

Report

Next Census – Cabinet and legislative approach

Date:	29 January 2025	Security Level:	In confidence
To:	Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Statistics	Report Number:	MM2863

Purpose of the report

This paper provides context about the next census and steps to seek Cabinet endorsement in March 2025 of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision.

Executive summary

The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision to modernise the approach for the next census that can be delivered within allocated funding. This decision has been informed by extensive public consultation and targeted engagement in 2024, and advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel. The preferred approach is to deliver the next census using administrative (admin) data combined with an annual sample survey (i.e. a Census Attribute Survey) and other tailored solutions (e.g. targeted surveys).

The Chief Executive and Government Statistician met with you on 24 January 2025 to discuss the planned approach to seeking Cabinet endorsement of these changes. In this meeting, you indicated your comfort with the proposed approach, and requested further information on international approaches, data quality, and evidence behind the approach. Information on these areas is set out in this briefing.

You are due to take a paper to Cabinet to seek endorsement of the in-principle decision in March 2025. Agency consultation concluded this week, with Ministerial consultation due to commence on 20 February 2025. There are still some decisions to be made around data system governance and policy levers, and we would like to hear your thoughts on these options and any preferences you may have at the official's meeting on 30 January 2025.

If endorsed by Cabinet, the Data and Statistics Act 2022 (the Act) will need to be amended to enable the preferred approach. We will provide you with a draft legislative bid by 4 February 2025. This bid needs to be submitted to the Cabinet Office by 10 February 2025, so it can be included in the 2025 Legislative Programme.

Parliamentary Counsel Office (PCO) advised reducing the usual Select Committee stage from six months to five months, as the proposed Bill is small, of low complexity, and there is urgency for its passing to deliver on the proposed approach to the census. If you agree with this recommendation, a meeting with the Leader of the House will need to take place as soon as possible.

Recommendations

March Cabinet paper

- 1 **Note** that you are due to take a paper to Cabinet in March 2025 seeking endorsement of the Government Statistician's in-principle decision on the approach to the next census

Noted

- 2 **Agree** to provide direction on options for data system governance and policy levers at the officials meeting on 30 January 2025

Agree | Disagree

- 3 **Note** that we will provide your office with an updated draft Cabinet paper by 18 February 2025, seeking agreement to begin Ministerial consultation

Noted

Legislative bid

- 4 **Note** that the Data and Statistics Act 2022 will need to be amended to support the proposed approach, and we will provide your office with a draft legislative bid on 4 February 2025, for inclusion in the 2025 Legislative Programme

Noted

- 5 **Agree** to set up a meeting with the Leader of the House, as soon as possible, to approve reducing the Select Committee stage from six months to five months (as recommended by the Parliamentary Counsel Office).

Agree | Disagree

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29/01/2025

Rachael Milicich
Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief
Executive – Insights and Statistics

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Dr Shane Reti
Minister of Statistics

13/2/2025

Date

Context

Stats NZ is transforming the way we conduct census

- 1 Stats NZ is required to conduct a census every five years. The census supports various critical functions across government, population funding models, and long-term planning on infrastructure and transport.
- 2 In March 2024, Cabinet noted that:
 - 2.1 the current approach to the census is unsustainable, vulnerable to external events, and facing significant challenges (e.g. declining response rates and rising costs)
 - 2.2 the census needs to be modernised and transformed.
- 3 Cabinet also agreed for the Government Statistician to publicly consult on an admin data-first approach and report back to Cabinet on a final decision [CAB-24-MIN-0101].
- 4 The Government Statistician has taken an in-principle decision on the approach to census. This decision was informed by extensive public consultation and targeted engagement with key partners and stakeholders (including government agencies, iwi and Māori, key communities and groups, and academics) throughout 2024, and advice from an Independent Evaluation Panel.
- 5 The approach builds on the 'combined census model' which has been in place since the 2018 Census, combining admin data with information collected through surveys. The proposed new model continues this evolution by relying primarily on admin data supplemented by surveys (rather than surveying everyone in New Zealand) and direct data collection partnerships. Specifically, the new approach involves:
 - 5.1 **Ongoing admin data collection** on key census variables
 - 5.2 **A large annual sample survey (i.e. the Census Attribute Survey)** – surveying a proportion of the population throughout the year, every year
 - 5.3 **Other tailored solutions (e.g. targeted survey programmes)** – designed with key partners to address remaining gaps in data – such as those not well-represented in admin data
- 6 This shift has been underway since 2011/12. The rising cost of the census provided a catalyst for discussions about the sustainability of the current arrangement. Improvements to the scale and quality of admin data collected by government agencies and investigation into census models used by other countries resulted in Stats NZ exploring making better use of data the government already holds to produce data and statistics. Admin data is already a critical part of our economic and population statistics. We have also been exploring using more admin data for the census, and we have published the results of this work on our website – called the experimental administrative population census (APC).

The decision has been made in the face of insurmountable risks to the status quo

- 7 The current approach to the census is unsustainable and is facing significant challenges. All over the world, it is becoming harder to get people to respond to the census, costs are steadily increasing, the census is vulnerable to external events such as natural disasters, and data quality is being impacted – particularly for smaller and hard-to-reach

communities. Meanwhile, there is a growing demand for greater flexibility and responsiveness, and the faster delivery of more timely data and statistics.

- 8 The 2023 Census programme cost approximately \$326 million over five years – a significant increase from the 2018 Census (\$126m) and the 2013 Census (\$104m). While increased funding for the 2023 Census lifted response rates across all groups, we did not meet our target response rates for some populations. The current funding envelope for the next census is significantly less than the 2023 Census Programme (\$100m less).
- 9 We are unlikely to deliver our status quo approach successfully within this funding envelope given known challenges with surveying, population growth, inflation, and possible external disruptions (e.g. severe weather events). Reduced funding means we will not have the full scale of resource needed for non-response follow-up, marketing and community engagement, or events supporting people to fill out their forms. Continuing with the status quo will, therefore, likely lead to results on a par with the 2018 Census (or lower).
- 10 A modernised approach is needed to ensure the census will continue to meet the needs of New Zealand in a sustainable way.

The proposed approach aligns with international trends

- 11 Census approaches used around the world can generally be categorised into one of the three descriptions below:
 - 11.1 **The traditional model** – this model collects all census data by surveying every person in a country on a specified day. This survey provides the data for a full population count, full dwelling count, and attributes (i.e. details or descriptions) of the population and dwellings. This was the model New Zealand used before 2018 and the model that most countries have traditionally based their censuses on.
 - 11.2 **A combined model** – this model collects census data by using a combination of survey data and admin data. Countries that use this model use different levels of survey and admin data in their census collection depending on their data needs and the quality of their available admin data. This is the model New Zealand used in the 2018 and 2023 censuses. Most census data was collected via the census survey, with admin data used to include people missed by the census survey or to fill data gaps.
 - 11.3 **A register-based (admin data-only) model** – this model uses data held by the government to collect all census data. This model is often used by countries that have a high-functioning population register system in place and is most notably used by Scandinavian countries. A register is a list or database that holds information about the public.
- 12 There is an international trend of countries (particularly OECD countries) moving away from a traditional census approach and towards approaches that increasingly use admin data.
- 13 For example, across the EU-27, the number of countries undertaking a traditional census model decreased from 17 in 2001 to six in 2021. At the same time, the number of EU-27 countries undertaking a register-based or combined model (like New Zealand's most recent model) has increased from 10 in 2001 to 20 in 2021. Across the world, in 2020, about one-quarter of census models are now non-traditional models. The Office for National Statistics in the UK is currently progressing a similar change proposal to ours.

- 14 Appendix.7 provides a table that shows census models in different countries, and some changes that are currently being considered in other jurisdictions.

There is general support for the new approach

- 15 Engagement to date has showed support for a modernised approach from the public and from most agencies across government. Key concerns centre around the speed of transition, and the associated costs of improving admin data sources in the proposed timeframe (particularly from Health NZ and MoH). There are also some concerns that the quality and coverage of admin data is not sufficient for some populations, such as Māori and Pacific Peoples. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.
- 16 Last year, relevant Ministers were also sent a briefing pack that set out the in-principle decision, rationale, and overview of expected quality and availability of census data. We did not receive any feedback or questions beyond your previous office (Health and Pacific Peoples portfolios).

There will be changes to data quality for some variables

- 17 There are various dimensions of data quality, including:
- 17.1 **Frequency** – how often data and statistics are published
 - 17.2 **Timeliness** – the time between when information is collected and when data/statistics are published
 - 17.3 **Accuracy** – how close data and statistics are to the true values
 - 17.4 **Granularity** – how detailed data and statistics are (for example, breaking an ethnicity category, such as “Pacific Peoples” into multiple categories, such as “Samoan,” “Tongan” etc.)
 - 17.5 **Coverage** – what percent of the population is covered.
- 18 The proposed approach will improve the **frequency** and **timeliness** for much of the data that is provided through the census. It will also improve **accuracy** for some data, such as population counts. For example, we know we have good admin data on some population characteristics, such as age, income, and employment status. For this data, admin data is comparable to survey data.
- 19 Additionally, the proposed approach will make the census more responsive to data needs. The Census Attribute Survey (CAS), which will supplement ongoing admin data collection, provides greater flexibility to collect and publish different data to better meet the needs of users. This is because some of the variables collected in the CAS can be changed each year and tailored to better target data collection. The current census approach can only be altered every five years, and we made limited changes to the questions in 2018 and 2023.
- 20 However, the proposed approach is not without risks. For example, there will be a temporary reduction in the accuracy of some data, particularly data on smaller population groups (e.g. Pacific peoples, disability communities), and iwi affiliation data. However, it is important to note that this is likely even under the status quo.
- 21 The initial reduced quality may include:
- 21.1 data that has **low coverage**, meaning we cannot be confident that initial data will be representative of all population groups

- 21.2 data that **lacks granularity**, meaning that for some variables, Stats NZ will not have the level of detail that has historically been available from census (e.g. the ability to break down information will be limited for small populations and geographies – such as viewing statistics about Level 4 ethnicity¹ by occupation).
- 22 In most cases, the accuracy (coverage and granularity) of data will build over time. Granular data for many variables will begin to be available from 2030 and the quality of data will improve over time as more data is collected. We will develop tailored data collection approaches, including community-targeted surveys, to help meet data needs while we identify and realise new data sources. These approaches will be informed by further engagement to understand the needs of data users and communities and will continue to be developed while the shift progresses.
- 23 Appendix 8 provides an overview of the expected quality and availability of census data under the preferred approach.

The official census count will be released in 2030, rather than 2028

- 24 Under the proposed approach, the official census count will be released in 2030 rather than 2028 to give Stats NZ and other government agencies the time required to lift the quality of admin data, implement CAS, and adapt to the new delivery schedule. The shift to 2030 Census would also bring us back in alignment with other international jurisdictions, which run their censuses in years ending with '0' or '1'.
- 25 From late 2026, we plan to release key data (such as population counts and population structure – e.g. age, sex, location, ethnicity) using only admin data sources, so that agencies and other users will have access to official, up-to-date data before the full 2030 Census release. This information will:
- 25.1 be released as preliminary² statistics in 2026 and 2027, with annual official statistics beginning in 2028
 - 25.2 ensure agencies continue to have the information they need to set electoral boundaries and determine the number of electorates for upcoming elections, undertake long-term planning on infrastructure and transport, and inform population funding models (i.e. supporting critical government functions).
- 26 Data on some variables will only be available from 2030 onwards because these variables are currently not well represented in admin data and will need to be supplemented by CAS and targeted survey information.
- 27 There will be an impact on statistics like the New Zealand Deprivation Index and the Severe Housing Deprivation Estimates which are delivered 5-yearly. New data sources and statistical techniques and methods for producing these statistics will need to be developed. We expect these products to be delivered from 2030 onwards. Work is already underway to find an alternative way to produce the New Zealand Deprivation Index. From 2025, we will explore alternatives for products like the Severe Housing Deprivation

¹ Ethnicity is classified into levels based on the granularity of the data. Level 1 includes 7 categories (e.g. European, Māori, Pacific Peoples, etc.), whereas Level 4 includes 186 categories (e.g. Fijian, Tongan, English, Scottish, etc.)

² 'Preliminary' or 'experimental' statistics are the final phase of development of official statistics – the methodologies used to produce them may change following further testing or user feedback. A detailed technical report on data sources and methods, including any limitations, are published alongside the release of such statistics.

estimates. More regular updates on both the New Zealand Deprivation Index and the Severe Housing Deprivation estimates will be possible in the future.

- 28 Appendix.9 provides a high-level view of key milestones in the lead up to the next census.

These changes will require legislative change

- 29 The Data and Statistics Act 2022 (the Act) was drafted with the traditional census model in mind. This includes provisions to enable a traditional census such as a short collection window, 'census day' concept and a specific notification process and associated responsibilities for the Government Statistician.
- 30 Because the preferred approach alters these features, the Act will need to be amended to enable the preferred approach. Specifically, to:
- 30.1 remove references to a set census collection period (e.g. a census 'day' or 'event') so the Government Statistician can collect and publish data for census more frequently, on a rolling basis
 - 30.2 simplify the notification process for data collection and clarify the requirements of the Government Statistician under the new approach
 - 30.3 allow for the final census count to be provided in 2030, rather than in 2028 as currently required.
- 31 Other Acts (e.g. the Electoral Act 1993) also refer to the 'census day' concept and may, therefore, also require consequential amendments to reflect the new approach. We are working with Ministry of Justice and the Electoral Commission on this.
- 32 We have drafted a legislative bid for inclusion on the 2025 programme, requesting Priority 3 so that the Bill can be passed by end of the year. This will give certainty on the approach and allow time for the testing and design work needed to run the next census.
- 33 The legislative bid is due by 10 February 2025. We will provide you with a copy on 4 February 2025 for inclusion in the 2025 Legislative Programme. PCO advised reducing the usual six-month period to five months, as our proposed Bill is small, of low complexity, and there is urgency for its passing to deliver on the proposed approach to census. A meeting will need to be arranged by your office with the Leader of the House, as soon as possible, to approve reducing the Select Committee stage from six months to five months.

Support is needed across government

- 34 Success of the preferred approach will require support and collective responsibility from across government. Agencies will be called on to help build and supply reliable and high-quality admin data across government. We will need agencies to commit to:
- 34.1 addressing critical data gaps – where admin data is not of sufficient quality (e.g. disability data, Māori descent, level 4 ethnicity, iwi affiliation data)
 - 34.2 providing clean and accurate data – the flow of high-quality data is essential for realising the benefits of admin data in the data system
 - 34.3 consistently implementing data standards – greater interoperability will improve the quality and usability of data across the data system
 - 34.4 collecting data ethically and within privacy and security frameworks to maintain trust and confidence – ethical and secure data flow across the data system is essential for

maintaining public trust and confidence in census and the Official Statistics System, social licence, and continued data supply.

Cabinet directive

- 35 The Government Statistician has powers under the Act to request agencies to provide certain data. However, the use of these levers in isolation will not meet the needs of an admin data-first approach to the next census. While the Government Statistician can make requests, there are often barriers to sharing data such as cost, competing priorities, and insufficient data quality.
- 36 The Government Statistician's powers under the Data and Statistics Act 2022 also cannot determine the timeframe for agencies to:
- 36.1 collect and provide us data to produce official statistics
 - 36.2 work to adopt our mandated standards.
- 37 We, therefore, recommend supplementing this with a Cabinet directive, which has been included as a recommendation in the Cabinet paper.
- 38 This Cabinet directive would target agencies in critical areas where we need admin data improvements or changes to support future censuses. It would apply to five government agencies (MoE, DIA, MSD, MBIE, and Corrections). A corresponding statutory directive will apply to five Crown entities (Tertiary Education Commission, Health New Zealand, ACC, NZTA, and the Electoral Commission).
- 39 This will help mobilise cross-government action to improve admin data and support the delivery of the next census. It will also have wider benefits due to an uplift in the quality of admin data across government and support other Government priorities like social investment and digitising government.

Further supporting mechanisms

- 40 To further enhance programme delivery and accountability, there are several mechanisms you could consider implementing.
- 41 For example, the previous Minister of Statistics had expressed interest in establishing an independent advisory group to provide objective, expert advice on the management and progress of census over time. This group could play a key role in ensuring the census is effectively and transparently managed, while also enhancing public trust by offering ongoing oversight.
- 42 Alternatively, there are other mechanisms that could achieve these objectives while streamlining processes and making the best use of Ministerial time and public resources. These include:
- 42.1 Strengthening reporting measures (e.g. through the existing Performance Plan process or scheduling regular progress updates to Cabinet)
 - 42.2 Using independent evaluations (e.g. commissioning periodic reviews to assess progress and identify improvements without requiring continuous oversight structures), similar to that of the Statutory Review of New Zealand's 2023 Census or Future Census Independent Evaluation Panel
 - 42.3 Leveraging existing governance forums or groups (e.g. a cross-agency Chief Executives group to oversee delivery and ensure alignment across agencies)
 - 42.4 Developing a real-time performance dashboard (e.g. an online tool to track and report on programme progress, risks, and milestones in a transparent way).

- 43 We would like to hear your thoughts on these options and any preferences you may have at the official's meeting on 30 January 2025. These could then be reflected in the Cabinet paper.

Next steps

- 44 You are due to report back to Cabinet seeking endorsement of the decision in March 2025.
- 45 We are happy to organise a technical session where the team can explain the work programme, potential impact and proposed mitigations in further detail.
- 46 Departmental consultation on the draft Cabinet paper (attached as Appendix.0) has recently concluded. We are currently revising the draft Cabinet paper to incorporate agency feedback.
- 47 There are two timeframe options for progressing the Cabinet paper:

Cabinet consideration in mid-March (recommended)		Cabinet consideration in late-March (alternate option)	
Milestone	Date	Milestone	Date
Draft Cabinet paper provided to your office	18 Feb	Draft Cabinet paper provided to your office	18 Feb
Ministerial consultation	20 Feb – 26 Feb (condensed)	Ministerial consultation	24 Feb – 6 Mar
Updated Cabinet paper provided to your office	3 Mar	Updated Cabinet paper provided to your office	12 Mar
Cabinet paper lodged	5 Mar	Cabinet paper lodged	19 Mar
ECO Cabinet committee	12 Mar	ECO Cabinet Committee	26 Mar
Cabinet	17 Mar	Cabinet	31 Mar

- 48 We can discuss these timeframes further at the Officials meeting of 30 January. Additional information has also been provided to the Statistics Private Secretary to help with planning.

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Author: Sara Montgomery, Senior Policy Advisor – Policy

Responsible manager: Tennille Maxey, General Manager – Policy

Appendix 1: International examples on census models

Appendix 2: Expected quality and availability of census data under the new approach

Appendix 3: High-level milestones

Appendix 4: Draft Cabinet paper (version that was sent for departmental consultation) Please refer to final version.

Appendix 1 - International examples on census models

Model Type	Country	Census survey of the whole population	Frequency of census survey	Supplementary survey used	Frequency of supplementary survey	Current admin data use for census	Planned future admin data use for census	Comments/details
Traditional	Australia	✓	5 years	×	-	×	✓	Considering using more administrative data in future censuses; investigating options such as large-scale direct use of admin data or running a combined census model in 2031. Australia's 2024 International Census Forum presentation notes that they made indirect use of integrated admin data in 2021 and small-scale direct use of admin data in 2026.
	United Kingdom (England and Wales)	✓	10 years	×	-	×	✓	Public consultation in 2023 about plans to evolve to a system that would “primarily use administrative data such as tax or benefit data, complemented by survey data and a wider range of data sources replacing the current reliance on the census every ten years”
	United Kingdom (Scotland)	✓	10 years	×	-	×	✓	Exploring whether the census can be completely replaced with admin and transformed survey data or whether they need to underpin this with a streamlined census. Planning to make a recommendation on the preferred option for measuring Scotland's population by 2026
	United Kingdom (Northern Ireland)	✓	10 years	×	-	×	✓	Developing a programme of work to provide costed options for the future delivery of census and pop stats by mid-2026. They will be doing user consultation in 2025 and ramping up admin

								data teams to investigate the feasibility of characteristic outputs from admin data
	United States	✓	10 years	✓	Annual	×	×	A full population survey is done every 10 years, supplemented by a continuous sample survey (every month, sent to 3 percent of households)
	Canada	✓	5 years	×	-	×	✓	Every five years the population completes a short 17 questions census survey, but one-quarter of dwellings are required to complete a 'long form' version of 55 questions covering a wider range of topics. Canada noted at the 2024 International Census Forum that they plan to increase the use of admin data for 2026 and are preparing for a possible combined census post-2026.
	Ireland	✓	5 years	×	-	×	✓	Exploring options for the future, including continuing with a traditional census or making greater use of admin data for a combined approach
Combined	Italy	×	Annual	✓	Annual	✓	-	Every year, a sample of approximately 1.4 million households across Italy are surveyed and administrative data is used to supplement this survey data
	Switzerland	×	-	✓	Annual	✓	-	Data is primarily drawn from population registers, which is supplemented by sample surveys to collect data not held in the registers. Roughly 2.5 percent of the population is surveyed in writing or by telephone
	Türkiye	×	-	✓	10 years	✓	-	Data is collected every 10 years from population registers in combination with a large-scale household survey (approximately 2.4 million households) and a complete enumeration of institutional places

	Belgium	×	-	✓	10 years	✓	-	Data is collected every 10 years and is based on administrative data sources and surveys. About 60 percent of statistics compiled are from administrative databases or other existing sources and the remaining 40 percent of statistics are compiled from surveys
Register-based	Denmark	×	-	×	-	✓	-	Since 1970, censuses have been exclusively based on administrative registers, particularly data from the Civil Registration System
	Sweden	×	-	×	-	✓	-	Population data in Sweden, including census data, is drawn from the “population registration”, which is the civil registration of vital population events administered by the Swedish Tax Agency
	Finland	×	-	×	-	✓	-	The population census and the count of dwellings and real estate are carried out every ten years and the data are drawn entirely from registers and administrative files
	The Netherlands	×	-	×	-	✓	-	A Census is held once every 10 years, but they have been register based since 1971.

International examples of census models

Traditional model

Australia

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts a census every five years using a traditional survey model.

Their most recent 2021 Census was primarily collected online, with paper census forms being available on request for any household. This survey has a response rate of 95.8 percent (a number that can be attributed to this census being held during national/regional COVID lockdown).

Although responses to Australia's traditional census model are high, the ABS is considering using more administrative data in future censuses, with the possibility of running a combined census model in 2031. They are developing an admin data workstream as a risk mitigation against low response rates.

The independent review of Australia's 2021 census recommended consideration should be given to establishing sources of reliable administrative data to help address a population undercount for indigenous populations.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the census is run once every 10 years using a traditional survey approach.

The Office for National Statistics in England and Wales (ONS), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, last ran their census in 2021. The National Records of Scotland ran their last census in 2022. Across the United Kingdom, between 15-19 percent of census forms were submitted online. The return rate in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland was 97 percent and in Scotland it was 89 percent. It is worth noting that the collection of data was during the COVID-19 lockdown period, which may have led to higher results. Other surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey, have been impacted by lower response rates.

In mid-2023, the ONS consulted publicly about their plans to evolve towards an administrative data-first census model (similar to what is happening in New Zealand).

Canada

In Canada, a population census is run every five years. The survey has 17 questions about core demographics and provides an official count of the population.

In addition, one-quarter of all dwellings are selected to complete a 'long form census', which has a total of 55 questions and seeks information about topics, such as education, employment, disabilities, mobility, and transport. The sample for the long form census includes all dwellings of First Nations communities, Métis settlements, Inuit regions, and other remote areas.

United States

In the United States, a population census is run every 10 years. The survey has nine questions about core demographics (e.g. age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and owner/renter status) and provides an official count of the population.

In addition, the American Community Survey is a continuous survey conducted every month of every year. It is sent to a sample of addresses (3 percent of households across the 50 states, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico) and asks about topics not included in the Census, such as education, employment, internet access, and transportation.

Combined model

Italy

Italy runs an annual census survey for a sample of the population (approximately 1.4 million households) across the country. The survey collects the main characteristics of the resident population and its social and economic conditions at a national, regional, and local level. It includes questions in areas such as education, employment, and mobility. The annual attributes survey data is then supplemented by administrative data to provide yearly data representing the entire population.

Switzerland

Switzerland uses a system of population and dwelling registers to provide population counts and some census attributes. Information not contained in a register is collected using additional sample surveys. This includes an annual census day attributes survey of around 200,000 people (local authorities can enlarge the sample for their area at their own cost); smaller thematic surveys (between 10 and 40,000 people) covering five rotating themes, changing annually; and an omnibus survey of 3,000 people on topical issues.

Belgium

The Belgium census is run by Statistics Belgium (Statbel). Census data is collected every 10 years. Collection is based on administrative data sources and surveys. Research is also being carried out into new data sources, such as big data. Statbel produces approximately one-hundred statistics, 75 percent of which are required by European law and others in the framework of the National Accounts Institute. About 60 percent of the statistics are compiled from administrative databases or other existing sources, and surveys (in whole or in part) are used to produce the remaining 40 percent of statistics.

Turkey

The Turkish census takes place every 10 years and uses a combined method. Population registers are used in combination with a large-scale household survey (approximately 2.4 million households) and a complete enumeration of institutional places.

Register-based model

Sweden

All population data in Sweden, including census data, is drawn from the “population registration”, which is the civil registration of vital population events (e.g. births, deaths, marriages, immigration, and emigration). Population data is available by county, municipality, sex, age, civil status, country of birth, and country of citizenship. The data is kept in the population registry, which is administered by the Swedish Tax Agency, who supplies the data to Statistics Sweden. The registry spans several centuries and is often used by genealogists.

Denmark

From 1981 and each year onwards, information that corresponds to a population and housing census is retrieved from registers, with Denmark being the first country in the world to conduct these censuses from administrative registers. The most important registers are the Population Register (Det Centrale Person register), the Building and Dwelling Register (Byggnings – og Boligregistret) and the Enterprise Register (Det Centrale Virksomheds register). The central statistical office, Statistics Denmark, is responsible for compiling these data. This information is available online in the Statbank Denmark.

Finland

In Finland, the population census and related count of dwellings and real estate are carried out every 10 years and drawn entirely from registers and administrative data. Census data includes population structure, families, dwellings and housing conditions, buildings and free-time residences, and employment.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has run a register-based census for over 40 years. Officially, a census is held every 10 years, but work is underway to produce data annually. The Netherlands has a good municipal Personal Records Database (BRP), which Statistics Netherlands (CBS) is permitted to use under the Statistics Netherlands Act. Another important source for data is the System of Social Statistical Databases (SSB). One reason for the shift to a register-based census was growing privacy concerns by the general public that made the traditional model untenable.

Appendix 2: Expected quality and availability of census data under the preferred approach

Key use(s)	Census data variables	Availability	Initial data quality Note: Quality will improve over time.	
Justice (electoral)				
Setting the number of electorates and electoral boundaries	Usually resident population (most granular)	2023 - Available now, used for 2026 Election 2028 - Data available for 2029 Election 2031- Data available for 2032 Election	Comparable or improved quality	
	Māori descent usually resident population (most granular)		Change in initial quality	
Social sector (social investment, health, Te Tiriti and smaller communities)				
High-quality data on: - small population groups, geographic areas, and cross-tabulations - household and family living situations Used to inform evidence-based interventions such as: - access to health services, unmet need, and health outcome disparities Treaty of Waitangi settlements - Evidence-based policy for population groups (e.g. disability issues, ethnic communities) <i>Note: Child poverty measurement will not be impacted and could be improved under the proposed change</i>	Usually resident population (most granular) – incl. age	2026 / 27- Early transitional measures (admin-based) 2028 - Official measures	Comparable or improved quality	
	Māori descent	2026 - Annual provisional population counts 2030 - Official population counts	Change in initial quality	
	Iwi affiliation data	2030 - Population counts and profiles (using historic census data)	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Ethnicity data	2028 - Broad ethnicity categories – official measures 2029 - Detailed ethnicity categories – estimates	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Small population data	2030 - Population counts and profiles (using historic census data)	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Deprivation index	2023 - Data available now (2023 Census)	Alternative measurement approach required	
	Activity limitations	2029 - Estimates (with some provisional measures in 2028)	Change in initial quality	
	Other demographics: - Household and family context - Languages spoken - Gender and related variables	2029 - Estimates (with some provisional measures in 2028)	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
Housing and infrastructure				
High-quality data on: - housing supply and demand - conditions of access to housing & tenure - nature and distribution of dwelling stock Used to inform evidence-based interventions such as: infrastructure planning - local government long-term and transport planning disaster recovery planning	Dwelling location (address) and type	2030/31- Official measures	Change in initial quality	
	Dwelling type, tenure, housing condition and access	2030/31 - Estimates	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Occupancy status	2030/2031 - Official measures	Change in initial quality	
	Combined information on people, dwellings & location	2030/2031 - Official measures	Significant decrease in initial quality	
	Severe Housing Deprivation	2024 - Estimates using 2023 Census data 2030 – Estimates using survey-based outputs	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
Education				
Research and evaluation of education provision and initiatives School network forecasting , planning and prioritisation of school property	Highest education qualifications and household composition	2028 - Provisional measure 2029 - Official measure	Moderate decrease in initial quality	
	Hours of work and occupation	2030 - Estimates		
	Place of usual residence	2026 / 27 - Early transitional measures (admin-based) 2028 - Official measures	Comparable or improved quality	
Key:	Comparable or improved quality: Similar or improved coverage, accuracy, granularity, and frequency	Change in initial quality: Slight decrease in coverage and accuracy but Improved granularity and frequency	Moderate decrease in initial quality: Decreased coverage and accuracy for small groups but increased frequency	Significant decrease in initial quality: Substantial reduction in quality.

Appendix 3: 2030 Census: Summary of key workstreams and milestones – 2025

Module	Workstream	Q3 Jan - March	Q4 Apr - Jun	Q1 Jul - Sep	Q2 Oct - Dec	
Census Design The scope, features, characteristics, and assumptions of how the next Census will be delivered	<i>Foundational design work</i>	Government Statistician decides on design objectives and choices. Te Ao Māori design approach scope confirmed. Work commences on high-level design and assurance processes.	Design guidance and frameworks confirmed. Work commences on Te Ao Māori design approach. Implementation plan (including dependency mapping) confirmed.	Detailed design work commences.		
	<i>Working with design partners</i>	Work with iwi-Māori and other priority communities to understand needs and work together to design how we will deliver to those needs. In Q3 – decision confirming design partners: iwi-Māori and priority communities within the constraints for Next Census.				
	<i>Understanding information needs</i>	Engagement plan that covers working with design partners, communities and populations of interest, agencies, and data suppliers .	Engagement commences in line with engagement plan, focusing on content to be included in the 2030 Census.	Public consultation on potential range of topics to be supported by the 2030 Census.	Government Statistician decides on content to be included in the 2030 Census (Oct).	
Implementation Data ingestion, technology, methodologies, and testing to deliver the next Census	<i>Administrative data pipeline</i>	Develop Multi-year Data and Statistical Programme (MYDSP) (i.e. plan to improve and acquire admin data from other agencies, including support in implementing data standards).		Work with agencies to action MYDSP, work with data suppliers to implement data standards, and plan and shift data to new ingestion platform; complete privacy assessments.		
	<i>Census Attribute Survey (CAS) collection</i>	Interim plan – CAS variables and timing, helping to inform field test and public consultation document. Sample and Collection methodology confirmed.	Internal testing of survey collection tool, ensuring it can collect responses online, via phone, and in person.	Confirm design and objectives for a field test of the CAS. Questionnaire designed for initial confirmed content, including alignment with data standards (to support field test in Q4).		
	<i>Statistical methods</i>		Proof of concept for model-based estimates from survey data.	Iterative refinement of methodology for administrative data-based measures: population, dwellings, attributes about population and dwellings; and methodology for quality assessment of outputs produced from combination of administrative and survey data.		
			Statistical Design for 2030 Census.			
	<i>Data infrastructure</i>	Integrate new survey tool. Completion of enterprise data platform to support ingestion of admin data. Design of new business processes to support the use of the new technology platform.		Minimum viable product (MVP) systems developed to support field test operation and data collection.		Admin Population Model built (to facilitate the production of population data).
	<i>Testing and readiness</i>	Develop testing strategy for field test and operational readiness test. Create the procurement plan to underpin the tests.	Procure systems testing partner.	Operational readiness and resilience plan.		Field test to assess design and cost assumptions.
Trust and confidence Building public confidence in the approach by delivering value using safe and ethical approaches	<i>Trust and confidence</i>	Point in time understanding of trust levels and areas of concern from communities and population groups. Map communities trust and confidence concerns to inform measures and tools.		Establish a trust measurement and track over time. Strengthen procedures for the safe acquisition and use of admin data.		
	<i>Communications and marketing</i>		Communicate census design (pending Cabinet endorsement) with stakeholders. Campaign to demonstrate the value of data and statistics to the public (ongoing).		Confirm census content with stakeholders and the public. Campaign for a field test of the Census Attribute Survey.	
Supports Governance, legislative change, and finance to enable the next Census	<i>Policy approvals</i>	Cabinet paper seeking endorsement of the in-principle decision; and Cabinet approval to draft legislation.	Cabinet approval of discussion document.	Bill introduced and first reading in Parliament (TBC via the 2025 legislative programme).		
	<i>Governance</i>	Policy choices and levers for establishing system governance over the admin data pipeline. Internal programme governance established to oversee design and implementation.	Implement and action programme governance framework throughout design phase. Monthly programme governance meetings commence.	System governance mechanisms established.		
	<i>Business case</i>	Updated detailed costing.	Monthly reporting and quarterly forecasting.			

2030 Census: Summary of key workstreams and milestones 2026 - 2031

Module	Workstream	FY25/26 Q3 – FY26/27 Q2	FY26/27 Q3 – FY27/28 Q2	FY27/28 Q3 – FY28/29 Q2	FY28/29 Q3 – FY29/30 Q2	FY29/30 Q3 – FY30/31 Q2	FY30/31 Q3 – FY31/32 Q2
Data and statistics releases The expected release schedule for when data and statistics will be released	Outputs	Provisional admin data-based measures published (in both late 2026 and 2027) to demonstrate value of approach and familiarise customers.		First official release of admin data-only measures in late 2028 (e.g. official population counts and projections).	First release of combined admin data and Census Attribute Survey estimates in early 2029 .	Annual release of combined admin and survey data in early 2031 and early 2032	
						Dwelling counts. Release of outputs to deliver value for iwi-Māori in mid 2030 .	Release of official 2030 Census admin data-first measures; release of outputs to deliver value for priority communities in mid 2031 .
Census Design The scope, features, characteristics, and assumptions of how the next Census will be delivered	Foundational design work	Detailed design finalised; performance targets and measures agreed.	Design work moves to BAU phase focussed on subsequent CAS annual surveys and further options to advance admin data variables: Design assurance activities; review of design functions; quality assurance activities; methodology assurance activities; and assessment and reporting on performance measures.				
	Working with design partners	Design of bespoke collection approach and work programme to deliver value for iwi-Māori and priority communities.		Delivering value for iwi-Māori programme in progress, outputs to be delivered in 2030.	Delivering value for priority communities programme in progress, outputs to be delivered in 2031.		
	Understanding information needs	Work with agencies to understand their information needs; design and finalise mix of outputs.	Establish regular cycle to manage and refine information needs and outputs.	Ongoing: Establish and maintain relationships with partners, suppliers, customers, and communities. Embed cyclical engagement process: listen and plan, engage, deliver and action, share learnings, and continuous review and improvement.			
Implementation Data ingestion, technology, methodologies, and testing to deliver the next Census	Administrative data pipeline	Ongoing work with data suppliers to improve administrative data, in alignment with the MYDSP, assessment of MYDSP progress to date (and strengthen levers if required)					
	Census Attribute Survey (CAS) collection	Design questionnaire for initial content. Multi-year plan for CAS variables.	Census Attribute Survey in field from July 2027.	Continuous Census Attribute Survey collection, to be published on an annual basis.			
		Operational readiness test.		Continuous improvement and programme of embedded design testing.			
	Statistical methods	Iterative refinement of methodology for administrative data-based measures: population, dwellings, attributes about population and dwellings. Methodology for quality assessment of outputs produced from combination of administrative and survey data.					
	Data infrastructure	Support provisional 2026 outputs. End-to-end Census Attribute Survey infrastructure developed.	Support provisional 2027 outputs. Support CAS by developing a high quality Operational Dwelling Frame.	Integrated Statistical Data System able to link survey data to admin data.	Integrated Statistical Data System used to support first official release of next census.		
Trust and confidence Building public confidence in the approach by delivering value using safe and ethical approaches	Trust and confidence	Proactive, targeted engagement to understand NZ attitudes to data; ongoing maintenance, education, and continuous improvement of safe, transparent, and ethical data practices .					
		Community wānanga on trust measurement framework and admin data (country-wide); annual trust measurement report.		Report against trust measures (every 3 years).			Report against trust measures (every 3 years).
	Communications and marketing	Value of data campaign (ongoing, including supporting key milestones such as collection efforts and in 2028 to support first official release of admin data measures).					
Educational programme campaign about how Stats NZ keeps data safe.		Census Attribute Survey campaign to launch the survey and encourage people to participate.	Ongoing activities to support participation in the Census Attributes Survey and launch new collections.				