



Are population censuses in Asia and the Pacific evolving?

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Abstract:

The population census is among the most complex and massive exercises a nation undertakes ¹. It requires comprehensive planning, immense resourcing, attentive implementation as well as thorough collaboration nationally, or regionally such as among the Pacific Island States. In return, the population census generates a wealth of data for legislative and evidence-based decision-making at all levels - global, regional, national and subnational.

For centuries, the essential role of the census in policy formulation and governance has been known, more recently in the development and social welfare planning and programmes. Adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which underlines inclusive development and places the priority on “Leaving No One Behind”, has multiplied the importance of population census as the major source of data for small geographic areas and small population groups in many countries. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted the critical role of timely and disaggregated population statistics in monitoring and responding to the situation, while the census, in its traditional form, could hardly catch up with demands.

Now, official statisticians worldwide are challenged by the need to respond to increasing statistical demands in the face of limitations and disasters such as the Covid-19 pandemic. However, adversity also leads to opportunity. While committed to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, National Statistical Offices are exploring new approaches to producing data and statistics, which among others include “modernizing census taking”. Such efforts have already started within the official statistics community. The pandemic restrictions are shedding further light on the limitations of traditional census taking and accelerating those efforts to evolve more urgently towards more resilient approaches.

This paper will review how census taking has been evolving over recent decades, focusing on the Asia and the Pacific region as the home to two-thirds of the world’s population.

Keywords:

Census taking; modernizing census; data collection

¹ Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, United Nations Publication ST/ESA/STAT/SER.M/67/Rev.3. Available at https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesM/Series_M67Rev3en.pdf.