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*Summary:
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United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Statistics Division, Demographic and Social Statistics Branch

**National reporting of national and/or ethnic group and sex
data from population and housing censuses (covering 1971
through 1993 Demographic Yearbooks as well as the
forthcoming Demographic Yearbook Special Topic)**

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. The Department works in three main interlinked areas: (i) it compiles, generates and analyses a wide range of economic, social and environmental data and information on which States Members of the United Nations draw to review common problems and to take stock of policy options; (ii) it facilitates the negotiations of Member States in many intergovernmental bodies on joint courses of action to address ongoing or emerging global challenges; and (iii) it advises interested Governments on the ways and means of translating policy frameworks developed in United Nations conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance, helps build national capacities.

NOTE

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this report do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Symbols of United Nations documents are composed of capital letters combined with figures.

The term "country" as used in the text of this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

This report has been issued without formal editing.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, collects data on national and/or ethnic group, language and religion from population and housing censuses, and has done so for more than 50 years, using standardised questionnaires sent to national statistical offices (NSOs). The collected data are processed and disseminated by the United Nations Statistics Division through the Demographic Yearbook (DYB) system. The United Nations Demographic Yearbook system is designed to collect, store and disseminate official national demographic and social statistics at the international level, and provide a selection of these data to a wide range of users through print publications such as the annual Demographic Yearbook, as well as through CD ROM on special topics¹, and the Internet².
2. The United Nations Statistics Division has been working in collaboration with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in reviewing the way indigenous peoples are measured in national censuses, and to make data relevant to indigenous issues available on the internet. The current report provides background information on the Demographic Yearbook and the United Nations Statistics Division's population census questionnaire on national and/or ethnic group and reviews reporting of national data to the United Nations Statistics Division on this topic.

¹ Two CD-ROMs have so far been issued: the *Demographic Yearbook Historical Supplement*, which presents demographic statistics for the period 1948 to 1997, and the *Demographic Yearbook: Natality Statistics*, which contains a series of detailed tables dedicated to natality and covering the period 1980 to 1998.

² For example, data on capital cities and cities with population of 100,000 or more are available at <http://www.un.org/depts/unsd/demog/index.html>; and, data from the *Population and Vital Statistics Report* are available to subscribers at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/seriesa/index.asp>.

II. Background on the Demographic Yearbook Data Collection on National and/or Ethnic Group and sex.

3. Beginning with its second issue in 1948, the Demographic Yearbook has featured a recurring special topic every year, for example mortality, natality, ageing and the situation of elderly persons, international migration and population censuses, among others. From 1948 to 1996, the yearbook published general tables and special topic tables in the same volume. The only two exceptions are the 1978 and 1991 issues, when the Demographic Yearbook was issued in two parts: a general tables volume and a special topic volume. From the 1997 issue onwards, the print Demographic Yearbook being disseminated annually contains only the general tables. Two supplementary (special topic) volumes have been issued since, a historical supplement in 1997 and a natality special topic in 2000 (see Demographic Yearbook Special Topics online at the following address:
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybcens.htm>).
4. The current report focuses on the topics National and/or Ethnic Group, Language and Religion³ collected by the United Nations Statistics Division and disseminated in the Demographic Yearbook Special Topic issue on population censuses. These three topics have been used by countries, based on national context, to identify indigenous peoples. (see <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybcens.htm>)

III. Description of the United Nations Statistics Division Questionnaire

5. The United Nations Statistics Division population census questionnaire (general) is one of six sets of questionnaires sent out in September/October in 2001 to more than 200 countries or areas that

³ These three topics as a group are also referred to as “ethnic characteristics”

conducted a census between 1995-2004⁴. At present, the United Nations Statistics Division population census questionnaire (general) includes the following three tables relevant to ethnic characteristics:

Table 16. Population by national and/or ethnic group and sex

Table 17. Population by religion and sex

Table 18. Population by language and sex

Each table provides space for collecting disaggregated data by urban/rural (starting in 1971) as well as by sex. The questionnaire on population by national and/or ethnic group and sex collects information on the definition of national and/or ethnic group used in the tabulation. The questionnaire on language collects information on whether the languages given are “mother tongue”, “usual language” or “ability to speak one or more languages”

6. The Demographic Yearbook questionnaire was developed with reference to the internationally agreed United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*⁵, which is currently being reviewed and updated in response to recommendations by the Statistical Commission in its 36th meeting and in light of the next round of population and housing censuses from 2005-2014.
7. Table 16, Population by National and/or Ethnic Group and Sex requests the definition of national and/or ethnic group used in the data provided for

⁴ The six sets of questionnaires are: the questionnaire on population estimates, the questionnaire on vital statistics, the questionnaire on international migration and travel statistics, the population census questionnaire (general), the population census questionnaire on household characteristics and the population census questionnaire on economic characteristics. The first three questionnaires are mailed out annually, while the last three are sent to a country or area only when it is known that it has completed a population census.

⁵ Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev. 1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8 and corrigendum).
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/principles/default.htm>

tabulation. This approach is consistent with the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* which states the following:

“The national and/or ethnic groups of the population about which information is needed in different countries are dependent upon national circumstances. Some of the bases upon which ethnic groups are identified are ethnic nationality (in other words country or area of origin as distinct from citizenship or country of legal nationality), race, colour, language, religion, customs of dress or eating, tribe or various combinations of these characteristics. In addition, some of the terms used, such as “race”, “origin” and “tribe” have a number of different connotations. The definitions and criteria applied by each country investigating ethnic characteristics of the population must therefore be determined by the groups that it desires to identify. By the very nature of the subject, these groups will vary widely from country to country; thus, no internationally relevant criteria can be recommended.”

“Because of the interpretative difficulties that may occur, it is important that, where such an investigation is undertaken, the basic criteria used be clearly explained in the census report so that the meaning of the classification is readily apparent.”⁶

8. The Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Census also state the following with reference to consultation with indigenous peoples in census planning:

“Gender-related stereotypes and biases are concerns that have relevance for all countries. Census authorities in a number of countries must also be alert to the possibility of stereotypes and biases affecting data on minority population groups. Such groups may include ethnic, linguistic, national, racial and religious minorities and indigenous and nomadic populations. As with gender issues, the problem will need to be addressed in terms of both census content and census operations. Representatives of these minority groups can often provide census planners with important information and insights relevant to both census content and operations. Thus, special efforts should be made to consult with them when planning the census. In the case of minority populations living in isolated settlements or enclaves, such consultations are often critical for minimizing underenumeration among these populations.”⁷

⁶ Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev. 1 para 1.120 and 2.121 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8 and corrigendum).

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/principles/default.htm>

⁷ Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev. 1 para 1.142 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8 and corrigendum).

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/standmeth/principles/default.htm>

IV. Overview of the dissemination, by the United Nations Statistics Division, of statistics on national and/or ethnic group, language and religion.

9. To date, the United Nations Statistics Division's dissemination of statistics on ethnic characteristics (national and/or ethnic group, language and religion) has been limited to the print Demographic Yearbook. Specifically, nine issues have contained these tables: the 1956, 1963, 1964 (supplement to 1963), 1971, 1973 (supplement to 1971), 1979, 1983, 1988 and 1993 issues.
10. The first three of these issues presented only totals but beginning in 1971, urban/rural data were presented for all tables in addition to the totals. Traditionally very few countries report urban/rural data.
11. The latest issue to include data on national and/or ethnic group, language and religion was 1993. This issue included data reported by national statistical offices for the period 1985-1993. As Table 1 shows, only 29 countries reported data on national and or ethnic group. Twenty-nine countries also reported data on religion. Twenty-five countries reported data on language. Table 1 gives the number of countries reporting these topics for each of the previous issues of the Demographic Yearbook.

Table 1: Number of countries for which ethnic characteristics data (national and/or ethnic group, language and religion) was published by table and year*.

DYB year:	1956	1963,4	1971	1973	1979	1983	1988	1993
Years covered:	1945-55	1955-63	1962-71	1965-73	1970-1979	1974-83	1973-88	1985-93
National and/or Ethnic Group	74 (70, N/A)	89 (74, N/A)	44 (38, 3)	19 (17, 3)	24 (24, 1)	30 (24, 0)	40 (37, 0)	29 (27, 2)
Language	58 (35, N/A)	30 (21, N/A)	15 (12, 1)	17 (15, 4)	9 (9, 1)	21 (18, 0)	22 (11, 0)	25 (18, 1)
Religion	90 (79, N/A)	83 (71, N/A)	44 (32, 1)	27 (23, 2)	39 (39, 1)	38 (37, 0)	45 (40, 0)	29 (25, 3)

* Followed by number for which data was disaggregated by sex and by urban/rural. Format: total (sex, urban rural) for example, in the 1993 edition, which covered the years 1985-1993, 29 countries reported data on national and/or ethnic group, 27 reported by sex, and 2 reported by urban/rural.

V. The forthcoming Demographic Yearbook Special Topic (2005).

12. Data on national and/or ethnic group, language and religion will again be published in the forthcoming Demographic Yearbook Special Topic 2005 scheduled to be published by end 2005.

13. The ethnic characteristics tables on National and/or Ethnic Group, Language and Religion were previously disseminated only in print form through the Demographic Yearbook. So that the Demographic Yearbook is more widely utilized, the United Nations Statistics Division will for the first time make the data available to users in electronic form. Data on National and/or Ethnic Group is being made available online in advance of the publication to coincide with the 4th Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and will be available at the following website:
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dybcens.htm>.

14. The 2005 Special Topic will cover the years 1985-2004. For the 2000 census round, which includes censuses conducted between 1995-2004, 42

countries have thus far reported data on national and/or ethnic group. Because there is a lag time between the time the census is conducted and the time the data is tabulated and disseminated, the latest data is for 2002. We expect to receive more data in the near future from countries who conducted censuses late in the census decade, and they will be updated on-line as they are received

15. To briefly summarize, 56 countries reported information for the 1990 census decade (1985-1994). Forty-two countries reported information for the 2000 census decade (1995-2004). Twenty-three countries reported data at least once for both census decades. A total of 75 countries reported data at least once for the period 1985-2004. Most countries reported national and/or ethnic group by sex. Only 11 countries did not report by sex. Several countries also reported by urban/rural residence.