

The 2014 Population and Housing Census of Myanmar:

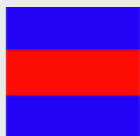
Questions and Answers about Myanmar's Census



Ministry of Immigration and Population

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Introduction

This booklet is a compilation of questions and answers that were frequently raised during a series of consultations and interactions on data release and dissemination of the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. These consultations took place over several months from May 2014 and involved meetings and discussions with representatives of different sectors of society across States and Regions in Myanmar. They involved meetings with religious and ethnic groups, political parties and groups, civil society and community-based organizations, women and youth organizations, private sector, media and government officials. In addition, visits to the Census Centre in Nay Pyi Taw by different stakeholder groups, such as Ambassadors, the UN, media, donors and development partners, NGOs, and ethnic groups, took place to see the data processing that was underway. These “Frequently Asked Questions” about the census also benefitted from the advice and questions of the members of the Census National Advisory Committee.

Having listened to the main concerns about the census generally and associated data release specifically among different communities in Myanmar, this booklet is part of a larger effort to shape a people-centered approach to census data release and dissemination by helping to build public trust, understanding, acceptance and use of census data at all levels.

General questions on the census

1. Why is a census conducted?

Periodic population censuses are conducted in nearly all countries in the world to provide governments and society in general with accurate information on the number of people in the country, their characteristics and living conditions. Very few countries do not need to conduct censuses because they have up-to-date registration systems that provide this information in a continuous manner.

2. What is UNFPA and what is its role in census?

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that provides support to countries on population, gender, and reproductive health. This includes technical and sometimes financial support for conducting censuses.

3. What is the cost of the Myanmar census?

The total cost of the census is around \$60 million (USD). The exact figure will be known as soon as the whole operation is finished. This has come from Government, Donors and UNFPA. Communities and civil society organisations have also voluntarily through local communication and mobilisation activities.

4. What is the value of conducting a census?

Having accurate knowledge about the population is critical to guide decisions relating to people's wellbeing, economic investments, policy making, development planning, and the improvement of services. A census constitutes the base of any sound statistical systems.



5. Given that risks had been identified for census taking, why was the census conducted in March/April 2014 and not delayed to a future date?

There are always risks of different nature associated with large scale operations like the census. It is impossible to guarantee that no risk would affect the operations, particularly in countries with complex political and social issues like Myanmar. In Myanmar, a comprehensive risk analysis was conducted at the end of 2012. The risks outlined in this report were tested out during the pilot census by a team of national and international observers. Then, the census planning incorporated the recommendations of the risk assessment, conducting several activities and adjusting the planning to address and mitigate those risks.

The approach was to analyze the opportunities and risks associated with taking the census as planned in 2014, as well as the opportunities and risks inherent to not having a census. Myanmar is undergoing a complex reform process that incorporates peace negotiations, political, social and economic reforms. Important decisions need to be made, which require an adequate information base. Available information is based on the data from the 1983 census, which are both outdated and no longer reliable not only because it is more than 30 years old, but also because during these last three decades the country has experienced major events that transformed the country's political, social and demographic basis. The

available knowledge base from that census, therefore, is inadequate to guide policy decision making and planning. In addition, in 2015 an election is planned to take place and a new government would be appointed. If the census is not conducted before these relevant events, the new government would have to take office, start planning and decision making without the benefit of accurate information.



It would have to initiate census planning, but the census and data would not be available for at least three -most probably four years- after the new government has taken office. That would mean that new policies and programmes would have to be adopted with inadequate knowledge of the population situation and their social needs.

The time-line described above is in conformity with the fact that international experience and practices indicate that a census and elections should be separated at least by one year.

In addition, also for pragmatic reasons the census should precede the elections, because it can provide valuable information to improve the planning and logistic preparation for the elections, as it indicates the number of people residing in every electoral district and therefore also an estimate of potential eligible voters. While the data of the census is not used for establishing a Myanmar voter list update, it provides a reliable independent source to assess whether the numbers included in electoral lists are reasonably accurate or not. This is a valuable measure to expose anomalies and the potential exclusion or disenfranchisement of voters.

Similarly, the census provides the Union Electoral Commission and the political parties with an estimate of the number of potential voters per electoral district. On the basis of this, an estimate number of polling stations per constituency, including required polling staff to be recruited and trained, may be identified with the ultimate objective that the Myanmar voters will be informed on where to cast their votes on Election Day. Taking into account all these factors the decision was to conduct the census in 2014, and incorporate all feasible activities aimed to risk prevention and mitigation.

An example of risk mitigation, among others measures undertaken, was the consultations conducted in the second half of 2013 with all parties, non-state and armed groups. In all, 126 political/peace ethnic leaders participated in a meeting on 2nd March 2014, after the census launch in Nay Pyi Taw, to discuss final preparations for the enumeration with the Minister of Immigration and Population. Most of these groups, even in cases where no peace agreement had been reached, agreed

to cooperate and support the census. In many cases these groups selected the enumerators to work in their areas or even conducted the enumeration themselves, and returned the completed census questionnaires for processing. In most cases the census not only did not generate conflict, but instead it became an opportunity for confidence building and effective cooperation.

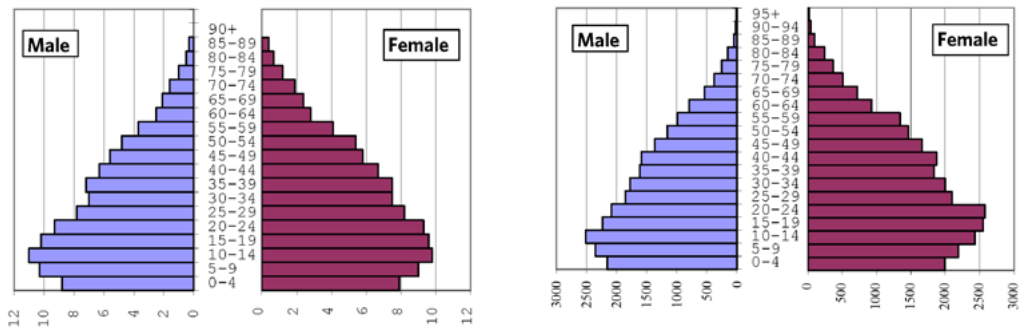
6. In what sense has the census improved or may improve decision making and planning?

The 2014 population and housing census constitutes the foundation for developing a national institutional statistical system. An updated population census provides the basis for planning all development activities and provision of health, education, sanitation, infrastructure and all other social services.

For example, the Pilot Census has already revealed that important demographic transformations are taking place in Myanmar. This is seen in that the base of the population pyramid is no longer expanding, but is narrowing. It means that population age groups below the age of 15-19 are becoming smaller than the groups before them. (*Figure 1*) This is because families are having fewer children and the population growth rate has reduced over the last 30 years. This situation results in a levelling in the number of births each year, as can be seen in tables 1 and 2 from the pilot census. This transition process has created a “bulge” in the now 15 – 29 age group. This represents a potentially powerful factor to accelerate economic growth and development, demanding adjustments and investments in different sectors. When the “bulge” of 15-29 year-olds reaches or is in the working age, the dependency ratio (the proportion of dependent population to the working age population) declines. That means that each person in the labor force has to sustain a declining number of people who are dependent. Hence, this demographic transformation creates a situation that would favour economic production and savings with respect to consumption needs.

This phenomenon is known as the “demographic bonus”. There is abundant empirical evidence demonstrating the impact of the

Figure 1: Population Pyramid- 2007 Fertility and Reproductive Health Survey Population Pyramid- Pilot Census 2013



demographic bonus in accelerating economic growth. However, the potential benefits of the demographic bonus are fully materialized only if conducive public policies are adopted in order to enhance the human capital of the new entrants to the labor force, equipping them with the knowledge and skills that contribute to increase productivity, at the same time as employment opportunities are expanded so as to accommodate the increases in the working age population.

Data on these processes is essential in order to design adequate policies in a timely manner so as to maximize the advantages emanating from these opportunities. In the case of Myanmar, policies to enhance the benefits from the demographic bonus must start immediately. Ideally they should have started about 10 years ago, when the fertility decline resulted in decreasing number of births as compared to previous years, but inadequate information basis did not allow for proper monitoring of trends in order to guide policy making.

Questions about the census results



7. How certain is it that the data will be released?

Government has committed itself to releasing data in three stages. The provisional data was released on time in August 2014 and it is expected that the main results will be made available in May 2015, and at the end of 2015 or early 2016 for the data that need more time for analysis. International advisers are assisting in this whole process. As of November 2014, the census process was on schedule.

8. Can census information be used to protect groups at risk?

The information that a census provides about people's lives can help to defend socially marginalized groups, as well as those most in need. It can also highlight geographical disparities, as well as social and economic inequalities. The information from the census is anonymous with respect to individuals who provided it. Hence it is not a tool that can be used to protect any particular individual. However, the census provides information on the number of these groups and thus the magnitude of marginalization or disparities. If there are initiatives that pose a threat to the population in a given area, the census will show how many people may be affected; this knowledge may support actions and policies geared to provide protection.

9. How will data on each household's economic situation be used?

Answers to census questions are anonymous, so there can be no repercussions for any individual who has responded. Data on the economic status of households are important because they can be related to information about infrastructure and social services. Showing how the availability of certain services is linked to higher living standards can help promote policies aimed at poverty reduction and better access to services meeting people's basic needs.

10. Is there a relationship between the census and national registration card?

There is no connection. The census is anonymous, so the information collected cannot be connected to any particular individual.

11. After the data are processed, when will the data be released?

The first release of data was in August 2014. This showed the number of males and females at the levels of Union, State/Region, District and Township. This information comes from the summary sheets made by enumerator and supervisors. The second release is foreseen for May or June 2015 and will include information on population, age, gender, health, disability, education, housing conditions and other socio-demographic indicators.

12. Why is it that some of the data cannot be released until after the second release, expected in May or June 2015? If the questionnaires have been electronically scanned, why is it not possible to release the data?

Some responses on the questionnaire include handwritten information that the computer cannot directly read and understand. This data relates to employment and industry, which need to be coded. Operators will input this information by hand, which is a time-consuming process. These data are expected to be ready for release by the end of 2015 or early 2016.

13. There was a question about family members living abroad. How will that data be used?

Household members reported to be outside the country on the date of the census are not counted in the census population because a census only captures individuals that reside on Myanmar territory on the census night. Still normally countries are interested in knowing how many nationals are living abroad, as they may constitute resources which can help on the country's development. They may constitute networks for international trade, or eventually human resources that the country may want to encourage to return as qualified labour force.

14. How can you verify the accuracy of data results?

A number of important quality control procedures are imbedded in the census process. One critical element is accurate mapping at all levels, down to the small level of the enumeration areas meant to be covered by one enumerator. These areas, consisting of 100 to 150 households and sometimes less in remote areas, were precisely delineated, so that no household would be represented more than once and none were left out.

Next is the selection and training of reliable enumerators. Selection criteria aimed to ensure that the enumerators were from the same areas as the respondents, familiar with the area's culture and customs, and able to communicate in the same language as the respondents. Enumerators were trained to understand the questions properly, to identify signs that a respondent did not correctly understand a question, and to rephrase those questions in a way that would be understood. Supervisors were trained to identify enumerators' mistakes by reviewing their questionnaires, and to correct them immediately.

Census committees conduct communications activities to ensure that people correctly understand the census, and take care of logistics.

The quality of the census is determined by the quality of the preparations, planning and logistical activities involving the whole operation. This means from the design of the questionnaires to the training of enumerators

and all other personnel that have worked in the census, including the mapping, the Pilot Census of April 2013, the interviews and final data processing. Based on analysis of the Pilot Census findings, adjustments were made, including corrections to the questionnaires. Incorporations of lessons learned contributed to improve operations in the final census enumeration and processing.

At each of these census stages, there have been international professionals who are prominent experts, providing guidance and making assessments on whether the preparations and the execution have been done properly, following international standards. In early 2013, the International Technical Advisory Board (ITAB) was installed at the request of Government. This comprises 15 international census experts. The ITAB's core business is to oversee and advise on the implementation of the census in full recognition that the ultimate responsibility of the census is that of the Government of Myanmar.

The International Technical Advisory Board (ITAB) has been supervising every step of the census process. ITAB members have reviewed training materials, manuals and cartography and provided feedback so the highest international standards are followed.

A team of 46 international and national observers were deployed throughout the country, to witness the enumeration process. They noted how enumerators asked questions and recorded the information on the questionnaire forms. Their report has been made public.

All available evidence so far indicates that the population census in Myanmar has been conducted properly and that information should be of good quality.

Finally, once questionnaires have been processed there will be an evaluation of the census data, a detailed process that will analyse the internal consistency of the results and compare them with other available information.



15. Will census data be used to create voting lists for the 2015 elections?

No. The voter registration list is used to identify individuals qualified to vote. That cannot be done with census data, which are anonymous and confidential. However, census information can be used as quality control for the election, and to help in logistical planning for the election, for example the number of polling stations and personnel needed.

16. Could census data support the proposed proportional representative system in the Parliament?

No. Under a proportional representation system parties get representatives in proportion to the number of votes they receive, not to the population in a particular area, so there is no relation to the census. Census data are neutral on matters related to the type of parliamentary representation that a country decides upon.

17. At the time of the Referendum on the Constitution in 2008 a total population of about 57 million was announced. Now the provisional results of the 2014 census are indicating that the population is about 51 million. How do you explain these differences?

What needs to be understood is that all references to “total population”, which were made previous to the 2014 census, were approximate estimates based on the 1983 census and a number of assumptions on how the birth rates, mortality rates and migration would change after 1983, when the census was conducted. The only figure that was produced



by the Referendum was the number of people that voted. This included Myanmar citizens who were residing abroad. The 57 million at that time was estimated assuming that the population growth rate would increase along the pattern observed during the 1983 census.

However, the evidence available today, from the Pilot Census as well as other surveys, indicates that the number of children per family has been decreasing during the last 15 years. This is visible in the population pyramids, which consistently show smaller numbers in the younger age groups in the last 15 years. The growth rate of the population has been declining significantly. Hence, estimates made under the assumption that the growth rate was constant have exaggerated the assumed total population size.

The exact difference between the previous estimates and the actual size of the population will be known when the final census results become available in May 2015. However, from the provisional 2014 census data results, it appears that the actual population is significantly smaller than previous estimations which were done on the assumption of higher and constant population growth rates. The Referendum itself did not produce any estimate of total population (this was calculated using growth rates as mentioned before). The referendum only gave the number of people who had voted, including citizens residing abroad - who are not counted in the census, because censuses only include those residing in the national territory.





18. How will women's participation be ensured during the data release?

Women have played essential roles throughout the census. Most of the enumerators were women. Women Civil Society Organisations have been engaged in all stages of the process thus far and are included as members of the Census National Advisory Committee. When the data are released, it will be important to have women's organizations communicating messages on the value of the census. It is critical that they remain engaged in using census information for policy advocacy and for planning development programmes and improving social and other services.

The census data will reveal information on the status of women in the country, including their health, fertility, education and employment status.

19. What role can civil society play?

Civil society and community-based organizations that have trusted relationships at the community level have an important role in clarifying the purpose and content of the census. At the same time, census information will provide a resource to enable community-based organizations to perform their own activities better, target those most in need of support, and facilitate their dialogue with authorities.

The census enumeration process



20. Why did the enumerator not ask me all of the 41 questions?

Some questions in the questionnaire were directed to specific groups of people, such as women or individuals older than a certain age. Others were follow-up questions that only applied if one answered a 'yes' or 'no' question in a certain way. That explains why most people were not asked all 41 questions. For example, on the question on deaths in the last 12 months, a follow up would only be asked for females aged 15-49 to ascertain how many women died because of pregnancy related causes.

21. How are religious leaders and monks counted?

Everyone in the country on the Census Night should have been counted in the place where they stayed on the night of March 29/30th. In institutions such as monasteries, military bases or prisons, some questions relevant to individual households did not apply (such as those asking the number of rooms in a family's home, for example). But every individual was counted and asked the questions pertinent to individuals.

22. I live in a hostel. I didn't answer the census because my family back home already answered for me. Was this correct?

If anyone was counted more than once, this was a mistake. The census rules were very clear. Every individual should have been counted in the

place where he or she was on the Census Night. So, for example, if you stayed at the hostel that night, you should have been counted under the institutional questionnaire in the hostel, not in your family's household. If you were included in the household, it was a misunderstanding and that was a mistake.

Mistakes like this happen due to misunderstandings in any census. But they are relatively rare compared to the millions of individuals that have been counted, and thus will not compromise the overall validity of census information for decision-making.

23. Why was there a question about disability in the family?

It was included because data on the characteristics of disabled people can help to design and guide social policies to address the needs of persons with disabilities.

24. Why was I asked who died in my family last year?

Knowing the number of deaths in each household allows demographers to estimate the death (mortality) rate in different areas of the country and throughout. This is very important for health policies. Speaking about death can be culturally sensitive in some parts of Myanmar, so the information reported may be incomplete. But demographers are trained in utilizing incomplete or imperfect data and have methodologies to correct this and provide information that is accurate for decision-making.

25. Why were most enumerators teachers? What were the selection criteria?

Enumerators required a minimum level of literacy and good communications skills, which teachers must have for their profession. They had to be able to correctly articulate the questions, and to recognize when a question was misunderstood and needed to be rephrased. In countries all over the world, teachers are typically the first people to be recruited to conduct census interviews. Additionally, teachers know the communities they work in, are known and trusted, and speak the language. This impacts the quality of the information they collect.

26. Why did enumerators use pencils? How can you be sure answers were not changed later on?

The use of pencils is a universal practice. The technology used to process the data can only read forms that are clean and marked clearly. While conducting an interview, it is easy to make mistakes such as not placing the marking correctly in the selected box. Enumerators need to erase these and correct them, which cannot be done when using a pen. Alternatively, they could discard the questionnaire and start again, but this would waste valuable time and would be expensive. The interviewers were recruited from the communities where they work so most probably they would share language, culture and the interests of the community.

Furthermore, census analysts have methodologies to detect levels of misreporting that are significant enough to affect the overall quality of the data. Decades of studies and analysis have provided learning about what patterns to expect in census data, and to recognize when results deviate from these patterns due to misreporting. This type of evaluation is also part of the overall census data verification and quality control exercise. There are highly technical ways to check this and this is being done for Myanmar's census.

27. If census data are anonymous and confidential, why did enumerators ask the names of every member of our household?

Names were asked, not to identify individuals, but to facilitate interviews. In a household with multiple individuals, the enumerator needs to keep track of who is being referred to when asking questions about a person's age, level of literacy, etc. There are careful measures in place to ensure that the questionnaires with this information remain confidential. The names are not used when the data are processed, and are not recorded in data files.



28. How were the scanners and computers used for the census data analysis selected?

UNFPA guided this process and followed a competitive international bidding process. Any company in the world that sells equipment meeting the specified technological requirements could submit a proposal. Selection was based on price and the company's ability to provide the training and support needed to operate the equipment and to provide maintenance and repairs as needed. The national origin of the companies was not a factor in those decisions.

29. Were people counted in areas with ethnic armed groups?

In some cases, negotiated agreements between the Government and the armed groups allowed enumerators access to the areas with ethnic armed groups. This was not possible in a few specific situations, mostly because of security concerns. The areas that have been missed have been clearly identified. The census results will be reported for all areas where information could be collected, which in percentage terms covered nearly all of the country (about 98%).

30. Will the census count the many Myanmar migrants and refugees living outside the country?

The census counts every person in the country on the date of the census, regardless of his or her legal status. Refugees and other Myanmar people living abroad, legal or illegal, therefore, are not counted.

31. How useful was the pilot census conducted last year?

Exactly one year before the actual enumeration, a pilot census was taken in a number of areas chosen to represent various circumstances under which the census would be conducted, including areas hard to access and those with different cultures and languages. This helped to identify problems that might be encountered, and to assess how good the questions were and whether the mapping included all households. Lessons learned from the pilot were used to improve the process, for example, by revising the training of enumerators and words used in asking the questions. Information materials were produced based on the lessons learnt in the pilot, which involved a total 5000 households in 20 townships across the country.

Questions about ethnicity and religion



32. The list of ethnic subgroups (categorisation) identified 135 ethnicities. But there was little agreement, particularly among ethnic communities, that the list provided an accurate representation of ethnic divisions within Myanmar. This raises several questions: what if people do not identify under the “designated” category on the list (because the list was not an accurate reflection of ethnic categories)? If the categories are not accurate and/or respondents did not answer accurately, what will be the impact on allocation of Ethnic Affairs Ministers at the State & Regional level?

It is clear that the 135 code list is a listing that not everyone in the country recognizes nor accepts. Government has acknowledged the need to address the challenge of how people self-identify in terms of ethnicity. It has committed itself to work collaboratively with Ethnic Leaders on how the 135 list (or a revised one) should reflect ethnic categories that people would recognize as legitimate. This listing must emerge from a consultative process, which still needs to take place in the country and would ultimately require Parliamentary approval.

The census is not the tool or mechanism to address this challenge. The census has helped reveal the extent to which disagreement exists over categorization of ethnicity. It has also revealed the many dilemmas and implications that arise as a result of the disagreement. Ultimately, this has contributed to launch initiatives geared to find adequate solutions.

But the census process, or ensuing data, will not play a role in shaping the outcome of these initiatives.

The census collects the information on ethnicity that people provide. It is the people themselves who identify with one category or another. The census registers what they have reported. If there are any Ethnic Affairs positions that need to be assigned, these positions will reflect how people have reported. If there is any misunderstanding on what has been reported, this reflects a diversity of views related to ethnic identity. This lies at the heart of the challenge that needs to be addressed.

Once the Government made the decision to include the question on ethnicity, the only tool then available was the 135 code list as this what exists under Myanmar law to describe ethnicity. If a new list becomes available, the census results can be reclassified according to the new list. In the event that no consensus had been reached on a new ethnic listing by the time of that the third data release, a decision on releasing the ethnicity data could be deferred until consensus emerges through dialogue and consultation producing a new list that is approved in parliament.

33. Who determines, and how is it determined whether religious and ethnic data will be available for the State/Region, District, Township, and Village-Tract level?"

For all data, release is done on the basis of relevance. Some information may be relevant for planning and development at a certain level and not at others. For example, information on access to water, electricity, sanitation, is necessary to examine at an in-depth level as it may lead to decision making in terms of providing these services, as needed in specific areas. Other information would not guide decisions on service provision or other decision making at disaggregated level. And, where such information and data may raise risks, these would be expected to be published only at the highest administrative levels for different reasons. Ultimately it is the Government of Myanmar that decides on the level of detail by which information will be released, including information on religion and ethnicity.

34. Why are mixed blood not recognized in the census and not given code numbers?

The census did make provision for “mixed blood” identification. However, it is important to understand that the census is not a tool to define ethnicity and or assign codes to ethnic groups. Even so, the reality is that many individuals have mixed identity and may identify more strongly with one or other of their ethnic origins or with an equal value to each. In recognition of this, Government agreed that those who would wish to identify as mixed identity could do so using the option of “other” (under 914 code) instead of one of the ethnicity codes in the 135 list.

These are situations where a case-by-case analysis has to be done, assigning separate coding for each different formulation of mixed ethnic identity. This has to be done manually by the census computer operators, before it can be registered. This takes a longer time to process and accounts for why ethnicity cannot be released earlier than the third stage of data release at the end of 2015 or early 2016. Also, given the many possible formulations that this exercise could entail, the outcome may mean a great number of combinations. This adds to the time needed to finalize this process. This is the reason why these data will not be part of the release expected in May 2015.





If the census reveals many new as well as mixed ethnic identities, this may be important and valuable information in terms of understanding the evolving nature of ethnic identity in the country. However, this in itself would not suffice as a defining new ethnic categories. In all cases, further consultation would be needed to arrive at a listing of ethnicity for the country that is valid in the current context, and carries broad consensus in the society. Furthermore, the Government made a commitment to undertake a consultative process to review and replace the currently contested “135” ethnic classification listing. Once done, this would require Parliamentary approval before coming into effect.

It is essential to keep in mind that the question on ethnicity is included in the census for different reasons; most critically to know the spread of ethnicity around the country. It is important because economic or social inequalities frequently are associated with persons belonging to certain groups or living in certain areas in a country. The census asks these questions to collect information that can be used to design social policies to enhance equity.

35. How can you ensure that the census data will not undercount or overcount the real number of ethnic population in the States and Regions?

There is no current evidence to suggest concern that there may be under-counting or over-counting. The census assigned enumerators to work in their own areas to ensure a familiar setting and common language with people they would enumerate. Additionally, there are quality control processes in place to ensure accuracy of the data. If any mistakes are made, they may be related to two main factors.

The first factor is that individuals declared an ethnicity that is different to their own real ethnicity. If they self-identified their ethnicity incorrectly, enumerators would record it in the way it was reported. There might have been some cases where this has happened, but it is not expected that there would be a significant number of these errors.

The second factor would be that the population was undercounted in a particular area where a specific ethnic group resides. This would cause an under enumeration of that group. The possibility of this happening is low because of built-in quality control procedures in the census. The production and use of accurate enumeration area maps that cover the whole country, together with detailed verification of all structures and households in each enumeration area ahead of the actual count, reduces the likelihood of people being omitted from the population count. Preparations are such that not even one household should be omitted.

That being said, it is rarely possible to guarantee full coverage up to a 100% in a census. The cases where this happens, however, would be few and would not be enough to affect the overall results. Further, if relevant omission did happen, these will be revealed in the evaluations of the census process.

The final evaluation of the census will occur in 2016. In undertaking this, as with the preparations, Myanmar will be guided by the UN Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Census.

To find out more information visit:

www.dop.gov.mm

<http://myanmar.unfpa.org/census>

