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¹ The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

Leaving no one behind--Disaggregating census data by migratory status through IPUMS

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For dozens of additional SDG targets that rely on “big data” and other non-traditional data sources that are not nationally representative, census data will be required to produce population-level estimates. Likewise, census data will be required for the disaggregation of indicators derived from data sources that lack the sample sizes or stratifying variables necessary to support disaggregated estimates. While targeted household surveys often provide more detail than population censuses, they rarely produce sample sizes that are representative of the population.

IPUMS census microdata have limits, but are directly relevant to SDGs

Certain limitations restrict the utility of IPUMS census microdata for SDG monitoring. For countries that do not participate in IPUMS-International, accessing public-use microdata samples is challenging. Eighty-five countries currently disseminate data through the project; some of these countries have not yet contributed 2010-round data. As of 2018, 55 2010-round censuses were available in the data collection.

Other limitations relate to the topical coverage and timing of censuses. Census questions cover a broad range of topics in limited detail. Household surveys are often a better source for the in-depth information necessary for qualitative SDG indicators. Likewise, censuses are conducted every 10 years and therefore provide information about a country's population at the time the data were collected—not present time. In contrast, household surveys are conducted more frequently than censuses, providing timelier indicator estimates. Using household surveys in combination with census data improves the applicability and accuracy of both sources.

Despite these limitations, harmonized census microdata, like that disseminated by IPUMS-International, represent an important resource for SDG monitoring and SDG-related research. Many indicators can be directly measured using census microdata, and other data sources can be used in combination with census microdata to produce disaggregated population-level indicator estimates. Few other resources allow data users to generate customized indicators, tabulations, and statistics for migrants for multiple countries across all world regions.

To minimize resources spent on new data collection and maximize resources devoted to the implementation of policies and