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## **Economic Commission for Europe**

Conference of European Statisticians

### **Group of Experts on Population and Housing Censuses**

#### **Twenty-fourth Meeting**

Geneva, Switzerland, 20-22 September 2023

Item 4 (m) of the provisional agenda

**Revising the Conference of European Statisticians Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses for the 2030 round:  
Communications and Outreach**

## **Preliminary progress report of the Conference of European Statisticians Census Task Force on Communications and Outreach**

**Note by the Conference of European Statisticians Task Force on Communications and Outreach\***

### *Summary*

The Task Force on Communication and Outreach, with representatives from multiple nations and organizations, has focused on assessing previous recommendations and identifying current communication challenges in running national censuses. Among these challenges are the growing influence of social media, the spread of misinformation, declining survey response rates, and the nuances of managing respondent relations. With an emphasis on addressing these challenges, the task force members have undertaken a thorough review of the 2010 survey questionnaire, discussed its existing content and suggested additions to adapt to the evolving media landscape. Significant updates were recommended to reflect the new digital environment and the current global context. As the task force moves forward, they await the insights from the survey of national practices, that will shape recommendations for the upcoming 2030 round.

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NOTE: The designations employed in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

## I. Introduction

1. The Task Force on Communications and Outreach, with representatives from Canada (serving as the Task Force leader), CIS-Stat (Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States), Ireland, Poland, the United Kingdom, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, and the United States of America, has reported significant progress in the development of content for the Recommendations for the 2030 Censuses of Population and Housing. The task force has gathered considerable experience in communications and outreach from various countries, resulting in updated content for the online survey of national practices and informing the development of updated and new recommendations for the 2030 round.

### A. Defining the scope of the work for communications and outreach

2. The primary objective of the task force is to assess the nature of the publicity campaign activities detailed in the 2020 recommendations. This assessment considers advances in technology and shifts in social interactions since the last edition was prepared, and incorporates insights from successful communication campaigns from the 2020 round.
3. The task force's scope includes:
  - i. Stakeholder consultation during planning phases: this involves pinpointing key stakeholder groups, understanding the rationale for engaging these groups, and determining methods of engagement.
  - ii. Publicity and information campaigns during operational phases: this covers the reasons for initiating such campaigns, strategies for their execution, and their primary messages.
  - iii. Recognizing prevalent challenges that communication campaigns aim to address: these challenges include engaging hard-to-reach and hard-to-enumerate groups; addressing concerns or sensitivities among various population segments; and catering to varying communication needs that arise from different census methodologies.
4. The Task Force on Communications and Outreach will collaborate with the Task Force on Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Planning to ensure thorough consideration of matters related to emergency-related communications.
5. The 2020 recommendations provide comprehensive information concerning pre-census engagement. Yet, the pandemic has radically altered both our operational context and the media landscape. The 2020 recommendations do not address the significant role of social media in communication, monitoring activities, or publicity endeavours during such census phases as early awareness, collection, and dissemination. There is also an absence of directives on countering misinformation/disinformation and formulating responsive communications for crisis management, including public and media relations. Moreover, the guidance pertaining to communications during the dissemination phase warrants further elaboration and details.
6. In an effort to address these issues, the task force will offer advice and guidance to countries on these subjects in the 2030 recommendations document.

## **B. Country experience with communication and outreach**

7. The members of the task force have scrutinized the 2020 recommendations to identify the omissions in the document and to understand the present communication challenges confronted by statistical agencies throughout the census cycle.
8. They also shared their recent and ongoing experiences with census communications and outreach in bi-weekly virtual meetings conducted in early 2023.
9. Among the communication challenges, task force members highlighted the terminology concerning hard-to-reach populations (also referred to as hard-to-count, hard-to-enumerate, and difficult-to-enumerate) and the strategies to engage particular groups such as individuals who rent and communal establishments.
10. The increasing difficulty in engaging individuals and disseminating messages, particularly to smaller yet expanding segments of society, was also addressed. For example, certain groups are leveraging contemporary social issues to propagate conspiracy theories, resulting in misinformation or disinformation.
11. Regarding the disinformation/misinformation aspect, it is imperative to have comprehensive information on monitoring both social and traditional media. Insight into the tools employed for this purpose and collaborations with major social media entities is critical.
12. The importance of the respondents' journey, including contact centres, public-facing messages, website interactions, communication with enumerators at the doorstep, and respondent relations, was also discussed.
13. Other challenges highlighted include online literacy, declining response rates across all surveys, the need for real-time monitoring of collection activities to adjust communication strategies, and matters related to risk management, crisis management, and scenario planning.

## **C. Reviewing the 2010 survey questionnaire of national practices**

14. The task force members reviewed the 2010 survey questionnaire in bi-weekly meetings, discussing the existing content and suggesting additions. The final questionnaire content was submitted to UNECE at the end of April 2023.
15. As a result, several questions related to social media and dissemination communication activities were introduced. Additionally, pre-existing content was revised to accommodate new media platforms and the prevailing public context.

## **II. Conclusion**

16. Over the past six months, the Task Force on Communication and Outreach has been preparing for the development of recommendations for the 2030 round. The members are looking forward to analyzing the feedback from the survey of national practices and using the findings to shape 2030 recommendations.
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