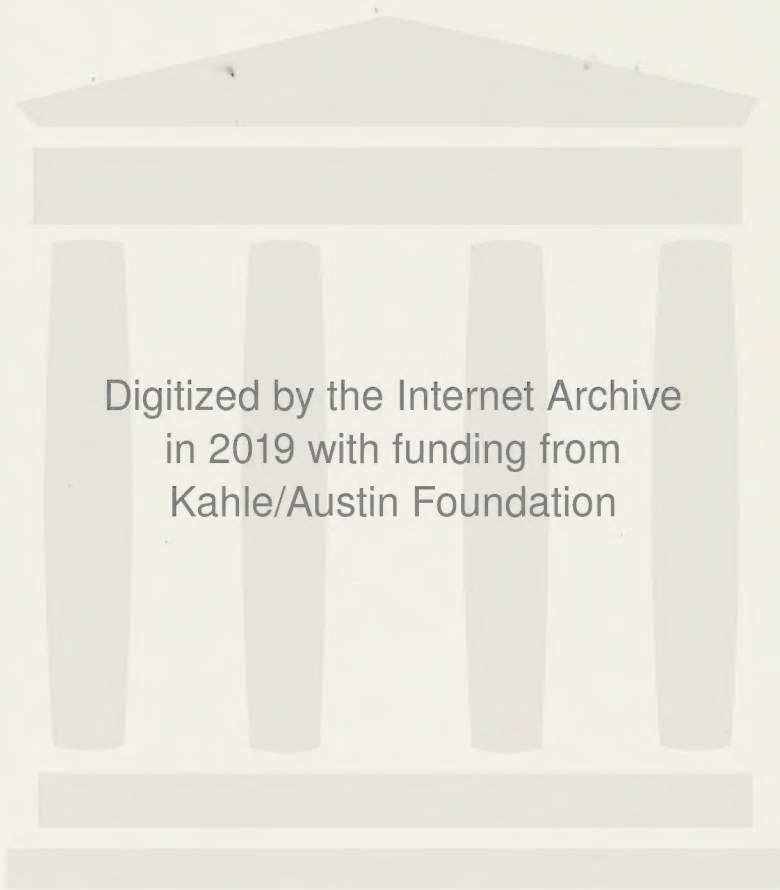


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USSR

CENSUS

'89



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Leonid SOBOLEV

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Centuries ago, houses and, later, households were registered in the old Rus for purposes of taxation. In 1718, Peter the Great issued a decree (*ukaz*) stipulating that a census be carried out "to take records from all, so that they tell the truth as to how many people they have and in what village".

The first Soviet census was held in 1920 during the Civil War, amidst economic ruin and famine, with shortages in resources and skilled enumerators.

The nation-wide census of 1989 was held for eight days in January. It was carried out by 910,000 specially trained enumerators and required a substantial amount of money, effort and time.

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## QUESTIONS

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Why was the census timed for such a cold and gloomy time of the year when enumerators would have much more difficulty in reaching addresses than in summer, especially those places in the North, the realm of bitter frosts, blizzards, snow-swept roads, not to mention the polar night? Why did it have to take place in January instead of, for example, August as was done under Lenin, in 1920? And why was 1989 chosen for the census, and not 1990 or 1988? Was it that the census had to be carried out exactly ten years after the previous one? But why ten years, and not five, considering that the Soviet Union's economic calendar is split into five-year periods?

Before the October revolution of 1917 the state managed without censuses for more than a thousand years. Do they have to be conducted now once every ten years? Perhaps, for the sake of economy, the interval can be extended to twenty years, which was the case in the USSR between 1939 and 1959? Are periodical censuses needed at all? After all, statistical agencies are keeping watch over population movement all the time. Births, deaths, arrivals and departures are all recorded. Perhaps, it would be enough to amend the results of just one census using these annual corrections?

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## ANSWERS

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Even the best current records cannot insure against mistakes. Mistakes tend to accumulate and, in ten years' time, could add up to a considerable amount.

Let us say, for example, that some region has a low birth rate. Apparently, this depends in some measure on sex and age-group patterns (women may outnumber men or vice versa or there are many elderly people), educational standards, prevailing occupations, the percentage of incomplete families, and other factors. What are the true relationships? A census can provide the answer. What is the



native tongue of children in an autonomous republic, how many are they, and what is their age-group structure? Unless we know the answers, we will not be able to provide the necessary number of school books. How many of our fellow-countrymen will have moustaches and beards by 1995 or 2000? This is not just curiosity. Officials who decide on investments in production of shaving articles for five years or a longer term must have figures. There are many more examples like that.

Censuses are immensely important in theoretical and practical terms. The less often a country holds them, the more often it may commit blunders in charting population policies for the future.

In 1951 a French expert published a book in Paris predicting the future of the human race. He maintained that by 1970 the Soviet Union would have a population of 300 million. The actual number proved to be 242 million. The author (who used the pseudonym Georges) argued that decrease in birth rate as a result of family planning was "typical only of Western civilisation" and was the consequence of its socio-economic and especially cultural progress. His mistake, however, was partly due to Soviet population statistics. Current records were inaccurate, due, in particular, to the damage caused by the war. The first census after the war was held in the Soviet Union only in 1959.

The more information is available about a country's population, the more realistic are the estimates of its future numbers.

Why did the latest census take place in winter? In January domestic migration in the USSR is at its lowest. At such a time it was easier to find people in their homes at a time of day which was convenient to them.

There is no arguing that in summer the enumerators would have found it much easier to reach any part of the country—the Arctic communities lost in a wilderness of snow and ice, the remote mountain villages of the Caucasus, or the communities in the Siberian hinterland. The multimillion investments provided for the campaign could have been reduced. But the losses would have proved greater. Because of the high level of summertime migration, many people would be "lost" from statistics, or else recorded twice. As it was, in the most intractable parts of Daghestan, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Karelia, Buryatia, the Altai Territory, Irkutsk Region and Chukotka, the census was conducted before winter set in.

The winter did cause some problems. In Norilsk, a strong blizzard and snowdrifts nearly foiled the work of the 780 enumerators in that Arctic town. The census people also had hard times in Sakhalin. Violent snowfalls cut off communications some of which remained inoperable when the census got started. Bad weather reigned in the nation's heartland. In Voronezh Region heavy snowfalls were followed by rain and later by frosts. The enumerators had difficulty in travelling from one community to another. Because of nasty weather many passenger trains fell behind schedule on the Kuibyshev and the North Caucasus Railways.

True, if problems for census had come down only to unruly



weather, their consequences could have been overcome on a more or less scientific basis. However, subjective difficulties cropped up. For example, officials in some areas of Tyumen Region decided to "rationalise" the work of the enumerators; they were charged with drawing up voters' lists for the March elections to the Supreme Soviet. The quality of the census records and the effectiveness of the election campaign could have been damaged as a result (the decision was repealed in good time). There were "rationalisation schemes" of other kind. The city executive committee in a large centre of Siberia decided to combine the census with a survey of commuting patterns between the city and the suburbs. In some places, officials tried to get the enumerators to collect additional information for health authorities, and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions formed many extra tourist trains one day before the census without passing a word to the statisticians. The census people learned about some of them when the trains were already on the move. The situation developed very much along the lines of a detective story. The enumerators learned about the existence of a Sverdlovsk-Moscow train at midnight when it was approaching Yanaul, in Bashkiria, and "caught up" with it at Agryz, in Tataria.

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## THE SCOPE

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No restrictions were imposed on movements. So special census teams were set up to count air, railway and water-borne passengers, people staying at hotels, and holiday-makers.

Cosmonauts orbiting the Earth answered the census questionnaire too. Census records were made on foreign citizens, persons without citizenship who were in the Soviet Union at that time and Soviet citizens abroad.

A census department was set up at the USSR Committee for Statistics. It coordinated the work of 106,000 census aid commissions established at the local Soviets of People's Deputies, and at housing maintenance offices, at enterprises, and on collective farms.

In the eight-day census, each urban enumerator made records for 450 to 600 people, and his rural counterpart for 350 to 500.

For the first time since the 1926 census, the 25-point questionnaire included questions about housing conditions. What are the housing conditions of the over 72 million families? This information is essential to expedite the accomplishment of the task of providing every family with an apartment or a house of its own by the year 2000. The census will show to what degree mass-scale housing construction corresponds to people's needs. It will indicate the conditions people live in, how old the houses are, what materials they are made of, what amenities they have, and what the housing situation is in different parts of the country.

Another new question, as compared with the 1979 census, is about



vocational training. This will help to determine the effectiveness of utilising personnel with this type of training.

Another question, concerning birth place, is intended to analyse migration patterns in the country, especially in the Soviet Far East and in Eastern and Western Siberia which are experiencing manpower shortages.

Information about children will help to draw up an authentic population forecast.

Another new addition concerned information about sources of subsistence of which there can be several: retired citizens, university students and even school pupils may be engaged in paid work, or many people do part-time work for cooperatives and have subsidiary farming plots. The census will also help to gauge a new social group—the self-employed persons.

Following the earthquake that struck Armenia in December 1988, the census in some areas of the republic was extended for a month. The number of questions was reduced as under such circumstances some of the questions appeared tactless, to say the least.

The 1989 census took into account recommendations from the United Nations and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the experience of other countries, the interests of central agencies and the agencies of the republics, and the advice of scientists and experts. As a result of the large-scale work, almost 300 million indicators were obtained, one-third more than in the 1979 census. With the 19th All-Union CPSU Conference decision lifting the “shroud” of secrecy from the census data, these will become available to anyone who is interested.

The first preliminary results were provided in April 1989. Most of the results will be published in the autumn or winter of 1989, and the data processing will be completed in the summer of 1990, almost a year earlier than was the case with the previous census.

### Population of the USSR (according to the post-war censuses, in millions)

January, 1959	— 208.8
January, 1970	— 241.7
January, 1979	— 262.4
January, 1989	— 286.7

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## CONCERNS

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All sorts of doubts were voiced pending the census. What people feared most was that the census might be used to make files on everyone. The USSR Committee for Statistics stated that a person's name would be put down only to prevent him from being registered several times. When the data are processed on computers, they will be



made anonymous because the aim of the census is to learn **how many, not who is who**. Openness in filling in the questionnaire will not affect the respondent's standing. No individual conclusions have been drawn up on the basis of the census, nor could this happen as such. The data are used only in a generalised form. The statisticians guarantee that all private information will be kept secret so that nobody can use it. Census people were forbidden to give anyone any information about individuals or families.

The distinguishing feature of the census was that the enumerator made the records on the basis of everyone's replies. No documents had to be presented. Incidentally, some information can be obtained only from the person himself. Thus, according to the principles of Soviet ethnographic science, a person's belonging to an ethnic group is determined by his own self-awareness, not by certain "objective" indications. Similarly, the native tongue was put down in the questionnaire as the respondent indicated himself, though this might have differed from his ethnic origin.

The principle of self-determination also applied to wedlock. In the census sheet wedlock was recorded no matter if it was officially registered or not.

However, the statisticians were somewhat concerned that the information was supplied by the respondent himself and not taken from documents. It was extremely important to avoid any withheld information and conscious or unconscious distortions which, unfortunately, had often happened before. For instance, the 1959 census showed there were 28,015 centenarians in the Soviet Union. A critical analysis aroused some doubts later: some indications of advanced age seemed dubious. They were checked and the number of centenarians proved to be 21,708.

Obviously, the statisticians' concern about being given not quite truthful information was the reason why no questions were asked about incomes. On the other hand, accurate information could have helped to disperse the myth about the people's extraordinary wealth.

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## ETHNIC ISSUES

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Questions on the census sheet about the respondent's ethnic background and native tongue provoked the writing of many letters to statistical agencies and the mass media. (Estonia is a good example of what the wrong use of the wrong statistics may lead to. According to the Estonian Academician, Gustav Naan, they "would incite a person against Soviet government.")

To answer the question about a person's nationality is not so simple as it might seem. By its very nature, ethnic self-awareness is an extremely hierarchal affair (in a certain sense hierarchy is also typical of the languages), and a respondent may tell the enumerator that he is a Gutsul (not a Ukrainian), a Pinchuk (not a



Byelorussian), or a Pomor (not a Russian). Within itself every people has different ethnographic groups which differ from the main population in some of their daily-life or cultural activities and sometimes also in their religion (or the religion of their ancestors). Asked about their ethnic background, some respondents give the name of these small groups (sometimes they use the obsolete names too). Scientists estimate that the number of possible options in the Soviet Union approaches 800, but gradually, with the increase in educational and cultural standards, the use of these names is sharply decreasing. One should also keep in mind the processes of ethnic consolidation and natural assimilation whereby the differences between some ethnographic groups are fading away.

For a variety of reasons (especially because of pressure applied by the leaders of some republics), the previous censuses provided the ethnic picture of the country with some distortions.

There were other reasons why the post-war censuses failed to yield perfectly accurate data about the Soviet Union's ethnic structure. For example, legal and psychological factors played a certain role. In 1932 passports were issued for a large part of the population, and later for all inhabitants of the country. Originally, when a person received his passport, he was free to choose his nationality, but in 1939 the USSR Ministry of the Interior gave an instruction, confirmed by the passport exchange decision of 1974, whereby change of nationality was prohibited and the passport holder was to put down that of his parents. At that time, when passports were first issued, crude distortions were committed in some localities. Although under census regulations a respondent's replies may differ from what is written in his passport, the passport record does wield some influence.

It is to be presumed that some local authorities were at times not interested in revealing an objective picture of all the ethnic groups living in their republics. For instance, in the years of Soviet government more than 50 alphabets have been created primarily for minority groups (altogether, there are nearly 75 alphabets in the country), but instruction at schools is now conducted only in 39 languages, which is fewer than in the early 1930s. The issue of providing school instruction for children of minority groups in their native tongues must be dealt with separately, for a census as such cannot solve it.

The chief shortcoming of the previous censuses was the steady reduction of data made available about their results.

The 1989 census must single out all the indigenous peoples of the Soviet Union, regardless of their numbers or assimilative trends. It is essential to correct the mistake of the previous censuses when some of the small peoples were included in the major ethnic groups inhabiting the republics of the Union. The list of these groups should now be expanded with the Orokes (which used to be included in the Oroch), the Chuvan (which were wrongly included in the Chukchi), the En (which were included in the Nentsi), the Talyshes, the Kryz, the Budukha and the Khanalyk (which used to be joined with the



Azerbaijanis), and the Liv (which were included in the Latvians). Needless to say, when the census data are processed small peoples must not be mixed with others, no matter how small their numbers might turn out to be.

Most of the scientists of the Institute of Ethnography at the USSR Academy of Sciences, who are doing research in those areas, agree with scientists in Daghestan and Tajikistan, and with the USSR Committee for Statistics, that the 13 Ando-Tsezian peoples of Daghestan should be viewed as ethnographic groups of the Avars and the Darghin and the ten Pamir peoples as ethnographic groups of the Tajiks (this applies still more to the Laz, the Swan and the Megrel who long ago consciously considered themselves to be Georgians). This does not mean, however, that the census should not single out the languages of these groups—the Pamir languages: the Shugnani, the Rushani, the Yazgulemi and others, and the Ando-Tsezian languages: the Zani (the Megrel-Lazi) language, and the Swani language.

In the opinion of many scientists, when the census data are processed, the Jews should not be joined with such groups as the Georgian, Gorskiye and Bukhara Jews and the Krymchaks which constitute quite independent groups. Nor is it correct to include the Crimean Tatars in the Tatars since the former speak their own special language and consider themselves a separate people.

When the census was conducted, those responsible tried to comply with the scientists' recommendation that the enumerator be of the same ethnic group as the respondents.

### Population Growth in the Union Republics

	Population, in thousands		1989 in % of 1979
	1979	1989	
USSR	262,436	286,717	109
RSFSR	137,551	147,386	107
Ukrainian SSR	49,755	51,704	104
Byelorussian SSR	9,560	10,200	107
Uzbek SSR	15,391	19,906	129
Kazakh SSR	14,684	16,538	113
Georgian SSR	5,015	5,449	109
Azerbaijan SSR	6,028	7,029	117
Lithuanian SSR	3,398	3,690	109
Moldavian SSR	3,947	4,341	110
Latvian SSR	2,521	2,681	106
Kirghiz SSR	3,529	4,291	122
Tajik SSR	3,801	5,112	134
Armenian SSR	3,031	3,283	108

	Population, in thousands		1989 in % of 1979
	1979	1989	
Turkmen SSR	2,759	3,534	128
Estonian SSR	1,466	1,573	107

The chief factor in population increase in the majority of Union republics was the natural growth.

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## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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In terms of population, the Soviet Union still ranks third in the world.

Now we are 286.7 million. Compared with China (population 1,100 million), this is not so many but ten years ago population experts predicted a lesser figure. Population growth in the country began to rise in the early 1970s and the trend picked up in the 1980s.

The highest increase in population was recorded in the Central Asian republics (from 22 to 34 per cent), medium growth in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (13 and 17 per cent respectively), and a growth of not more than 10 per cent in the other Union republics.

Many factors influence the growth rate. The aftermath of the Second World War, for instance, is still felt.

In most of the constituent republics of the USSR natural growth has been the chief factor in population increase. This is connected with population growth overall, the increasing percentage of young people and, what is the most heartening sign, with more births in a number of regions of second and third babies into families. This seems to be the result of still modest measures to encourage childbirth such as the extension of partially-paid maternity leave to 12 months and the prolongation of unpaid leave for nursing mothers.

Another factor has been the growth of political and public activity among people, especially the young, which, strange as it may seem, has coincided with more value being attached to private and family life. Ever more people are beginning to look for moral support in a family and children. This is just a hypothesis, however, and requires more proof.

On the other hand, population growth rates differ greatly from one part of the country to another. In Byelorussia, Ukraine, the Russian Federation and especially the Baltic republics additional measures are needed to stimulate birth rates among the indigenous peoples, though in the past ten years the situation has substantially improved.

It is a good thing that our numbers are growing. But the scale of economic development and the need for additional manpower to



develop promising new areas require that the population increase still more. This applies to some regions, in particular, the European part of the country and the eastern regions of the Russian Federation above all, and this despite the fact that since 1975 an influx of the population into the Russian Federation from other republics has been observed: between 1979 and 1989 it averaged some 117,000 people a year. Before the mid-1970s the situation developed in the opposite direction: the number of people leaving the Russian Federation was larger than new arrivals, and between 1959 and 1969 the annual migration losses of the Russian Federation exceeded 150,000.

In the past ten years the population growth rates in Siberia and the Soviet Far East have been double the average growth in the Russian Federation. This was due primarily to the rapid growth of many industries, including fuel and energy complex, the mining and processing of minerals, and timber industry.

At the same time, in some territories the populations have decreased over the last ten years. In Pskov Region this was the result of natural losses, i.e. the number of deaths being greater than the number of births. In Ivanovo, Bryansk, Orel, Ryazan, Voronezh and Kursk regions, it was the result of migration to other territories. In Tula and Tambov regions it was the result of both factors. Population decreases in these regions occurred between the censuses of 1970 and 1979, and in Pskov, Ryazan, Kursk and Tambov regions even in the previous ten years.

By the beginning of 1989, there were 2,190 towns and cities in the USSR, including 57 cities with population of more than half a million each and 23 cities with population of more than one million. The new millionaire cities are Alma-Ata, Kazan, Perm, Rostov-on-Don and Ufa. On May 4, Volgograd joined the group.

The populations of large and extra-large cities have continued to grow faster than the average. Compared with 1979, people living in big towns (from 100,000 to 500,000 residents) have increased by 9 per cent, in cities (from 500,000 to 1,000,000 residents) by 18 per cent, and in millionaire cities by 29 per cent. Though small and medium-size towns are more comfortable and ecologically cleaner, people continue to move to millionaire cities because of better food and commodity supplies, consumer services and transportation. When any social problem is tackled, priority is given to these megapolises.

### Population Changes in the Capitals of Union Republics

Capital (republic)	Population, in thousands		1989 in % of 1979
	1979	1989	
Moscow (RSFSR)	8,137	8,967	110
excluding population centres controlled by the Moscow City Soviet	7,933	8,769	111

Capital (republic)	Population, in thousands		1989 in % of 1979
	1979	1989	
Kiev (Ukrainian SSR)	2,133	2,587	121
Minsk (Byelorussian SSR)	1,262	1,589	126
Tashkent (Uzbek SSR)	1,780	2,073	116
Alma-Ata (Kazakh SSR)	910	1,128	124
Tbilisi (Georgian SSR)	1,066	1,260	118
Baku (Azerbaijan SSR)	1,550	1,757	113
excluding population centres controlled by the Baku City Soviet	1,022	1,150	113
Vilnius (Lithuanian SSR)	481	582	121
Kishinev (Moldavian SSR)	503	665	132
Riga (Latvian SSR)	835	915	110
Frunze (Kirghiz SSR)	533	616	116
Dushambe (Tajik SSR)	494	595	120
Yerevan (Armenian SSR)	1,019	1,199	118
Ashkhabad (Turkmen SSR)	312	398	128
Tallinn (Estonian SSR)	430	482	112

Compared with 1979, the urban population has increased by 25.2 million people, including 14.6 million owing to natural growth and 10.6 million owing to migration and the transformation of rural communities into towns. The growth of urban population has been particularly high in the eastern parts of the Soviet Union. In Tyumen Region, the number of urban residents has doubled as compared with 1979. The population of Surgut has grown by 2.3 times and of Nizhnevartovsk, by 2.2 times. Yet, the advancing urbanisation of these territories has not been backed by a proportionate growth in the public services. In the past ten years the retail trade turnover per urban resident has grown there by merely 2 per cent, as against 14 per cent in the Russian Federation as a whole, and the provision of consumer services by 49 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. In Tyumen Region total floor space per urban resident equals 13.5 square metres as compared with 15.1 square metres in the republic as a whole.

The inadequate development of the social sphere is one of the chief reasons why newcomers refuse to settle down in Siberia and the Soviet Far East for good. The migration flow from those territories proceeds at a high level and leads to great non-productive losses. The rural population has decreased by 900,000. This occurred in most of the autonomous republics and regions of the Russian Federation, including 27 out of the 29 belonging to the Non-Black-Earth Zone, in almost each region of Ukraine, and throughout Byelorussia. Rural population has increased in Kazakhstan and some of the Transcaucasian and the Baltic republics. The highest growth has been in Central Asia.

The census has shown that the percentage of women is higher



among urban residents than among rural people. Naturally, this creates problems with marriage.

### Number of Men and Women

Years	People, in millions		Number of women per 1,000 men		
	men	women	total population	urban	rural
1959	94.0	114.8	1,220	1,211	1,229
1970	111.4	130.3	1,170	1,158	1,186
1979	122.3	140.1	1,145	1,144	1,148
1989	135.5	151.2	1,116	1,126	1,098

Women begin to outnumber men from the age of 30 onwards, which is due to the higher death rate among men and, in the older age groups, to the effects of the great losses incurred during the war. But these are average figures for the Soviet Union. Quite substantial deviations from the average are observed in different parts of the country. Thus in Leningrad, there are 1,229 women for 1,000 men and in Moscow, 1,221. Reverse proportions are observed in the Kamchatka and Magadan regions—925 and 938 women respectively.

### Changes in Urban and Rural Population of the USSR

Years	Total population, in millions	including		In percentages of total population	
		urban	rural	urban	rural
1959	208.8	100.0	108.8	48	52
1970	241.7	136.0	105.7	56	44
1979	262.4	163.6	98.8	62	38
1989	286.7	188.8	97.9	66	34

In the 1980s, measures have been undertaken to improve the socio-demographic situation in the country. They have helped to raise the rate of reproduction among the rural population. Prior to the previous census, birth rates in the Russian Federation countryside were lower than in the cities. Over the past ten years they have gone up and now 18 babies are born for each 1,000 of rural people, as compared with 15 babies in the cities. Yet, the death rate in the Russian Federation countryside remains 30 per cent higher than in the cities. This is due to the fact that there are many more elderly people in rural areas.

Between the two censuses, the mortality rate among men of economically active age has dropped (by 22 per cent in the Russian Federation). Yet, life expectancy among men remains lower than among women.

Detailed information about the census concerning the territorial distribution of the population according to sex, age, ethnic background, language, educational standards, marital status, the size of families, housing conditions and other characteristics is being sorted out by the USSR Committee for Statistics and will be published in the series "The Results of the 1989 Census".



Леонид Дмитриевич Соболев  
СССР. ПЕРЕПИСЬ — 89 г.  
*на английском языке*

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