

## Buildings and constructions

### Housing in general population Censuses

The first General housing and population census in 1861 already collected some information on the number of dwellings, both occupied and unoccupied, and the average number of households and persons per dwelling<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the problems in the definitions and classifications used till then, by 1901 and 1911 surveys the field of observation was reduced and the survey unit was redefined, firstly by substituting the concept of *house* with that of *dwelling*, and later changing it with that of *room*.

The 1921 Census also revealed a number of difficulties, mainly associated with the questions on dwellings within the household survey form, which caused some figures to be counted twice.

In consideration of these issues, in 1911 and 1921 the Statistics Union of Italian Cities promoted a survey to be conducted by municipalities at the same time as the census, using a separate form, thus allowing for the publication of information referring to some local areas.

Due to changes in definitions and methodology, the data collected until then did not allow for harmonised information to be obtained, so as to reconstruct the changes that took place in dwellings and living conditions over time.

In order to extend knowledge on the sector, two separate surveys on dwellings were conducted in 1931. The first, called *Indagine sommaria* (Summary survey), was extended to all Italian Municipalities and was designed to record the number of dwellings, rooms and occupants. The second, known as *Indagine speciale* (Special survey), was conducted only in the 422 largest municipalities using specific forms with the purpose of acquiring more detailed information, especially regarding services available in occupied dwellings, use of the rooms and reasons for possible unoccupied dwellings.

The first General housing and population census was conducted in 1951. Combining data collection on both population and housing into one survey, which was repeated in Italy and elsewhere in future censuses, allowed for expenses to be reduced and data to be better interpreted, thanks to their significance when read together<sup>2</sup>.

From 1971 onwards new questions were included on the date of construction or rebuilding and the surface area of dwellings<sup>3</sup>; since 1981, furthermore, a group of questions was introduced on the town planning framework in which the dwelling was located and, for the first time, detailed information was acquired on the owner of the property (natural person, construction company, etc.)<sup>4</sup>; in 1991 the questions on the use of unoccupied dwellings and the building characteristics were extended<sup>5</sup>.

Important content innovations were introduced with the 2001 Census, when information on buildings were recorded for the first time in an *ad hoc* questionnaire. This covered all buildings present in

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the evolution of the methodology and organisation of the general Censuses, please refer to chapter on Population (Chapter 2). For 1881 and 1901 censuses, the information covered: the number of rooms in each dwelling, including the kitchen; the position (floor of the building in which the dwelling was located); the number of cohabitations (number of households in each dwelling); the location of the dwelling (centre of the municipality; other areas; scattered housing). 1891 Census was not carried out due to financial and organisational problems.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to the amount and features of the population, information regarded the type of dwelling, number and use of rooms, existence and general conditions of kitchen, hygienic services and systems and tenure status.

<sup>3</sup> Surface area is understood as the entire area in square metres including both the rooms and any accessory spaces, excluding terraces, balconies, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Information was also collected regarding the reason for unoccupied dwellings, i.e. whether they were available for rental or sale, usable for holidays, work, or other.

<sup>5</sup> Regarding unoccupied dwellings, information was requested on whether they were available to rent or sell; regarding buildings, questions were added on the weight-bearing structure and number of floors.

residential nuclei, while outside these areas only buildings used for residential purposes were recorded, including characteristics in terms of material used for the weight-bearing structure, the buildings state of conservation, the presence of elevators and the number of stairways in the building<sup>6</sup>.

#### *Warnings for time series comparisons*

- In 1931, data on occupied dwellings refer to both resident and non-resident households; since 1951 only data on resident households were recorded.
- In 1931, data on unoccupied dwellings only refer to empty buildings; since 1951 they include both empty dwellings and dwellings occupied by non-residents.
- Given the small number of years elapsed since the previous Census, the 1936 survey did not record data on dwellings.
- In 1941, the General population and housing census was not performed due to the war.

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<sup>6</sup> The household form also included questions on works/renovations to the systems, structural and non-structural elements of the dwelling, the presence and position of car-parking spaces and the presence of telephone in the dwelling.