Task Force work: past activities, constraints and achievements;
  - (h) Round table on the future of the Task Force work;
4. Conclusions and recommendations.

Annex I\*

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Annex II

**LIST OF DOCUMENTS**

Symbol	Title
بلا رمز	مذكرة توضيحية
بلا رمز	تنظيم الأعمال المقترح
بلا رمز	جدول الأعمال المؤقت
E/ESCWA/SD/2009/6	تقرير الاجتماع الخامس لفريق العمل الإقليمي حول تعدادات السكان والمساكن
ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/REV.2	مبادئ وتوصيات خاصة بتعدادات السكان والمساكن، التتقي -2 فريق عمل تعدادات السكان والمساكن : الأنشطة والإنجازات والمعوقات ومستقبل عمل الفريق عرض ) متابعة تنفيذ توصيات الاجتماع الخامس لفريق العمل عرض ) مبادئ وتوصيات تعدادات السكان والمساكن، التتقي -2 الترجمة العربية ) تجربة جمهورية مصر العربية في إعداد وتنفيذ التعداد، دورة 2010 والمنهجية المستخدمة، ومراقبة الجودة وتطبيق التوصيات الدولية الموجودة في منشور الأمم المتحدة مبادئ وتوصيات تعدادات السكان والمساكن؛ دورة 2010، التتقي -2 ، والصعوبات والدروس المستفادة، وأساليب نشر نتائج التعداد ورقة + عرض مصر ) سس ومبادئ التعداد العام للسكان والإسكان والمنشآت ورقة مصر ) منهجية التعداد العام للسكان والإسكان والمنشآت ورقة مصر ) الأدوات والمنهجية المستخدمة في التعداد العام للسكان والمساكن في العراق 2009 ورقة + عرض العراق ) مركز الاتصال وضبط الجودة ورقة سلطنة عمان ) ورقة حول التجربة الفلسطينية في تنفيذ تعداد السكان والمساكن 2007 ورقة فلسطين ) ورقة موجزه عن تجربة الأعمال التحضيرية لتعداد 2010 في المملكة العربية السعودية ورقة المملكة العربية السعودية ) تجربة السودان في إجراء تعداد السكان والمساكن ورقة السودان ) ضبط جودة البيانات الخاصة بالمسوح والتعدادات ورقة الجمهورية العربية السورية ) ورقة حول التجربة الفلسطينية في إعداد "CensusInfo" عرض فلسطين ) Oman-Census 2010 Pre-Census-Building Counting Basic Data For the Population; Housing and Establishments Census: Towards Census 2010 Environmentally friendly لتعداد العام للسكان والمساكن : مشروع إحصائي أم عمل وطني ورقة خبير ) قائمة المشاركين

### Annex III

#### **FUTURE VISION FOR THE NEXT PHASE UNTIL 2015**

(a) Commitment of ESCWA member countries to support the work of the Task Force through: (i) providing financial support to cover participant expenses; (ii) technical support in specialized studies, experience and modern technologies in the field of censuses, which may be needed by the Task Force or member countries; (iii) reaffirming the commitment of countries to select members of the Task Force in charge of censuses in their respective countries giving priority to the membership to the Force; (iv) member countries hosting the meetings of the Task Force on a regular basis;

(b) ESCWA secretariat would cooperate with member countries in preparing the Task Force programme of work for the coming period which comprises: date and venue of meetings, arrangements of meetings, topics to be included for discussion in the meetings, and other matters;

(c) To examine the possibility of unifying the year of conducting the censuses in the region in 2020 (while identifying advantages and difficulties) or bridging the difference between the periods of implementation in some countries with converging conditions and deadlines to make use of each others experiences;

(d) To prepare a report on the current status of census systems in member countries, including adopted methodologies, forms, tools and equipment in order to enhance national capabilities in the field of censuses through identifying weaknesses and strengths of each country; each member country would prepare an integrated work report on its experience in planning, preparation and implementation of the census, to be sent to ESCWA secretariat, with attachments including all tools, and technical documents used, in order to prepare for the standardization of statistical methodologies and work tools in ESCWA member countries regarding the implementation of population and housing censuses, in addition to publishing those reports on ESCWA web page (Census net);

(e) To request member countries to work on training human resources in the statistical field in general, through holding local sessions in various statistical fields, to which all member countries would be invited. ESCWA would supervise the training of local technical personnel;

(f) To prepare a rehabilitation programme for the coming period to be implemented through ESCWA in cooperation with member countries and the United Nations specialized agencies, provided it is attached to the Task Force report to be submitted to the Statistical Committee at its ninth session in 2010. Each member country would identify its needs in the field of rehabilitation and training;

(g) To prepare a regional supplement to the guide "Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 2" that would reflect the specificities of the countries of the region. Member countries would prepare the components of the supplement through resorting to local statistical agencies and would include national experiences in the field of censuses in terms of used methodologies and technologies;

(h) The need to focus on censuses documentation processes;

(i) To analyse and use data, and analytical studies as the basis of policies and programmes in the public and private sectors;

(j) To prepare scientific studies on methodologies used in the implementation of the census, improving quality and other aspects, and diversification of means of cooperation in order for countries with advanced performance to prepare training materials and transfer knowledge to other member countries;

(k) Methods for disseminating data, including the use of the geographic information system technology;

(l) The use of census data in the preparation of population projections;

(m) To invite some international statistical organizations to send representatives to all meetings in order to make use of such participation.