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**ESCAP REGIONAL CENSUS PROGRAMME**

(Item 7 of the provisional agenda)

**GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGY IN POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUSES**

*Note by the secretariat*

**SUMMARY**

In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/13 of 22 July 2005, it is recommended that member States conduct a population and housing census at least once during the period 2005 to 2014 in order to collect key information on every person and every housing unit. Being the largest statistical undertaking, a population and housing census requires careful planning, broad-ranging technical capacity and considerable financial resources. Sensibly applied modern information technology can reduce the cost and improve the quality of census results considerably. Based on the results of a survey among statistical and census offices, international recommendations, and past experience in the region, the present document outlines the potential for and modalities of a regional exchange of expertise on census technologies. It also contains an overview of the technological changes that have occurred since the previous round of censuses. The Committee is invited to provide the secretariat with guidance on the most appropriate manner to facilitate the sharing of information technology knowledge and good practices in the region.

\* The late submission of the present document is due to the need to include information from a number of survey responses received after the submission deadline.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A. National and United Nations mandates and standards for population and housing censuses.....	1
B. Regional capacity-building activities on population and housing censuses .....	3
I. APPLICATION OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN NATIONAL CENSUSES AND EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 2010 ROUND OF CENSUSES .....	5
A. Overview.....	5
B. Office automation and data security .....	8
C. Planning and monitoring.....	9
D. The Geographic Information System and the Global Positioning System .....	9
E. Enumeration.....	9
F. Data capture, coding and editing .....	10
G. Dissemination .....	11
H. Standards for documentation and data exchange.....	11
II. AREAS AND MODALITIES FOR REQUIRED ASSISTANCE .....	12

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Reference years for population and housing censuses in the ESCAP region .....	2
2. Technologies applied at different stages of the census .....	6
3. Data capture and processing technologies in the latest enumerated census and the next planned census.....	10
4. Areas where technical assistance is needed .....	12
5. Possible modalities for the sharing of knowledge and expertise .....	13



## INTRODUCTION

1. A population and housing census is a major statistical undertaking in any country, requiring broad-ranging technical capacity and substantial financial resources. Sensibly applied modern information technology (IT) can reduce the cost of a census and improve the quality of results considerably. The present document outlines the potential for and modalities of a regional exchange of expertise on census technologies. Based on a survey<sup>1</sup> conducted among statistical and census offices, it provides an overview of the technologies used during the 2000 round of censuses and identifies areas in which technical assistance will be needed during the upcoming 2010 round.

2. Census operations require a variety of information, communication and space-based technologies. Optimizing the use of IT in a census is primarily a managerial challenge. In that respect, the Expert Group Meeting on Effective Use of IT in Population Censuses will be held in Bangkok from 10 to 12 December 2007. Experts at the meeting will review the challenges and lessons learned in the previous round and assess the technological trends that should be taken into account in the preparations for the 2010 round. The recommendations of the Expert Group Meeting will be made available as an informal document to the Committee at its fourth session.

### **A. National and United Nations mandates and standards for population and housing censuses**

3. Population and housing censuses form a principal component of a functional national statistical system.<sup>2</sup> Their importance is unquestionable for the following reasons:<sup>3</sup>

(a) Censuses often represent the only chance in a given decade to collect accurate basic information on the composition and characteristics of a population, as well as changes in that population;

(b) Censuses are a primary source of data for small areas and small population groups for development planning;

(c) Census data are critical for monitoring socio-economic and environmental trends, policies and programmes;

(d) Censuses provide sampling frames for household surveys;

(e) In many countries, the allocation of public funds to administrative regions and electoral representation depend on the population count in censuses;

(f) Research in many fields would not be possible without background and denominator variables provided by population and housing censuses;

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<sup>1</sup> A questionnaire-based survey on population and housing censuses, conducted by e-mail in August 2007 among the 58 regional members and associate members of ESCAP.

<sup>2</sup> In most parts of the region, the population and housing census is conducted by the national statistical office. However, some countries have an office dedicated to conducting the census.

<sup>3</sup> See E/ESCAP/CPR(3)/4, paras. 1-3, available at [http://unescap.org/pdd/CPR/CPR2006/English/CPR3\\_5E.pdf](http://unescap.org/pdd/CPR/CPR2006/English/CPR3_5E.pdf).

(g) The private sector uses data from a population and housing census for many purposes, including estimating consumer demand and determining the location of retail units;

(h) The 2010 census round (2005-2014) offers the single most important opportunity for improving the availability and quality of data required for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals and targets. A number of Goal indicators come directly from the population and housing census. In addition, the census provides reference populations for a large number of other Goal indicators.

4. In recent years, resolutions have been adopted on this issue. In its resolution 2005/13 of 22 July 2005 on the 2010 World Population and Housing Census Programme, the Economic and Social Council urged member States to carry out a population census during the period from 2005 to 2014. Subsequently, in its resolution 62/10 of 12 April 2006 on strengthening statistical capacity in Asia and the Pacific, the Commission recalled the Council resolution and provided the Executive Secretary with a general capacity-building mandate. Special legislative acts and dedicated budget provisions are testimony to the national priority given to population and housing censuses. The reference years for population censuses conducted, as well as for those planned in the ESCAP region for the 2010 round of censuses, are listed in table 1.

**Table 1. Reference years for population and housing censuses in the ESCAP region**  
(status known as of the end of October 2007)

Country/area	Latest census	Next census
1. Afghanistan <sup>a</sup>	1979	2008
2. American Samoa <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
3. Armenia <sup>a</sup>	2001	(2011)
4. Australia <sup>a</sup>	2006	2011
5. Azerbaijan <sup>a</sup>	1999	2009
6. Bangladesh <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
7. Bhutan <sup>a</sup>	2005	2015
8. Brunei Darussalam <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
9. Cambodia <sup>a</sup>	1998	2008
10. China <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
11. Cook Islands <sup>a</sup>	2006	(2011)
12. Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1993	(2008)
13. Fiji	1996	(2007)
14. French Polynesia	2007	(2012)
15. Georgia <sup>a</sup>	2002	2010
16. Guam	2000	2010
17. Hong Kong, China <sup>a</sup>	2006	2011
18. India <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
19. Indonesia <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
20. Iran (Islamic Republic of) <sup>a</sup>	2006	(2016)
21. Japan <sup>a</sup>	2005	2010
22. Kazakhstan <sup>a</sup>	1999	2009
23. Kiribati	2005	(2010)
24. Kyrgyzstan <sup>a</sup>	1999	2009
25. Lao People's Democratic Republic <sup>a</sup>	2005	2015
26. Macao, China <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
27. Malaysia <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010

Country/area	Latest census	Next census
28. Maldives <sup>a</sup>	2006	2011
29. Marshall Islands <sup>a</sup>	1999	2009
30. Micronesia, Federated States of	2000	(2010)
31. Mongolia <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
32. Myanmar	1983	?
33. Nauru <sup>a</sup>	2002	(2007)
34. Nepal <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
35. New Caledonia <sup>a</sup>	2004	(2009)
36. New Zealand <sup>a</sup>	2006	2011
37. Niue <sup>a</sup>	2006	2011
38. Northern Mariana Islands <sup>a</sup>	2000	(2010)
39. Pakistan <sup>a</sup>	1998	2008
40. Palau <sup>a</sup>	2005	(2010)
41. Papua New Guinea <sup>a</sup>	2000	(2010)
42. Philippines <sup>a</sup>	2007	2010
43. Republic of Korea <sup>a</sup>	2005	2010
44. Russian Federation <sup>a</sup>	2002	2010
45. Samoa <sup>a</sup>	2006	(2011)
46. Singapore <sup>a</sup>	2000	(2010)
47. Solomon Islands <sup>a</sup>	1999	(2009)
48. Sri Lanka <sup>a</sup>	2001	2011
49. Tajikistan <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
50. Thailand <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
51. Timor-Leste <sup>a</sup>	2004	(2010)
52. Tonga <sup>a</sup>	1996	(2006)
53. Turkey <sup>a</sup>	2000	2010
54. Turkmenistan <sup>a</sup>	1995	2009
55. Tuvalu	2002	(2012)
56. Uzbekistan	1989	?
57. Vanuatu	1999	(2009)
58. Viet Nam <sup>a</sup>	1999	2009

Sources: ESCAP survey on population and housing censuses, August-October 2007 and the United Nations Statistics Division, available at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/censusdates.htm>.

Note: Years in parentheses in the last column refer to the expected, rather than reported, date.

<sup>a</sup> Responded to the ESCAP survey.

## B. Regional capacity-building activities on population and housing censuses

5. The ESCAP secretariat has been attempting to obtain dedicated regional funding for the priority areas of censuses recommended by expert group meetings in 2004 and 2006.<sup>4</sup> It has submitted to the Population and Housing Census Trust Fund and other donors project proposals on (a) promoting the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*,<sup>5</sup> (b) building a migration data system around population censuses and (c) supporting the effective use of IT in population censuses. Follow-up discussions are being held with the United Nations Statistics Division and other relevant partners on the schedule for regional activities in 2008 and 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Expert Group Meeting on Population and Housing Census, held in Bangkok on 9 and 10 December 2004 (see <http://unescap.org/stat/meet/census2004/>) and Expert Group Meeting on ESCAP Regional Census Programme, held in Bangkok on 27 and 28 November 2006 (see <http://unescap.org/stat/meet/egm2004/>).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XVII.8. The *Principles and Recommendations* and other key guidelines for censuses can be downloaded at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/census3.htm>.

6. In the current technical cooperation programme of ESCAP, two ongoing projects contribute directly to the improvement of population and housing censuses. The United Nations Development Account project on improving disability statistics, implemented by ESCAP from 2007 to 2009 in collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, advocates the collection of data on disability through regular national statistical systems, including the population and housing census. A regional workshop on census-based disability data collection is scheduled for 2008. The project would develop extended sets of questions for surveys, including post-census surveys and health surveys, needed to collect detailed data for policy needs. For more information on the project, see E/ESCAP/CPR(4)/6.

7. In 2007 and 2008, the Statistics Division, in collaboration with the World Bank and the secretariat of the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (PARIS21), is implementing a project that aims to improve access to microdata<sup>6</sup> in the region, including from population and housing censuses. The project identifies and addresses constraints to microdata dissemination, helps to review national policies and plans for dissemination, and provides advice on the safe dissemination and archiving of microdata. The project provides tools and training for the adoption of systematic metadata documentation practices.<sup>7</sup> The project is currently being implemented in six countries, whose experiences will be shared in a regional workshop in 2008.

8. In Central Asia, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), in collaboration with ESCAP and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, is implementing a United Nations Development Account project on the strengthening of the national statistical capacity of countries of the Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia. Training workshops have been organized for those countries regarding population and housing censuses, the measurement of the health status of the population, and the measurement and analysis of the non-observed economy. The ESCAP secretariat has contributed resource persons to the following workshops:<sup>8</sup>

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