

# Measuring the Economically Active in Population Censuses: A Handbook



United Nations



International  
Labor Office

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# Measuring the Economically Active in Population Censuses: A Handbook



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# Preface

The United Nations, as part of its world programme on population and housing censuses, has provided technical guidelines to its Member States primarily through the preparation of (a) Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses;<sup>1</sup> (b) handbooks<sup>2</sup> on general census operations and on the collection of data on specific topics, such as economic activity; and (c) supporting technical materials.

The first version of *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations, 1980) was issued for the 1980 round of censuses (1975-1984). It has been supplemented and updated by further issues (United Nations, 1990b; 1998; and 2008b) for the 1990, 2000 and 2010 rounds of censuses that take into account changes in relevant international standard concepts and classifications as well as accumulated experiences from national census exercises. For the 1990 round of censuses, a handbook on economic activity status was also issued, presenting the content of census questionnaires and national practices in the collection of information on economic characteristics of the population during the 1970 and 1980 round of censuses.<sup>3</sup> The review documented which countries had included specific items in their population censuses. In 2002, a report entitled “Collection of economic characteristics in population censuses: technical report” was issued in draft form and was circulated for comments and suggestions for improvement with a view to the preparation of a handbook.

Given the broad focus of *Principles and Recommendations*, it was not possible or practical to include in that publication details that would guide countries operationally in the implementation of those concepts and standards in censuses. The present volume, *Measuring the Economically Active in Population Censuses: A Handbook*, is based on the above-mentioned technical report and provides suggestions on the implementation of guidelines on the measurement of economic characteristics in population censuses, based on relevant experiences of countries, with a particular focus on the questions used and the requirements for processing of responses. A separate part of the *Handbook* considers the role that the census results on economic characteristics can play in the planning of statistical surveys. The *Handbook* is intended to provide census planners with a variety of approaches to assess the questions and methods of collecting economic characteristics used in their national census, as they evaluate the performance in the past decade and plan for the current decade round of censuses (2005-2014). Users of census results may also find the present text useful when evaluating the quality of census results.

The publication of the *Handbook* is the result of a collaboration between the Department of Statistics of the International Labour Office and the United Nations Statistics Division. The original technical report on which it is based was first drafted

1 *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.80.XVII.8); *Revision 1* (Sales No. E.98.XVII.8); *Revision 2* (Sales No. E.07.XVII.8). *Supplementary Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.90.XVII.9).

2 Examples include *Handbook of Population and Housing Censuses—Part I: Planning, Organization and Administration of Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.92.XVII.8); *Part II: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.91.XVII.9); and *Part IV: Economic Activity Status* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.XVII.13). See also *Handbook on Census Management for Population and Housing Censuses* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.15 Rev.1).

3 *Handbook of Population and Housing Censuses—Part IV: Economic Activity Status* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.XVII.13). In 1990, 1996 and 2003 the International Labour Office published more detailed descriptions in its publication *Sources and Methods: Labour*

*Statistics*, vol. 5: *Total and Economically Active Population, Employment and Unemployment (Population Censuses)* (ILO, 1990b, 1996a and 2003). The third edition (2003) of volume 5 is available online only, from <http://laborsta.ilo.org/applv8/ssme.html>.

- 4 An early version of the material presented in parts two and three is available in R. Gilbert, "Asking questions on economic characteristics in a population census", STAT Working Papers, No. 2001-1 (Geneva, ILO, 2001). Chapters X and XI have been developed from material available in E. Hoffmann, "Coding occupation and industry in a population census", STAT Working Papers, No. 2001-2 (Geneva, ILO, 2001).

under the supervision of the Office,<sup>4</sup> reviewed by a group of experts convened by the Division and the Office and finalized in 2002 under the supervision of the Office and the Division. That report benefited from inputs by several writers. Special mention is made of Reginald Gilbert, who contributed to what are now chapters IV to VIII of the *Handbook* and prepared most of the suggestions for the questions to be tested. An initial draft of the *Handbook* was prepared by the International Labour Office and finalized by a consultant. That draft was then discussed at a meeting of experts organized by the United Nations Statistics Division and the International Labour Office in November 2007. On the basis of comments by participants in the meeting, the Division and the Office finalized the *Handbook*.

The United Nations Statistics Division and the International Labour Office invite feedback from the users of the present *Handbook* on the following: national experiences besides those presented here; the relevance and practicality of the suggested (untested) questions; how well the approaches presented have worked; and the circumstances under which they were found to be most effective. Such feedback will be useful in preparations for subsequent census rounds.

Comments or suggestions may be sent to:

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