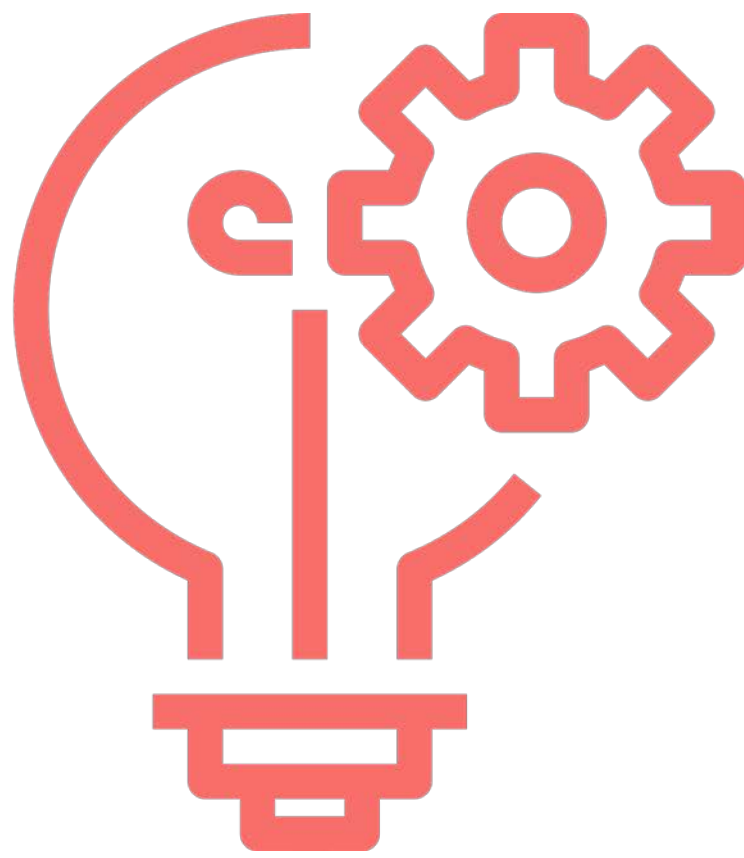


**Challenges when switching
from a traditional to a
combined census –
Romanian Experience**



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Some questions after the end of previous population census round:

- why, for the first time in the history of our censuses, we recorded an undercoverage of about 1 million people?
- why did the population often associate „census” with „referendum”?
- what went well and what did not work right?
- could it be more effective, and if so, in what areas?

Two important conclusions after 2021 census round:

- The census is not among the concerns of the population, which does not have a modicum of information on its major importance and necessity, nor do they link one's individual enumeration to the census to the possibility of building future evidence-based economic and social polities.
- The census has to renew and modernise, the old methods and techniques of data collection became obsolete in the context of the present social organisation.

1. Why is it necessary to change the type of census?

- **Continuous changes in the needs for statistical information**
- **Population attitude towards census**
- **EU legislation**

➤ Continuous changes in the needs for statistical information

- statistical information is required at increasingly low breakdown levels, such as grids of 1 km², but also 100 m² in large urban agglomerations
- data is required at breakdown levels that were unusual in the past, such as neighbourhood, street, coastline, crossborder areas etc.
- it is increasingly necessary for classical censuses to take place at a higher frequency

The information required to be produced by censuses becomes more and more diversified:

- primary and secondary homelessness
- characteristics of migrants with their usual residence (place of birth, country of citizenship, duration of residence, acquisition of citizenship and level of education, as well as the country of birth of their parents)
- movement of migrants within the Union, their partners and descendants, as well as those dependent on them
- information on family and parent-child relationships among the people
- at national and European level there is a great demand for data on the status of current activity (in particular age-related unemployment), country of birth, place of residence one year before the census, information on housing status and family characteristics at the NUTS2

- **Population attitude towards census:** reticence of the population in participating in the census for the previous round, due to:
- lack of information on the purpose and importance of a census,
 - confusion between referendum and census,
 - perplexity of why certain information that had already been collected and why should the administrative sources be disclosed,
 - the fear that the data will be used for anything else than statistical purposes,
 - as a defiance against the political class,
 - the very timid presence of census organisers in the public space to promote the census,
 - a rather aggressive anti-census campaign by some public figures in various areas

All led to the fact that a part of the population did not accept, either by its own will or by manipulation, to participate in the census.

Another reproach to the previous census was the **use of a single enumeration method**, the face-to-face interview with the enumerator, a method that imposed some restrictions on the population:

- the need to be available on a particular day and at a particular hour for the enumerator,
- the need to receive a foreign person in the house (there are suspicions about the authenticity of the persons who presented themselves as enumerators)
- the obligation to transmit personal information to an unknown person who could have used personal data for other purposes than statistical ones

Suspicious of political manipulation of the results: confusion that existed among the public opinion between the census and the referendum helped strengthen the completely wrong idea of a political character of the census.

Some of the population considered the census as a government tool to collect data that would be used in the political battle, which led to the equally wrong conclusion of NIS involvement in this battle.

➤ EU legislation

- a rich legislative framework at the level of the European Union for population and housing censuses establishing rules, criteria, definitions and nomenclatures which, on the one hand, lead to comparable data and, and on the other hand, it leaves to Member States some degree of freedom in the choice of methods and tools used
- United Nations Statistics Division has recommendations that seek to standardise censuses in order to ensure a high degree of comparability of their results.
- From the EU legislation perspective, at least three pieces of legislation make their mark on how the future census should look like:
 - the reference date, year 2021;
 - the obligation to produce statistics at 1 km² grids;
 - the obligation to disseminate results at grid level before 31 December 2022;
 - the obligation to disseminate all final results no later than 27 months since the reference data.

2. Is the Combined Census a solution for Romania for the 2021 Census Round?

Few factors outside the NIS helped us to decide how to modernize the census:

- **development of administrative sources**
- **technological advancement**
- **international experience**

➤ development of administrative sources

- the administrative sources are quite a recent development for Romania, being implemented primarily for their owners' own purposes.
- since 2013, the National Institute of Statistics has intensified its actions to promote the provisions of the Regulation (EC) No 223/2009 on European statistics, by which the national statistical offices have the right to access administrative sources, on the one hand, and their owners have the obligation to consult with the statistical offices when initiating the construction, modification or abolition of an administrative source.
- we had intense discussions with the main owners of administrative sources, especially in the field of social statistics, in order to conclude protocols or update some existing ones in order to receive extracts from these administrative sources with the variables necessary to determine some indicators in areas such as income statistics, education, health and justice, etc.
- NIS informed the owners of administrative sources of the way this data is taken in an encrypted form when the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data entered into force.
- there have already been established workflows for getting data from administrative sources in the NIS, which are presently used due to the correct understanding of the purposes of using these sources in the statistical process.

Data are available from the following administrative sources:

- The National Register for Persons Record – administered by the Directorate for Persons Record and Databases Management
- Declaration on the obligations to pay social contributions, income tax and nominal evidence of the insured persons – D112 – administered by the National Agency for Fiscal Administration
- Tax Registration Declaration / Declaration of Mentions for Self-employed Individuals or Free-Professionals - D70 - administered by the National Agency for Fiscal Administration
- Employee Evidence Register - administered by the Labor Inspectorate
- CNPP database - administered by the National House of Public Pensions
- The register of the beneficiaries of state child allowance, family support allowance and guaranteed minimum income - managed by the Agency for Payment and Social Inspection
- The database of pupils enrolled in the education system - managed by the Ministry of National Education.

- **technological advancement** - global and national technology has made major advances, making it easier to use them in data collection and processing
- the explosion of the population's use of the virtual environment for a multitude of activities: 9.6 million Facebook users in Romania, 2.6 million active YouTube users, 960 thousand users of the Snapchat Platform, according to the 2017 Zelist Monitor
 - online shopping has gained popularity in Romania, the value of online shopping exceeding € 3.5 billion in 2018, about 30% more than in 2017
 - there has been significant increase in portable devices sales. More performant and yet more affordable devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones offer people the ability to stay connected and to use them for many business or leisure activities
 - Romania has some advantages in terms of ICT infrastructure. Romania holds a leading position in terms of Internet speed, ranking fifth in the world at fixed broadband internet speed
 - 72,4% of Romanian households have access to the Internet
 - almost all Romanians have a mobile phone, since more than half of them (53%) used a smartphone at the end of 2016

➤ international experience

- The population and housing census has begun to change as early as the 2011 round, when a few countries have conducted censuses based on registers, completely (Austria, Nordic countries), or partially, by using sample surveys to collect data on certain variables (Netherlands) or a continuous census, as is the case of France
- In 2021 more countries will change the traditional census to a combined or a registered-based census
- At the Eurostat level, there have been numerous projects to support Member States in improving the tools and methods of collecting and processing census data

Some examples are:

- **The ESS.VIP ADMIN project**, launched by Eurostat in 2015 (to be finalized in 2019), aimed at facilitating the use of administrative sources by the national statistical offices. The project included 34 grants, a methodological helpdesk and offered the possibility of interventions on request
- **The project "Harmonized Protection of Census Data in the ESS"**, which was carried out on the occasion of a specific grant under the Partnership for the Confidentiality of Statistical Data, aims to develop and provide standardized tools to Member States to ensure adequate data protection against disclosure of individual information.
- **Courses organized under the European Statistical Training Program (ESTP)** are a good opportunity to enrich the theoretical and practical knowledge in statistics, providing young statisticians with the knowledge of best practices in vast areas
- **Exchanging experience** with experts from other Member States provides an opportunity to learn about examples of good practice that can be followed by the states that intend to implement new data collection and processing systems

3. What elements might guarantee a successful new census in Romania ?

- ***a new, powerful and detailed law census*** that has to make clear the duty to participate in the census and enumerate the entities involved in the design and conduct of the census, has to clarify the attributions and responsibilities of each entity, and as well to enumerate obligations and sanctions in case of violation of the provisions of the law.
- ***the support and collaboration of the various institutions, entities and the population of Romania***. NIS alone would be almost impossible without the active involvement of the institutions responsible for organizing and conducting the census, by fulfilling their duties properly and in due time, the completion of the census.
- ***a new integrated information system*** that integrates the statistical information collected through several channels (administrative sources, online and offline), but also fulfils other tasks, such as:
 - encryption of the personal data from online forms;
 - protection against divulgation of personal data;
 - backup in case of unexpected interruptions and disaster recovery;
 - geo-referencing the enumerated addresses.

- **a strategy for promoting and communicating the census**, with the following main objectives:
 - to inform correctly, complete and timely all categories of population on the need to conduct the census, the goals, objectives and modalities of organizing and conducting the 2021 census;
 - every person to understand the importance of his/her participation in the census;
 - to promote the independence of the INS in the planning, organization and implementation of the 2021 census;
 - to increase the public confidence about the purely statistic census purposes;
 - to achieve a higher rate of self-enumeration;
 - maximum reduction of non-responses.
- **a Call Centre** during data collection
- **a spokesperson** to react promptly react to all messages - pro or contra - that will be available at the census

CONCLUSIONS

1. Census is faced a multitude of expectations:

- Data users expect new and more detailed statistical information on the entire population, as well as about certain special categories, statistical data available at more unconventional territorial levels, such as arteries, districts, metropolitan areas or coastline areas, etc.
- Political factors request the census data to be produced much more quickly and at a lower cost
- Population is not available for complicated interviews regarding statistical surveys

2. New opportunities that need to be considered in planning and organizing a future census due to the technological advance

3. Un-modernized, the population census would be doomed to fail, since, firstly, it would be rejected by the population.

4. A joined effort of various central and local public administration institutions and other entities (NGOs, associations, etc.) is necessary for organizing and conducting the population and housing census in 2021.

5. Without trust from the different entities (ministries, county councils, city halls, central and local institutions, mass media, academia, the general public) on the one hand, and full transparency of the methods and decisions of the census officials, on the other hand, the census objectives cannot be achieved.

6. A combined census in which census information available from administrative sources is verified and enriched with information from respondents through on-line collection and using tablets for the field data collection process would be the best combination of methods for 2021 in Romania.

7. It is infinitely easier to perpetuate a system that has proven its usefulness, at least up to a certain point, and it is much more risky to try to implement a new mechanism, while having insufficient staff, who has not dealt with similar activities. However, it is necessary to listen to the voice of the society that wants a modern, easy and transparent process, the efficient use of all available resources, and greater respect for the individual, the one from whom comes most of the information necessary for statistics, particularly in the case of social statistics.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.