

### 3.3. Switzerland

The Swiss census had a reference date of 5 December, 2000. It has been both innovative and successful, and therefore can serve as an example to other countries. Nevertheless, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office considers this census as only a halfway mark on the way to ever more advanced methods and technology in statistics. This will result in better statistics as well as a smaller burden on respondents.

The census project introduced four major new methodologies:

- pre-printing household and person questionnaires with register data;
- replacing enumerators with a mail-out/mail-back approach, combined with a computer-managed follow-up system;
- an option for Internet response;
- setting up a national Service Centre that assisted cantons and communes in implementing their independently chosen survey methods.

Since this census was so different, the methods had to be carefully tested in trial and "dress rehearsal" operations. Census publicity was crucial for the success. It served to make the population broadly aware of the census activities, which is essential even in countries like Switzerland where participation is compulsory. The publicity also helped to raise interest in the innovations applied, which reduced the possibilities for confusion. Demonstrating that the Federal Statistical Office is in the forefront of technological developments also served to improve the image of the Office as a modern entity ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The massive information campaign exploited all the usual media plus the Internet. This is logical, as respondents in the Transit and Future categories, see below, were offered the option of responding via the Internet. In the end 4.2% of those did indeed choose this option.

The data collection methods can be classified as follows:

**Classic:** Traditional method, with blank questionnaires being distributed and enumerators collecting the responses: 3.7%.

**Semi-classic:** Questionnaires pre-printed with information from population registers, mailed to households, collected by enumerators: 3.0%.

**Transit:** Questionnaires pre-printed with information from population registers, mail-out/mail-back: 92.4%.

**Future:** As "Transit", but with pre-printed dwelling information as well: 0.9%.

Traditional censuses depend to a large extent on enumerators to clear up questions and difficulties that respondents may have. In Switzerland this option was largely absent, as less than 7% of households were visited at home. Thus the publicity campaign, including documentation respondents received by mail, had to be good enough to take over most of this role.

The information dissemination policy centres on providing products designed for certain user groups, in order to make the process of finding required information more