



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2022

Original: English

Statistical Commission

Fifty-fourth session

28 February–3 March 2023

Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Items for information: demographic statistics

Demographic statistics

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2022/324 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics. It provides a summary of the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme during the past year, with a focus on the adverse impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the implementation of this Programme; direct support to census-takers at the request of Member States; building national capacity for census-taking through conducting regional workshops; and assisting countries in implementing the recommendations of the Statistical Commission in terms of building national statistical population registers. It provides information on the implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, outlining the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of national civil registration systems and the production of accurate and reliable vital statistics, as well as maintaining the momentum of Legal Identity Agenda implementation in the African region. The report presents updated information on the work of the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment established by the World Health Organization and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. It also presents information on the collection of demographic statistics through the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires and on the activities related to capacity-building for the implementation of the methodology for delineating urban and rural areas for international and regional statistical purposes.

The Commission is invited to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2023/1.



I. Introduction

1. The present report, which was prepared in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2022/324 and past practices, presents activities carried out by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat in the area of demographic statistics in the period from March to December 2022.

II. Implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme

2. The 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme was approved by the Statistical Commission at its forty-sixth session and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 2015/10. The Programme acknowledges population and housing censuses as 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 Programme is aimed at ensuring 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 manner as possible.

3. 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. In its decision 53/107, the Commission expressed concern regarding the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on Programme's implementation and urged all Member States to conduct their population and housing census or produce census-like small area statistics, as soon as circumstances allow, and to continue securing financial and human resources to that end. It also requested the Statistics Division, in its role as the secretariat of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme, to continue to monitor the implementation of the Programme; to continue to develop platforms for exchanging national experiences, practices and lessons learned in conducting population and housing censuses during the COVID-19 pandemic; and to continue to develop the components of the methodological framework for population and housing censuses.

4. The Division continued to monitor and document census-taking worldwide during the reporting period of March to December 2022. It developed and deployed a survey targeting countries/areas that had initially planned to conduct a population and housing census in 2020 or 2021, years which were highly recommended as census years to allow for regional and international comparisons. A majority of countries and areas complied with that recommendation, which unfortunately coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In October 2022, when the present report was drafted, the survey was still ongoing. Preliminary results indicate that a significant number of countries and areas are making efforts to conduct the population and housing census before the end of 2024. Concerns remain, however, regarding the census coverage and the overall quality of both the census operations and the resulting statistics. Detailed results of this survey will be submitted as the background document to the present report.¹

5. The Division will also conduct a third expert group meeting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on census-taking from 12 to 14 December 2022 in New

¹ Background papers referred to in the present report are expected to be made available by the end of January 2023.

York. The conclusions and recommendations from the expert group meeting will be submitted as a background document to the present report.

6. The final report on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme will be submitted by the Secretary-General to the fifty-fifth session of the Statistical Commission, in 2024. It will be amended by the results of the monitoring of census-taking by the end of 2024 – the official end of the 2020 census round – and this amendment will be submitted, together with the launching of the 2030 World Population and Housing Census Programme, to the fifty-sixth session of the Commission, in 2025.

7. In terms of building capacity for census-taking during the pandemic, the Division, in collaboration with the Regional Office for Arab States of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics conducted a workshop on the implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme for Arabic-speaking countries, from 5 to 8 December 2022, in Algiers. The conclusions and recommendations from the workshop will be submitted as a background paper to the present report.

8. During the reporting period, the Division finalized work on the technical report entitled *Measuring Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Through Population and Housing Censuses and Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Data*, and conducted a national workshop on the subject at the request of INE Guatemala, from 24 to 28 October 2022.

9. In its decision 53/107, the Statistical Commission supported the initiative to encourage national statistical authorities to consider the establishment of national statistical population registers based on the census master file produced in the 2020 round of censuses, with the establishment of such registers to be undertaken only in full compliance with the provisions of the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics as set out in General Assembly resolution 68/261, including the requirement to protect the confidentiality and privacy of individual records, and under clear and unambiguous legal provisions which include permission to exploit the national statistical population register solely for the purposes of compiling aggregate statistics. In that regard, the Division finalized the work on the *Handbook on Register-based Population and Housing Censuses*, submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session. Furthermore, it supported the implementation of the *Handbook* by co-organizing the a conference in Chile on the topic “Towards the next chapter of building official statistics: use of administrative records for the production of population statistics”, held in Santiago from 18 to 20 October 2022.

10. In cooperation with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific (SIAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Economic Cooperation Organization, the Division conducted a virtual training on register-based population and housing censuses from 25 to 27 October 2022. The training was based on the *Handbook on Register-based Population and Housing Censuses* and Conference of European Statisticians methodological publications.² Participants comprised technical staff, statisticians and demographers from national statistical offices whose main responsibilities are for planning or conducting the population and housing census from the Economic Cooperation Organization countries.³

² See *Guidelines on the Use of Registers and Administrative Data for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, 2018) and *Guidelines for Assessing the Quality of Administrative Sources in Censuses* (United Nations publication, 2021).

³ Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

11. As in previous rounds, the Division will continue organizing virtual workshops to promote the international standards for population and housing censuses, thereby strengthening national capacities to conduct a census or otherwise generate census-like small area statistics and support the monitoring of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Details of 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.

12. The Division, together with UNFPA, the United States Census Bureau and the World Bank is coordinating population and housing census-related activities through the International Committee on Census Coordination, which meets at least twice a year.

13. The Division will also continue to monitor, document and report on the impact of COVID-19 on the conduct of the population and housing censuses in the 2020 round, as well as on the impact on the quality of resulting census statistics.

III. Implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda

14. At its fifty-first session, in March 2020, the Statistical Commission, in its decision 51/113, supported the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda as a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management, and as an expansion of the existing methodological framework for civil registration and vital statistics. The Commission urged Member States to implement the Legal Identity Agenda as a matter of priority.

15. The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda task force was established to coordinate the work at the level of the United Nations system and to facilitate the implementation of the Legal Identity Agenda in the field. The task force is chaired by the Statistics Division, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and also includes the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), ESCAP, UNFPA, Global Pulse, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization (WHO). The task force adopted its work programme for 2022 in January 2022 and meets once every two months to monitor its implementation. The secretariat of the task force, consisting of the Division, UNICEF, UNDP and ECA, meets every week. During the reporting period, the implementation of the Legal Identity Agenda was focused on the activities initiated in 13 pilot countries in Africa⁴ and on supporting the respective country teams in terms of rapid assessment and technical support.

16. In addition, the task force secretariat organized a side event during the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly on the implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda in two Member States, Cambodia and Cameroon. The event documented the development of the government infrastructure for ensuring universal civil registration of all vital events,⁵ which translates into regular, reliable, accurate and comprehensive vital statistics and legal identity for all from birth to death.⁶

⁴ Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Zambia.

⁵ Vital events include births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, divorces, annulments, judicial separations, adoptions, legitimations and recognitions.

⁶ See <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/meetings/2022/unlia-unga-side>.

17. The representatives of the task force participated in the expert group meeting of the sixth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration held from 24 to 28 October 2022 in Addis Ababa, which was attended by more than 500 experts from the African continent, with the task of preparing the discussion and proceedings for the ministerial conference.⁷ The expert group recommended that African States should adopt and/or strengthen a holistic and interoperable approach to civil registration, in line with the recommendations of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda,⁸ as a means to reach target 16.9 of the Sustainable Development Goals concerning legal identity for all by 2030.

18. The task force continues to systematically document the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically on the operations and maintenance of civil registration and production of vital statistics during the pandemic, the short- and long-term consequences on registration of vital events owing to the pandemic, and beyond the pandemic, ensuring universal civil registration of all vital events and the production of comprehensive, reliable and regular vital statistics. These results are available at the website for the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda.⁹

19. The Division continues to serve as the secretariat for the Global Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Group and maintains the accompanying website,¹⁰ which provides information on the activities of all the members of the Group relating to improving civil registration and vital statistics. The Group elaborated on various projects and programmes by its members, ensuring a coordinated approach and the use of international standards and recommendations.

20. As reported to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session (see [E/CN.3/2022/9](#)), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and WHO established the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment with the primary goal of advising and supporting WHO and the Department in assisting Member States to obtain accurate estimates of the number of deaths attributable to the direct and indirect impact of the pandemic. The Statistics Division and the Population Division of the Department, together with WHO, serve as the secretariat of the Technical Advisory Group.

21. The Technical Advisory Group established five working groups to ensure that it took a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to delivering on its responsibilities:

- (a) Working group 1 on global mortality estimates;
- (b) Working group 2 on the use of household surveys and population censuses to provide reliable information on COVID-19 mortality;¹¹
- (c) Working group 3 on death registration and reporting systems, which presented its findings and recommendations to the Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session ([E/CN.3/2022/9](#), para. 11);
- (d) Working group 4 on summary metrics of the toll in lives lost;
- (e) Working group 5 on inequality in COVID-19 mortality between and within countries.

⁷ See <https://www.uneca.org/events/data-and-statistics/experts-group-meeting-of-the-6th-conference-of-african-ministers>.

⁸ See https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/ACS/6CoMRCR/19122022_en_egm-on-crvs-com6-recommendations_final_002.pdf.

⁹ See <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>.

¹⁰ Available at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/globalcrvs.html>.

¹¹ An elaboration on the work of this group is presented in the report of the Inter-secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys ([E/CN.3/2023/6](#)), to be considered under item 3 (c).

22. In discussing the outputs and the results of the work of the Technical Advisory Group, the Group's Co-Chairs and the Chairs of the working groups expressed the need for the Technical Advisory Group to continue its work and suggested re-alignment of some of the working groups. The final proposal in this respect will be submitted to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and WHO principals in early 2023 for approval and the decision will be orally submitted to the fifty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission.

IV. *Demographic Yearbook*

23. Every year, the Statistics Division collects, compiles and disseminates official demographic and social statistics for all countries and areas of the world. The data are collected through a set of annual and census questionnaires dispatched to national statistical offices. The data collected refer to population distribution and composition by several characteristics, including the population of cities and urban agglomerations, fertility, mortality, nuptiality, annual migration flows, migrant stock according to the population censuses, household characteristics, housing characteristics, economic characteristics, and levels of education. The traditional form of dissemination is the *Demographic Yearbook* collection, published annually since 1948.¹²

24. The information in paragraph 25 below represents an update to the report submitted to the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session (E/CN.3/2019/23), and is focused on the availability of vital statistics collected from the national statistical offices, which is defined as the main data sets available for each vital event published in the *Demographic Yearbook*, the 2021 edition of which was published in 2022.

25. Broadly speaking, the availability of vital statistics, by topic, is as follows: live births by urban or rural residence, 73 per cent; deaths by urban or rural residence, 73 per cent; live births by age of mother and sex of child, and deaths by age and sex, 63 and 65 per cent, respectively; marriages by urban or rural residence, 63 per cent; marriages by age of groom and by age of bride, 48 per cent; infant deaths by urban or rural residence, 62 per cent; infant deaths by age and sex, 48 per cent; divorces by urban or rural residence, 50 per cent; late fetal deaths by urban or rural residence, 40 per cent; live births by age of father, 38 per cent; legally induced abortions, 27 per cent; and legally induced abortions by age of woman, 20 per cent.

26. Approximately three quarters of the countries or areas of the world have submitted overall statistics on total births and deaths to the United Nations. The share decreases significantly, however, with the introduction of additional variables, such as age, and with respect to other units of vital statistics enumeration, such as fetal deaths.

V. Activities related to the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas

27. The Statistical Commission, in its decision 51/112, endorsed the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas, while emphasizing that the methodology is not intended to replace national definitions of urban and rural areas, but to complement them. It also urged the release of the technical report on the implementation of the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas

¹² The *Demographic Yearbook* issues are available online at <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/index.cshtml>. Demographic data, especially population and housing censuses data are incrementally published online as well, at <http://data.un.org/>.

as early as possible. Pursuant to that decision, the Manual on the Methodology to Delineate Cities, Towns and Rural Areas, a methodology endorsed by the Commission for international and regional statistical purposes, has been further developed.¹³ The document was principally designed as a practical guide for data producers, suppliers and statisticians so that they have the necessary information to implement the methodology and ensure coherence and consistency within their data collections and analysis.

28. The Division, in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the European Commission and Eurostat, organized a subregional workshop for the implementation of the degree of urbanization methodology in South-East Asian countries, in Bangkok, held from 28 November to 2 December 2022. The participants are experts from national statistical offices and national geospatial agencies. The report of the workshop will be submitted as a background paper to the present report.

VI. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

29. **The Statistical Commission is invited to take note of the present report.**

¹³ The 2021 update is available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-manuals-and-guidelines/-/ks-02-20-499>.