

Comparative Analysis of Household Definitions and Future Household Projection Methodologies in OECD Countries

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Since the 1970s, advanced economies have experienced accelerated population aging, largely due to declining fertility rates. In countries experiencing population growth due to demographic transition, urban concentration has emerged as a major issue, making housing policy and the reduction of income disparities critical social challenges. Conversely, in countries such as contemporary Japan—where ultra-low fertility is progressing and the aging rate exceeds 20%—housing demand has plateaued, and the simultaneous advancement of elderly welfare and countermeasures against declining birthrates has become a more pressing concern.

Social security policies, including those targeting elderly and child welfare, are often directed not at individuals but at households. Therefore, accurate projections of future household numbers are essential for evidence-based policy planning. Although a few studies have explored projection methodologies in specific regions—primarily Western countries—comprehensive analyses that include both methodological approaches and projection outcomes across a wider range of nations are still lacking.

In 2021, many countries conducted population censuses during periods of social isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among OECD member states, five countries, including Spain, implemented register-based censuses, and 19 out of 38 countries—exactly half—have transitioned to register-based census methodologies. Furthermore, in January 2023, the European Commission proposed a regulation requiring EU member states to report census data annually using administrative records. This marks a significant shift from the traditional model of conducting census surveys every five or ten years.

In response to these societal changes, this study investigates the definition of “household” in censuses and the status of household projections across all 38 OECD countries. The findings reveal that while the concept of “residing in the same dwelling” is commonly shared, other definitional elements vary, including “sharing a household budget,” “meeting daily living needs together,” “sharing meals,” and “living together.” Notably, countries that define households solely based on shared residence tend to have a higher adoption rate of register-based censuses.

Household projections are conducted in 18 countries, nearly half of the OECD membership. Among these, 10 countries employ the propensity method, while 6 use the headship rate method, indicating that the propensity method is currently the dominant approach. Additionally, countries using the propensity method often project not only household types by family structure but also by household size. These projections typically involve multiple scenario-based patterns, highlighting clear differences in output depending on the methodology used.

Keywords: OECD countries, population census, household, household projections, headship rate method, propensity method