



Arab States Regional Workshop: Census Thematic Analysis for Enhanced Data Utilization

Concept Note

Date: May 19-21, 2025
Location: Amman – Jordan



Abstract

This concept note outlines plans for a regional workshop to strengthen the capacity of national statistical organisations (NSOs) in census thematic analysis as a census dissemination strategy. The workshop will cover contents related to the the process for identifying and selecting thematic topics, developing a roadmap for thematic analysis, various modalities for undertaking thematic analysis, their strengths, challenges and risks and identifying tools and best practices from the region and elsewhere for thematic analysis, including various outputs and their dissemination (e.g. detailed reports, policy briefs, thematic atlases, geospatial visualizations, etc), with the ultimate objective of improving the impact of census data on policy and programs. While the focus will be on the countries that recently completed their censuses, all countries that have implemented the 2020 Census Round or are actively planning for the 2030 Round will be considered.

Background

Census data have a wide range of uses, including, but not limited to, policy and program design and monitoring, administrative and electoral boundary delimitation, demographic and socio-economic research, business and industry planning, and crisis response. Census data dissemination is, therefore, a critical step in ensuring that the information collected reaches those who can leverage it for informed decision-making. It is more than just sharing data; it is about making information publicly accessible in ways that meet the needs of the users, thus making it actionable. There are multiple mechanisms by which national statistical organisations (NSOs) disseminate the results of their censuses, which serve different purposes. The most common ones are a report with an overview of the main census results, standard tabulations at the national and sub-national levels, census atlases with the spatial visualization of the main indicators, and online databases for more sophisticated users to generate their own analyses.

Thematic analysis of census data is a powerful means of census dissemination, going beyond the descriptive surface of census official results to provide deeper insights into - and a more nuanced understanding of - demographic trends, socio-economic patterns, and other factors shaping socio-economic development. As opposed to other dissemination mechanisms, thematic analysis places the census results into a broader interpretative context, making them more accessible to a wider audience and usable for policy purposes. Being a systematic examination of specific themes within census data, thematic analysis is fundamentally a research task that requires the steps of a research process, starting with the mapping of knowledge gaps, the formulation of research questions, the design of a methodology, and the development of an analysis plan.

The overarching purpose of census thematic analysis is to unlock the full potential of census data to inform a policy audience and support policy evaluation and development, responding to a country's specific development needs and addressing research questions of national interest. Compared to other census data dissemination products, thematic analysis brings specific added values. It enables the exploration of variables beyond the primary census results, fostering a deeper understanding of societal dynamics, and, through trends analysis, how they change over time. The production of census thematic analysis reports also maximizes the utilization of census data and justifies the huge financial and human resource investments made to implement the census program. Most importantly, it provides the data users and stakeholders with interpretation of the results and their implications. For example, a thematic monograph on gender can provide more conceptual clarity on what types of indicators from the census data can illuminate gender roles and relations and their implications for socio-economic development, rather than merely juxtaposing data for men and women. By focusing on a particular theme, thematic reports can attend to the needs of particular segments of users of census data, such as the health sector, the education sector, urban planners, and the private sector, among others.

UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States (ASRO) in collaboration with the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics (AITRS), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and other partners plan to conduct a workshop to strengthen capacity of National Statistical Organizations (NSOs), and national statistics systems at large, in census thematic analysis as a strategy for enhancing accessibility and utilization of census data.

The workshop will review the process for identifying and selecting thematic topics, assess various modalities for undertaking thematic analysis, their strengths, challenges and risks and identify tools and best practices from the region and elsewhere for thematic analysis, including various outputs and their dissemination (e.g. detailed reports, policy briefs, thematic atlases, geospatial visualizations, etc), with the ultimate objective of improving the impact of census data on policy and programs. While the focus will be on the countries that recently completed their censuses, all countries that have implemented the 2020 Census Round or are in the planning phase for the 2030 Round will be considered.

Objectives

The purpose of the workshop is to enhance NSOs' capacity to conduct census thematic analysis as a method to disseminate census results that expand their use, accessibility and ultimately, their impact. This will be achieved by sharing tools, plans and experiences from NSOs or other agencies that have already or are planning to develop thematic analyses for dissemination of their census results.

Specific objectives are to:

1. Discuss the purpose and benefits of thematic analysis as a census dissemination strategy.
2. Discuss mechanisms to identify and select thematic analysis topics through user engagement.
3. Identify practical approaches applied by NSOs to optimise census thematic analysis to respond to user needs - i.e. internal implementation by own staff; out-sourcing; collaboration with academic and other research institutions, etc - and lessons therefrom in terms of advantages, challenges and risks.
4. Identify tools and best practices for census thematic analysis, including various outputs and their dissemination (e.g. detailed reports, policy briefs, thematic atlases, geospatial visualizations, etc).

Outputs

The workshop will inform several outputs:

- A set of recommendations to improve the range of census thematic analyses conducted to promote dissemination of census results aligned with user needs.
- Draft action plans/roadmaps for optimizing census thematic analysis by countries that have conducted the 2020 Census Round and those preparing for their censuses.
- A documented set of recommendations outlining areas where further work is needed to support Arab countries in developing and disseminating census products.
- Enhanced capacity of participants in approaches and tools for enhancing census data analysis, dissemination and use.

Date and venue

- The workshop will be held from May 19-21, 2025 in Amman, Jordan. The venue will be confirmed.

Targeted participants

The workshop targets the following countries that have implemented the 2020 Census Round or are actively planning for the 2030 round - Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates.

- NSO participants - Each NSO delegation should consist of two participants only: one (1) expert from the statistical team who has responsibility for an area of the analysis and has been or will be responsible for developing census thematic analysis outputs or products; and one (1) expert from the census engagement or outreach team who has experience in engaging with users and has a good understanding of their local stakeholder landscape or who will be assigned these responsibilities in the planned census dissemination.
- UNFPA's Country Office Population and Development Focal Persons.
- Experts from UN and other organisations with experience in analysing and disseminating census data

Arrangements will also be made with the host country to identify 3 - 4 representatives of users of census data at the policy-making level (such as Ministries of Health, Social Development, Economic Planningetc) and other users from academia, the private sector and civil society, to share experiences, challenges, gaps and any good practices in census data accessibility, analysis and use.

Working Languages

The workshop will be held in English and Arabic.

Contacts

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Format of the Workshop

The aim of the workshop is to promote knowledge sharing and learning among NSOs on their experiences with census thematic analysis and census products' development and dissemination more broadly in terms of what worked well, what did not work well and what they would do differently to inform other countries' plans and design.

Countries participating will be given clear guidelines on the presentation content to ensure that these aims are met.