

**UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE  
CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

**Workshop on Migration Statistics**

Geneva, 1-2 November 2017

24 November 2017

**REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP**

**I. Organization and attendance**

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) organized the workshop on migration statistics in cooperation with the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat), with financial support from the World Bank ECASTAT project. The working languages of the workshop were English and Russian.

2. Participants represented the following countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Chile, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Experts from the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat), UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS, IOM Regional Office and UNECE participated as well. An expert from the Moscow State University participated at the invitation of the UNECE Secretariat. A student from La Sapienza University (Italy) also attended the meeting.

3. The workshop consisted of seven sessions taking place over two days. In the first part of the workshop, the participants of the workshop discussed the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of UNECE Handbook on the use of administrative sources and sample surveys to measure international migration in the CIS region. In the second part, the participants discussed the use of household surveys for measuring migration and remittances. Presentations from the workshop are available on the UNECE website:

<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43941>

**II. Objective**

4. The purpose of the Workshop was to exchange experience and build statistical capacity for producing comparable statistics on migration and remittances using household surveys, censuses and administrative data sources. Staff in charge of migration statistics at national statistical offices in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia attended.

### **III. Proceedings**

#### **A. UNECE Clearing House on Migration Statistics**

5. The workshop started with an update from UNECE on the 2017 data collection for the Clearing House of Migration Statistics. In the current data collection, the Russian Federation submitted the most complete set of tables, followed by Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova. It was noted that many tables are still not available and there has not been much improvement since the Clearing House was launched.

6. Participants expressed the need for more information on each country's methodology of data production, to understand better the comparability of the data in the Clearing House. Questions were raised about the methodological changes in recording migration in the Russian Federation in 2011, which resulted in significant discrepancies between the data of Russian Federation and of other countries. The methodology was discussed in detail in later sessions of the workshop.

#### **B. Use of administrative data and censuses in producing migration statistics**

7. In the first part of the session, CIS-Stat and Georgia delivered presentations on the use of population and housing censuses as data source for migration statistics.

8. CIS-Stat gave an overview of preparations for the 2020 round of population and housing censuses with a view to improve the use of these data for international migration statistics. The presentation highlighted the efforts of most countries to conduct the census in similar time as well as recommendations prepared by CIS-Stat to improve comparability of census data on migration collected in the region. It was mentioned that the recommendations related to indicators, tables, wording of questions and methodology are consistent with the recommendations of the Conference of European Statisticians and were consulted with various stakeholders and that additional feedback from experts was welcome.

9. Georgia presented lessons learnt from collecting migration data in the 2014 census. The population and housing census is considered in Georgia the most important source of stock data on migrants but there are also attempts to collect data on migration flows, including emigration, which remains the most important reason for the decrease of Georgian population size in recent years. It was noted that collection of data on emigration in the census proved challenging. The presenter highlighted also the need to collect relevant data on a regular basis to be able to analyse migration trends and mentioned that border crossings data are available to the statistical agency but there are quality issues and there are no variables allowing differentiating between short-term and long-term exits. Special algorithms are used to identify

emigrants and immigrants from this data, but the quality of data obtained using this method is still not certain.

10. The second part of the session was dedicated to taking stock of the progress achieved by countries in implementing the recommendations of the UNECE Handbook on the use of administrative sources and sample surveys to measure international migration in the CIS region. UNECE presented the overview of the progress based on the questionnaires filled by all countries before the Workshop. While countries reported on progress made, many challenges were raised in the presentations by the Russian Federation and the Republic of Moldova and subsequent general discussion led by Ms. Olga Chudinovskikh:

- a) Many recommendations from the Handbook are addressed to the administrative agencies, which are not participating in the meeting and the progress on those recommendations is conditional on the political will, cooperation and coordination between the agencies and national statistical offices.
- b) Introducing electronic data transmission is a step that significantly facilitates producing statistics from administrative data.
- c) Even when a national statistical office has access to the data, the data may not be of desired quality or may not include the variables needed for good quality statistics.
- d) It is important to understand the administrative procedure that generates the data. Significant changes in this procedure may lead to breaks in series or changes in data quality, therefore statistical offices should be involved in such changes.
- e) Although there might be some perspective in using ‘big data’ for official migration statistics in the future, current efforts should focus on the potential of the already available administrative data.

11. Participants discussed the new system of registering residential moves in the Russian Federation. Rosstat has been receiving data on internal and international migrants from local offices of the Ministry of Interior (and later of the Federal Migration Service) based on statistical forms of arrival and departure. Until 2011, the statistical forms for both Russian citizens and foreigners were filled in only in case of registration at a place of residence irrespective of the intended length of stay. From 1993, people moving to another place in Russia could keep their “permanent” registration at their place of residence and “temporarily” register at a new place, as a place of stay. These migrants were not included in the statistics of migration flows, thus underestimation of “temporary” migration was considerable.

12. Since 2011, also persons registered at their (temporary) place of stay for 9 months and longer must fill a statistical form of arrival. In this process, a registration expiry date is recorded and transmitted to Rosstat database. On this date, a migrant is automatically counted as moving back to their previous place of residence. International migrants considered as emigrating at that point whereas in reality they may not need to leave the country if they have

extendable work or student visas. A further discrepancy arises from the absence of a notification on a move before the registration expires. The events of registration and de-registration thus frequently do not correspond to actual residential moves.

13. The Russian delegates explained that the threshold of 9 months is used, because migrants do not need to register for stays under 3 months and when they register for a 9-month period they would have usually been in the Russian Federation for 3 months already. The migration flows reported under the new registration system are significantly higher than under the previous system. There are also discrepancies between the data from the Russian Federation and the data on similar migration flows obtained from other countries.

14. Participants from the Russian Federation shared further information about the ongoing changes in interactions with the Ministry of Interior – the source of primary information of migration flows, and plans for improving their migration data when Rosstat starts receiving it electronically.

### **C. Short-term labour migration and tourism statistics**

15. The next session discussed the potential of tourism statistics as a source data on short-term, possibly undocumented labour migration. First, UNECE presented the information on the sources of short-term labour migration data reported by the countries in the preparatory questionnaire. Secondly, a CIS representative introduced the concept, seeking the expertise of meeting participants whether they see a potential to use tourism data to gather information about persons who initially arrive as tourists but overstay their visas and become labour migrants. The meeting participants did not see this approach as promising at this time.

### **D. Improving the measurement of remittances through household surveys**

16. The second part of the workshop was dedicated to the use of household surveys for collecting data on migration and remittances.

#### ***Presentations***

17. The first presentation was delivered by Ms. Anna Prokhorova, UNECE consultant, who introduced methodological issues related to measuring remittances using balance of payments and household surveys and presented examples of relevant surveys from the region. Furthermore, she provided a rationale why collecting data on remittances in household surveys is important and complementary to the data obtained regularly from the balance of payments and discussed a broad range of information that can be collected in surveys and what policy questions such information can help to answer.

18. Subsequently, IOM gave an overview of their activities related to measuring remittances in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, underlining the focus on diaspora for the purposes of policy and programme development. The presenter shared examples of various data sources on diaspora used by IOM, such as the World Bank's and central banks' data on remittances, census and administrative data in destination countries, alternative sources (Google searches) or specialized surveys. Several challenges of collecting data in specialized surveys were mentioned such as:

- a) Cost and difficulty of identifying a representative sample.
- b) Reluctance of remittance recipients and senders to talk about financial issues: possible tendency of senders to over-state and recipients to under-state amounts; the need to estimate the amounts during the interview, which can lead to poor approximations; overstatement of interest in investing of received remittances.
- c) Developing survey to be policy-relevant and translating results into policy and programme decisions.

19. Two representatives of CIS-Stat delivered the next presentation, in which they gave a regional overview of available data on remittances from both central banks as well as sample surveys. They also gave examples of surveys and particular questions used in this data collection.

20. UNECE presented a summary of household surveys concluding the topic of migration and remittances based on the preparatory questionnaires circulated during the meeting. The presentation highlighted the number of various surveys related to migration and remittances that were conducted in the region and multitude of approaches adopted by the countries.

21. These regional summaries were followed by presentations from four countries with experience in including the topic of remittances in their household surveys: Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan.

22. The following conclusions can be drawn from the presentations and discussions under this agenda item:

- a) Many surveys have been conducted and there is a lot of experience in the region, but there are still no regularly produced comparable data.
- b) Countries adopt various approaches in collecting data on migration and remittances in household surveys – it can be either through specialized surveys, inclusion of questions in a regular survey or a dedicated module in regular household surveys.
- c) The scope of the collected data varies from country to country and between different surveys in the same country. For example, many countries included questions on receiving remittances in household budget surveys, but oftentimes they do not collect information about the migrant.

- d) Including an additional module as well as increasing the sample size to collect higher quality data may require external funding and funding agencies may insist on including questions that are of specific interest to them.
- e) The topic of remittances has received more attention in countries of high emigration flows and with high amounts of remittances received.
- f) Questions or modules on migration and remittances were most often included in a labour force survey (LFS) or a household budget survey (HBS). Attempts to collect comparable data with multi-country specialized surveys have remained isolated one-off exercises.
- g) Appropriate sampling is a challenge for both specialized and regular surveys with a module on migration and remittances, as they would have to capture a sufficient number of migrants in case of surveys in destination countries and households with a temporarily absent migrant in origin countries. In some cases, the questions were included in the survey, but the data were not published because of insufficient quality.
- h) In some countries, the gender dimension is very important. For example, in Tajikistan where majority of migrants are men, there is going to be a pilot study on the impact of migration on women left behind.

***Group discussions***

23. Participants engaged in group discussions on collecting data on migration and remittances through a module in regular household surveys. They shared lessons learnt from their previous experiences of including such module, deliberated on the potential and modality of doing so from a perspective of origin and destination country and proposed most important questions that should be included.

24. The following points were raised in the session:

- a) The main motivation for including modules on migration and remittances in surveys was the need to understand the scope, drivers and impact of migration and remittances (Republic of Moldova).
- b) Respondents are often reluctant to provide exact amounts of remittances. They would be more willing to indicate the range to which it belongs when provided with alternatives (Republic of Moldova).
- c) The cost of including additional questions is smaller if a survey is conducted using mobile devices (Georgia).
- d) Some countries do not see the need to include modules on remittances in their surveys as they think that for their needs

enough information is already collected (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Uzbekistan).

- e) Some countries perceive the topic as highly relevant but they are satisfied with the data collection that they already conduct and data quality they obtain. There may be room for improvement in comparability (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine).
- f) Destination countries such as the Russian Federation would be interested in obtaining more information on the senders of remittances. However, including questions on remittances sent in household surveys in destination countries is seen as challenging, because many immigrants may work illegally and be therefore reluctant to respond to an interview. Additionally, LFS and HBS usually target the resident population and a significant share of migrants may not be included in the sample. Information on the spending of remittances should preferably be collected in the country of origin.
- g) Specialized surveys were suggested as better suited for collection of detailed information on migrants and remittances in destination countries, but selected questions could be included as a module in regular household surveys.
- h) In selecting the best vehicle for a module on migration and remittances in origin countries, it is important to consider the sample size and information that is already collected in a survey. The groups considered LFS the most suitable survey to include such module due to its bigger sample size.

25. The groups proposed following most important questions to be included in a module:

- a) To be asked from a household with an absent migrant:
  - i. Do they receive remittances and how big is the share of remittances in the household income?
  - ii. How long is the migrant absent?
  - iii. What are the migrant's plans for return?
- b) To be asked from a household with a return migrant:
  - i. What was the reason for migrant's return?
  - ii. How did the migrant or their family spend the money accumulated abroad and how satisfied were they with the accumulated amount?
  - iii. Does the return migrant intend to emigrate again?
- c) To be asked from a household without a migrant
  - i. Does any household member intend to emigrate? If yes, where and for how long?
  - ii. Does the household receive remittances from someone who is not a member of the household?

26. The groups recommended including questions on family status, household composition and age of household members as well as the level of education to monitor the social impact of migration – both for migrants and the families left behind.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

27. UNECE led the concluding discussion on the way forward in improving the production of statistics on migration and remittances. Under the UNECE project on the measurement of migration and remittances, the following steps are planned:

- a) report with the analysis of survey questionnaires, including assessment of suitability as a vehicle for a harmonized survey module on migration and remittances, by December 2017
- b) development of a survey module for measuring migration and remittances in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, in the first half of 2018
- c) review and pilot testing of the survey module, in the second half of 2018
- d) workshop on measuring migration and remittances, scheduled for 23-24 October 2018 in Geneva

28. Overall, participants expressed satisfaction with the workshop and its relevance to their needs. They appreciated the opportunity to discuss and exchange experiences among government agencies and with international experts and welcomed further collaborative work in the future.

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