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**MEASURING EMIGRATION AT THE CENSUS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM FOUR  
COUNTRY EXPERIENCES**

Note by UNECE Secretariat

This paper has been prepared by Olga Chudinovskikh (Moscow State Lomonosov University), Rudolph Anich (UNECE) and Enrico Bisogno (UNECE) for presentation at the Joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva, Switzerland, 3-5 March 2008). The full version of the paper is available on the UNECE website at the following link:  
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.10/2008/wp.3.e.pdf>

## I. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. Many countries experience problems in providing accurate data on international emigration. Reliable estimates of emigration flows and stocks are often requested since policy makers need good statistical information to manage international emigration and assess its consequences. Various statistical sources are used to provide data on migration outflows and stocks of nationals living abroad but their accuracy is in most cases unsatisfactory.
5. Various countries experiencing intensive emigration tried to estimate it through an “emigration module”, in the form of specific questions on absent persons included in the last population census. The objective of this research is to evaluate the quality of data collected through emigration modules used in censuses in four countries (Georgia 2002, Moldova 2004, Poland 2002 and Tunisia 2004) through the comparison of these data with statistics produced by main countries of destination. The final objective is to identify good practices for those countries that are considering to using an emigration module for the next census.
6. The first important aspect that emerged from the exam of practices adopted by these countries is that different approaches were used in treating emigrants with respect to the count of resident population. In particular, some countries included emigrants in the resident population irrespectively of duration of absence. In view of the next census round, it's important that countries collecting information on emigrants strictly apply residency rules, with particular reference to duration of absence. Therefore, those persons living abroad for 12 months or more should be excluded from the count of resident population.

The four countries used different definitions to identify emigrants at the census: in particular, different criteria were adopted in terms of duration of absence, also depending on administrative rules in place, and different approaches were utilized in identifying respondents to which questions on absent persons were asked. Moreover, countries targeted different groups of emigrants: some concentrated on those who left the country in most recent years while others tried to cover a broader group of emigrants, including those who left the country up to 10 or

more years before the census. These choices clearly affected census results, in terms of coverage as well as on accuracy of collected information.

7. From the comparison of census data on emigrants with corresponding data supplied by the main destination countries, it can be said that emigration data from the census provide good coverage of:

- a) emigrants who left the country in the years immediately before the census (up to 5 years);
- b) emigrants who are more likely to keep close ties with their country, mainly because of close family ties and/or because of geographical proximity
- c) emigrants who are still included in the registration system of the country of origin, where such administrative registers exist.

8. It derives that emigration modules/questions at the census are not able to provide an accurate count of the total number of emigrants residing abroad. However, such approach can be useful to collect information on selected groups of emigrants, as for example on those who emigrated recently and/or on those who have close family ties in the country of origin. Moreover, the emigration module can be a useful tool to gather information on additional aspects, such as:

- a) socio-economic profile of households having a member living abroad
- b) reason of emigration
- c) identification of geographical regions/population groups most affected by emigration

9. Countries wishing to include an emigration module at the next census should pay attention to the following aspects:

- a) Clear separation between count of resident population and count of emigrants, with the latter being excluded from the resident population if their absence lasts 12 month or more
- b) Identify the group of emigrants that can be covered by the emigration module, such as those emigrated in the years immediately before the census and/or those who have family ties in the country of origin;
- c) Clear definition of respondents, in order to avoid the risk of overcounting (the same emigrant reported by two or more respondents)
- d) The use of a separate module, different from the main census form, appears to be preferable since it makes clear the distinction of resident from non-resident population, for the purposes of the statistical count
- e) Questions on emigrant persons should focus on objective and simple topics and their number should be very limited

10. This exercise showed that the use of immigration data produced by destination countries is an extremely useful source of information on emigrants, especially on national citizens living abroad. The use of statistical data from destination countries should be encouraged and it could provide a fairly accurate count of citizens living abroad. In this context, using the emigration module could be considered as an important tool to derive statistical data on selected groups of emigrants and/or on some qualitative aspects of emigration.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

11. In many countries it is difficult to estimate of nationals or, more generally, of former residents that have left the country to live abroad. Reliable estimates of migration outflows and stocks are often requested to understand international emigration and assess its consequences. Various statistical sources are used to provide data on migration outflows and stocks of nationals living abroad. Following earlier experiences, some countries made use of an ‘emigration module’ during the 2000 round of population censuses to collect data on emigration. Through the utilization of an emigration module at the census, it is possible to give answers, though partial, to various questions related to emigration when other sources are not available:

- a) how many nationals (or residents) are living abroad?
- b) what are the main destination countries?
- c) how long have emigrants been absent from the country of origin (or when did they leave to go abroad)?
- d) what are the reasons for moving abroad?
- e) what is the social and demographic profile of these people?

12. The objective of the present study is to evaluate the quality of data collected through emigration modules through the comparison of this data with statistics produced by destination countries. The final objective is to identify good practices for those countries that are considering to utilizing an emigration module for the next census. The experience of four countries (Georgia, Moldova, Poland and Tunisia) that used an emigration module at the last census has been considered in this analysis.

#### **A. ‘Emigration modules’ used in selected countries at the 2000 census round**

13. This chapter examines the ‘emigration modules’ utilised by four selected countries (Georgia, Moldova, Poland and Tunisia) in their last national census. The first paragraph focuses on the different standards used to define the term ‘emigrant’, the second paragraph presents some methodological aspects concerning the selection of respondents and the final paragraph examines the type of information collected.

**Table 1** - Census round 2000: time frameworks and estimated volumes of emigrants in selected countries

	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Moldova</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Tunisia</b>
<b>Date of census</b>	January 2002	October 2004	May 2002	April 2004
<b>Resident Population</b>	4.371.535	3.383.332	38.230.000	9.910.872
<b>Emigrants</b>	113.726	273.056	786.085	75.773
<b>Ratio emigrants/resident population</b>	2,6%	8,1%	2,1%	0,8%

## 1. Definitions of ‘emigrants’

14. The selected countries have used quite different definitions to identify emigrants to count at the population census. In this regard, the following two dimensions have to be taken into consideration for a correct understanding of the various definitions used:

- a) Duration of stay abroad
- b) Administrative linkages

15. In relation to minimal duration of stay abroad, the four selected countries of emigration present quite different approaches, largely influencing their respective results. In Georgia, only persons who left the country for more than 12 months were defined as emigrants. Georgia collected information about all persons who left the country in the intercensus period (1992-2002). The minimal period of absence was lower in Tunisia, where emigrants were defined as all those persons who had stayed or intended to stay out of the country for more than 6 months. Moreover Tunisia focussed on emigrants who left the countries in the five years prior to the census. In the case of Poland, a stay abroad of 2 months is sufficient to be considered as emigrant, while no indication on duration of absence was used in Moldova. Important differences also exist in terms of the emigration period: while In Moldova and Poland there was no specific time coverage, but absent persons were counted irrespective of when they left the country.

16. In addition to duration of absence, some countries consider administrative linkages in the definition of an ‘emigrant’. In the case of Moldova and Poland, the *formal registration in the country of origin* determines if a person has to be enumerated as an ‘emigrant’. Emigrants are defined as permanent residents who are ‘temporarily’ abroad, i.e. persons who moved abroad without deregistering from their country of residence. Emigration is considered to be ‘temporary’, regardless of the duration and reason for absence.

**Table 2 - Definitions used at national census: resident population and emigrants (as measured by the ‘emigration module’)**

	<b>Definition of resident people enumerated by the census</b>	<b>Definition of ‘emigrant’</b>	<b>Inclusion of emigrants in resident population</b>
<b>Georgia<sup>1</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persons residing permanently at the given place (regardless of their whereabouts during census)</li> <li>• Persons present in Georgia for <math>\geq 12</math> months</li> <li>• Temporary residents (<math>\leq 12</math> months residing in Georgia) and temporary absentees (absent for <math>\leq 12</math> months)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person who had left Georgia within the period of the last 10 years (at census survey)</li> <li>• Person absent from Georgia for <math>&gt; 12</math> months (at census survey)</li> </ul>	Not included
<b>Moldova<sup>2</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens of Moldova who reside in the country (regardless if temporarily abroad at census survey)</li> <li>• Foreign citizens and persons without citizenship with residence in Moldova at census survey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent (de jure) resident registered for residence in the Republic of Moldova</li> <li>• Person gone temporarily abroad due to work, studies, visiting family or friends, holidays etc. (regardless of the duration and reason of absence)</li> </ul>	Included
<b>Poland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent (de jure) residents registered for residence in Poland (regardless of citizenship and place where they reside at census survey)</li> <li>• Temporary immigrants excluded (regardless of the duration of their stay)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent (de jure) resident registered for residence in Poland</li> <li>• Person staying abroad for <math>&gt; 2</math> months (regardless of the period of stay)</li> </ul>	Included
<b>Tunisia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persons staying (or intending to stay) in Tunisia for <math>\geq 6</math> months</li> <li>• Absentees <math>&lt; 6</math> months</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person residing abroad for <math>\geq 6</math> months (at census survey)</li> <li>• Member of a family nucleus<sup>3</sup> and residing within a household in Tunisia 5 years prior to the census</li> </ul>	Not included

<sup>1</sup> The Census covered only the territory under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Government (Abkhazia and South Ossetia were not included).

<sup>2</sup> Census covered only the territory under jurisdiction of the Government of Moldova (area of the Left bank of the river Dnestr was not included).

<sup>3</sup> A family nucleus can be composed by: a couple with or without children, a mother widowed or divorced with children, a woman widowed or divorced without children, a father widowed or divorced with children, a man widowed or divorced without children

## 2. Identification of respondents

17. When collecting information on absent persons, the identification of respondents is of primary importance, highly influencing the coverage and the accuracy of the collected data. Who should be asked for? Who might provide the most reliable and appropriate information on absentees?

18. It is common practice to ask information on absent persons to their previous household members. Overcounting problems may arise when more than one household could report an absent person or, on the other hand, undercoverage will occur when the household of the absent person does not exist any longer, for example in the case the entire household emigrated following the absent person.

19. The four countries had a quite similar approach and mainly relied on household members of emigrated person, also because they are more likely to provide accurate information on absentees. Georgia asked all registered household members and in their absence to any other adult member of the same household. Similarly, Poland inquired family members of the absentee or other persons living with him/her before his/her departure. Moldova asked all the household members of the absentee, while Tunisia limited the data collection to the former family nucleus of the emigrant (i.e. wife and unmarried children).

20. Some of the selected countries also identified and defined alternative respondents who could provide information on absentees in absence of all household members of an emigrant. Poland collected information on emigrants (with no household members living in the country at census date) by asking the absentee's neighbours and/or persons renting the emigrants residence. Similarly, Georgia census asked information on emigrants to people having no family ties with the absentee.

**Table 3 - Typology of proxy respondents providing information on emigrants**

<b>Georgia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Registered household members</li> <li>• Any adult member of the household (in absence of registered household member)</li> <li>• If whole household abroad:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relatives</li> <li>- Neighbors</li> <li>- Local administration authorities (town, village)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Moldova</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absentee's household members</li> </ul>
<b>Poland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family members of absentees</li> <li>• Persons living with the family member before the departure in a joint household</li> <li>• Neighbours of the absentee and/or persons renting the emigrants residence</li> </ul>
<b>Tunisia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former family nucleus of the emigrant (spouse and unmarried children)</li> </ul>

### **3. Census questionnaire and questions on emigration**

21. The method used to collect information on migrants and the type of questions have an impact on relevance and accuracy of data. In this regard, two main aspects are particularly important:

- a) Separate module vs. inclusion of questions in the main form
- b) Topics covered by questions on emigrants

22. Two countries used a separate emigration module complementing the main questionnaire of the census. Georgia elaborated a specific census questionnaire for emigrants (form EM - 12 questions) added to the census form. Tunisia presented two modules on migration within the national census questionnaire: the first one on mobility, internal migration and immigration, the second one on international emigration (VII - 8 questions). Poland included some few questions on emigration in the main questionnaire (Form A) and utilized an additional module to investigate long-term and internal migration (M -12 questions). Moldova, instead, added some specific question regarding migration in the second form (2P) of the main census questionnaire.

23. Coming to the content of the questions, it is crucial to be aware *ex-ante* of the output type the adopted questions are going to produce. What kind of information on emigrants should be collected? What kind of information is useful for the development of policies?

24. It is fundamental to express all questions in a clear and precise way, leaving no space for interpretation and misunderstandings. A well-defined formulation is an essential prerequisite for the reliability and comparability of the data outcome. The table below summarises the different questions utilised by the four selected countries with the purpose of collecting useful information on current emigration patterns. The type of questions can roughly be classified into four main categories: general information, legal linkages, duration of absence and additional data.

25. All the selected countries of emigration collected through a separate module on emigration or additional questions in the main census questionnaire some main general information on the emigrant (name, sex, marital status, relationship to head of household, etc.) Georgia and Moldova, furthermore, ask for the religious belief of the emigrants. Poland, compared to the other countries is not directly enquiring the mother tongue of an emigrant, but ask instead for the ‘most frequently spoken language at home’. Tunisia collected only the year of birth, while the other countries ask for the complete date of birth (day, month and year).

26. With regard to the legal linkages, all countries collected information about the place of birth and the citizenship of the emigrant. In addition, Georgia and Moldova ask for the emigrant’s nationality, i.e. the ethnic group an emigrant is belonging to.

27. Coming to the duration of absence of an emigrant, some differences between the adopted questions were observed: Georgia and Tunisia asked for the year of emigration (Georgia census also the month of emigration) and thus collecting indirectly information on the period of stay abroad. Moldova and Poland, instead, asked both directly for the duration of absence, but adopting a different categorisation: under 1 year/1 year or more (Moldova), since birth/since 1988 or longer/since 1989 or shorter (Poland). Furthermore, Moldova asks for the duration of permanent residence in the current place. Only Georgia asks for the intention of the emigrant to return to his/her country of origin.

28. The additional data mainly focus on the place/country of residence and the reason for moving of an emigrant. Georgia and Tunisia ask both for the country of destination (without specifying if transitory or final destination). Georgia, however, collected information also on the country of current residence. Similarly, Moldova enquires the current residence of an emigrant at census date. Poland, instead, only asks for the place of previous residence without collecting any information on the country of destination. All countries enquire the reasons for moving but adopt a quite dissimilar codification of answers (see table 4). In addition, Georgia asks for economic relationship with the rest of the family of the emigrant (material aid).

**Table 4 - Comparison of questions on migration adopted in the main census questionnaires and in the 'emigration modules'**

<b>Type<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Moldova</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Tunisia</b>
		Specific form in main questionnaire (Form EM -15 questions)	Questions in main questionnaire (Form 2P)	Questions in main questionnaire (Form A)	Specific module within main questionnaire (VII - 8 questions)
G	NAME	• Last name, initials	• First name, last name, father's name	• Surname, Name	• First name, surname
G	Sex	• Male or female	• Male or female	• Male or female	• Male or female
G	Date of birth	• Year, month, day, age	• Year, month, day, age (Native language)	• Year, month, day.	• Year
G	Language	• Language of his/her nationality • Other languages	• Open answer	• (Most frequently spoken language at home) • Open answer	ND
G	Religion	• Orthodox Christian, Roman Catholics, Gregorian... none	• Open answer	-	ND
G	Educational level	• Higher, unfinished higher, secondary vocational... illiterate	• Higher, secondary vocational/high... analphabetic	• Higher, post-secondary, secondary, primary, others • Are you attending school?	ND
G	Marital Status	• Married, widowed, never married, divorced, separated	• Single, married (registered), married (unregistered), number of spouse, widowed, divorced, separated	• Single, legally married (and living together), legally married living separately, widower, divorced, legally separated • Month, year of current marriage	ND
G	Relationship to head of household	• First person, spouse, son/daughter, mother/father... no relationship	• First resident, husband/wife, son/daughter... not-relative	• Head of household, husband/wife, cohabitant, ...non-relative person	• Open answer
L	Place of birth	• Country, autonomous republic, region	• Region, municipality • Other country	• Poland • Other country (specify)	ND
L	Nationality/Ethnicity	• Open answer	• (Ethnicity) • Open answer	-	ND
L	CITIZENSHIP	• Georgian • Stateless • Other country	• Republic of Moldova • No citizens • Foreign citizens other countries	• Polish (only) • Both - Polish and other (specify) • Only others (specify)	ND
D	Date of emigration	• Year, Month	-	-	• Year
D	Duration of absence	-	• Under 1 year • 1 year and more	• Since birth • Since 1988 or longer • Since 1989 or shorter (month, year)	-
D	Duration of permanent residence in current place	-	• From birth • Year of permanent living • Place of previous residence • Arrived from rural or urban settlement	-	-
D	Intention to return	• Yes/no • Year	-	-	-
A	Country of destination	• Various options	-	-	• Open answer
A	Country of current residence	• Various options	(Residence/Situation at census date) • Present • Temporarily absent • Other settlement of Republic • Abroad (indicate country)	(Permanent/temporary stay in Poland at census date) • Live permanently - present • Live permanently - absent stay in other place Poland • Live permanently - absent stay abroad (indicate country) • Stay temporarily - arrived from other place in Poland • Stay temporarily - arrived from abroad (indicate country)	-
A	Place of previous residence	-	-	• Other locality in Poland (province, community, urban/rural area) • Abroad (country)	-
A	Reason of emigration	• Improvement of living conditions (employed before emigration?) • Refugee • Education • Other	(Reason for absence) • Work • Studies • Other	-	• Job seeking • Change of employment • Acquisition of accommodation • Better accommodation conditions • Marriage • Family unification • Return to place of origin • Studies • Other
A	Material aid/remittances	• Emigrants aid family • Family aids emigrant • No	-	-	-

<sup>4</sup> Keys: G =General information, L = Legal linkages, D = Duration of absence, A = Additional data.

