

DELIBERATION NO 5 OF THE AD-HOC SECTION FOR MONITORING THE 2021 CENSUS

**THE CONDUCT OF THE 2021 CENSUS AND PREPARATORY ASPECTS, IN THE CONTEXT OF
COVID-19**

The General Guidelines of Official Statistical Activity for the 2018-2022 period refer, among the Lines of Action (LA), to the importance of:

- LA 2.1. Ensure the quality of official statistics in their various dimensions (relevance, accuracy, and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, coherence and comparability, accessibility, and clarity).

Whereas in the pursuit of its activity Statistics Portugal enjoys, under the law, of technical independence, i.e. "(...) sole responsibility for defining statistical methods, standards and procedures, as well as the content, type and timing of data releases" (Article 5(2) of the above Decree-Law).

Decree-Law 54/2019, of April 18, submitted to a prior hearing of the Ad-Hoc Section for Monitoring the 2021 Census (SEAC 2021), establishes the rules to be followed by the holding of the XVI General Census of the Population and the VI General Census of Housing, designated as Census 2021.

Whereas:

- within the scope of its competencies, namely to "Monitor the preparation, implementation, clearance, and evaluation of the 2021 Census", SEAC 2021 analysed, at the request of Statistics Portugal, document DOCT/5142/CSE/C2021 ("The impact of COVID-19 in the 2021 Census") on aspects regarding the implementation and preparation of the census operation in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, referenced to May 2020, and expressed its views on them;
- it is clear, from Statistics Portugal's document, among other relevant aspects, that in May 2020, because the public health and safety conditions of the staff involved in the fieldwork and of the respondents themselves were not met, the 2021 Census Pilot Survey, an operation that due to its size and objectives is essential to ensure the adequate operation and effectiveness in carrying out the actual operation, was suspended due to Covid-19;
- the Census is a ten-year, structural operation whose planning and implementation is extremely difficult in a context of unpredictability such as Portugal is experiencing in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the budgetary and public health implications, as well as the economic and social impacts associated with the quality of its results, must be taken into account;

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- due to timing reasons, it is not possible to find an alternative date to March still in 2021 for the implementation of the Census, in particular, due to the holding of local elections in the 4th quarter;
- the change in the census period to 2022 will lead to a break in the frequency of census operations in Portugal, as well as a failure to comply with obligations within the European Union;

Taking into account the arguments forwarded by Statistics Portugal in the two scenarios presented for the next census operation (maintenance of the initial date of March 2021 vs. postponement to March 2022), the **Ad-Hoc Section for Monitoring the 2021 Census**, at the meeting held by videoconference on 21 May 2020 and according to its powers, **deliberated**:

- to express full confidence in Statistics Portugal in choosing the best solution to ensure the quality of the data to be collected through the census operation in the context of the constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic;
- recommend to Statistics Portugal, having exhausted all possibilities of carrying out the census operation in 2021 with quality, the preparation of a plan to postpone the operation to 2022, considering all possible difficulties or obstacles that may be observed until 2022, so that the implementation of the Census will not be compromised again by then;
- that, if the census operation is postponed until 2022, the necessary consideration by the Section of the new draft of legislation intended to regulate the conduct of the next Census, be carried out through the written procedure mechanism provided for in the Council's Rules of Procedure.

Lisbon, 1 June 2020

The Chairman of the Section, José António Pereirinha

The Executive Secretary of the Statistical Council, Maria da Graça Fernandes Caeiro Bento