

more information visit www.statcan.ca). Similarly, the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics released in 2001 public use samples of the 1970, 1980 and 1990 censuses. Many other countries also started to release public, or research use microdata samples from their censuses. On an international level, the African Census Analysis Project carried out by the Population Studies Center of the University of Pennsylvania created a collection of microdata samples for 33 censuses in certain countries of sub-Saharan Africa, starting in some cases with the 1970 round (for more information see: www.acap.upenn.edu).

All this attests to the increasing interest in census microdata and their importance for social science research.

PAU's project on the 1990 round of censuses

Since 1992 PAU, in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the U.S. National Institute on Aging (NIA), has been coordinating a project that resulted in the creation of a collection of cross-nationally comparable census microdata samples. Currently, this collection covers fifteen countries in Europe and North America, all of which participate with samples from the 1990-round of population and housing censuses.

The objectives of the project were to assemble a set of cross-nationally comparable microdata samples from the population and housing censuses of selected countries in Europe and North America; and to use these samples to study the social and economic conditions of older persons. The samples were designed to allow research on a wide range of issues related to ageing, as well as on other social phenomena. A common set of nomenclatures and classifications, derived on the basis of a study of census data comparability in Europe and North America, were adopted as standards for re-coding and harmonization. The processing of the datasets, including drawing the samples (when requested by the National Statistical Offices), cleaning (where necessary), and harmonization, was performed by the PAU. In line with the objectives, the recommended design and size of the samples envisaged over-sampling with age and retention of the full information on the living arrangements of the sampled individuals (more information on the recommended design is provided in Appendix II). Several countries provided samples that had not been drawn specially for this project, and cover the entire population without over-sampling. Most of the meta data and documentation related to the samples was obtained directly from the National Statistical Offices. Some documentation was made available by the UNECE's Statistical Division, which also carried out a study of the national practices during the 1990 round of censuses.

The samples are available to qualified researchers who have signed a pledge of confidentiality. The main medium for data distribution is CDs. The samples are prepared by the PAU as SAS transport data files. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR/NACDA) at the University of Michigan,