

Shifting to Register-Based Census

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Activities for the next decennial Census of India falls due in 2021.
- It is high time that India takes note of the transformation in census methods elsewhere in the world.

\n

\n\n

What is the recent development?

\n\n

\n

- There has been a remarkable transformation in census methods elsewhere in the world, mostly in Europe, in last two decades or so.
- The traditional census approach adopts the questionnaire-based method.
- Instead, attempts are being made to use data from various administrative data registers.
- Mostly, data from government sources are used, to produce useful statistics.

\n

\n\n

What are the noteworthy methods elsewhere?

\n\n

\n

- **Austria** - The traditional census involves a high burden for respondents, and a huge cost (€72 million).
- In 2000, the Austrian government decided that the 2001 census would be the last traditional one.

\n

- Consequently, a register-based “test census” was conducted in 2006, successfully testing the methods, data procedures and use of registers.
\n
- The first complete register-based 2011 census had no burden for respondents, and the cost declined to €10 million.
\n
- Most of the data were already available in several registers like the Integrated Data Bases for persons, families, households, buildings and dwellings, and locations of work.
\n
- Data was also available from municipalities, geo-information statistical databases and interactive maps.
\n
- The difficult task of combining all large registers was done by using a special identification number for persons.
\n
- At times, same variables featured in many registers.
\n
- Variables not in any register, such as “language mostly spoken” and “religion”, were collected by suitable sample surveys.
\n
- **Germany** - Germany conducted a nationwide census in 2011 after a 20-year gap.
\n
- This first register-based census was a multiple-source, mixed-mode method to collect data from administrative registers.
\n
- They include population registers, full enumerations and a sample survey.
\n
- **Others** - In Swiss too, since 2010, information is primarily drawn from population registers and supplemented by sample surveys of about 5% of the population.
\n
- Nordic countries such as Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark have a long tradition of using administrative registers for producing official statistics.
\n
- They now conduct population censuses using administrative data registers rather than through a nationwide survey of households.
\n
- Netherlands has held virtual censuses since 1981, using the Population Register and surveys.
\n
- Estonia, perhaps the most advanced digital nation in the world, used a combined census methodology using several registers along with an e-census

in 2011.

\n

- However, Estonia is now moving towards a completely register-based census for 2021.

\n

- UK would replace the decennial census beyond 2021 by statistics produced by more regular and timely administrative data.

\n

- Greenland in North America and Singapore and Bahrain in Asia are also making effective use of registers for their censuses.

\n

\n\n

What lies ahead for India?

\n\n

\n

- India should think beyond the traditional questionnaire-based approach.
- \n
- While the country's 2011 Census cost about Rs 22 billion, the 2021 Census could cost about Rs 46 billion.
- \n
- Instead, billions of rupees can be saved by making use of the administrative data of several available registers instead.
- \n
- Nevertheless, it would be a challenging task for a country like India with 1.3 billion.
- \n
- But, India does have the statistical and technological expertise.
- \n
- Several government registers can be combined along with tax, hospital and educational records to produce statistics similar to the census.
- \n
- The loss of information, if any, should be minimal, and can easily be compensated by suitable sample surveys.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Standard

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering