



Censuses across the Globe



Read the article below which comes from a magazine called "Government Computing" (<http://www.kablenet.com>) and then answer the following questions.

Counting the 6,122,500,000

Millennium year was a big year for censuses worldwide. Not just because it was a good round number. In July 1995 the United Nations passed a resolution calling on all its member countries to compile census data by 2004.

The US Census Bureau, part of the Department of Commerce, conducted a regular 10-yearly census in 2000, and like their UK counterparts, officials were worried about apparently declining rates of compliance; in 1990, an estimated 4.7 million people did not appear on the census, up to 2.8 million a decade before. Half of the undercount was children under 18 and the undercount rate was six times larger for African Americans than whites. Nearly one in eight Native Americans was missed. For the first time, the Census Bureau said, the 1990 census was less accurate than its predecessor. For the first time, the 2000 census included "a limited use of scientific sampling". The bureau released its first count on 28 December, showing the country had a population of 281.4 million. The Bureau's computers are crunching 5 terabytes of data to produce a stream of more detailed figures (www.census.gov).

Finland was one of a handful of countries to try a novel approach. Rather than sending out questionnaires, the government compiled information from 30 existing databases on 31 December 2000. It is the country's third register-based census: the last time census forms were sent out was in 1980. Like other Nordic countries, Finland has a central population register that is the source of data on demographics, dwellings and other buildings. Other registers supply information on employment, income, pension status, level of education and military service.

While such a national data-match would have privacy campaigners in the UK foaming at the mouth, the body responsible, Statistics Finland, say the advantage is clear. The census costs the equivalent of 16 US cents per head, compared with the US's \$10 per head.

A more controversial census is taking place in China, the world's most populous nation. It has recruited 6 million census officials to count about 1.3 billion people, half of whom share five surnames. Apart from ordinary demographic data it asks questions like "How much did you pay for your home?" and "How often do you wash?" The government in Peking says the census officials will not disclose details of anyone breaching the country's strict rules on family planning. Few people believe it.

1. What do you think the number in the title of the article refers to?
2. Why would people in the UK dislike Finland's way of conducting a census?
3. What is the big advantage in Finland's approach?
4. Can you think of any reason why China is enquiring into washing habits?
5. Which question would people in China not like to answer and why?
6. What is a declining rate of compliance?
7. Why do you think this is happening in the US and why Native Americans in particular?
8. Do you think it is likely to happen in other countries?