WHO-UNDESA Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment
Working Group 2: Use of Surveys and Censuses to Fill Data Gaps

Background

In the context of the work of the Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment, jointly established by WHO and UN DESA, the Working Group on the Use of Surveys and Censuses to Fill Data Gaps will focus on addressing important methodological questions related to gathering time-sensitive and reliable information on COVID-19 mortality through censuses and sample surveys.

Population censuses and household surveys have been the major sources of mortality for countries that do not have reliable civil registration and vital statistics. While there is a long history of directly and indirectly estimating adult mortality level based on relevant questions included censuses and surveys (e.g., sibling survivals and household deaths), those methods are not nearly efficient in producing timely and reliable estimates.

Objectives

The Working Group will provide advice and recommendations to WHO and UNDESA and National Statistical Offices on using censuses and surveys for time-sensitive and reliable information on COVID-19 mortality at the country level.

More specifically, the Working Group will provide advice, in two phases, on:

1. Using existing census and survey data for better measurement of mortality
   o Methods to estimate the number and levels of mortality that can properly reflect the impact of COVID-19
2. Innovative methods to improve mortality data collection through censuses and surveys and better integration of data sources, for countries with unreliable CRVS system, covering
   o Improved census and survey questions that can be used to collect more accurate adult mortality
   o Practical considerations on properly carrying out data collection, including sample design and other relevant stages of data collection
   o Practical consideration and best practices on data integration

The Guidance will be accompanied by practical examples from countries, while focusing on innovative approaches with suggestions on ways to further testing and adaption in countries.

The recommendations of the Working Group will be useful, particularly for countries with incomplete or unreliable civil registration and vital statistics systems, where complementary and interim sources of data such as population censuses and surveys will be vital for measuring the impact of COVID-19 on population mortality levels. In the longer term, the recommendations of the Working Group will help build a more agile and resilient statistical system for future large-scale epidemic and natural disasters.

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