Improving migration statistics in the Republic of Serbia 
through the Population census 

Note by the Statistical office of the Republic of Serbia 

Summary 
The census represents an essential source of data on population on the lowest level of aggregation and it is the only source of data on emigration in Serbia, although this data are not complete and they can be considered only as a good sample. Thus, census data on migration gain further in importance. This paper focuses on the quality of migration data with special emphasis on a number of specific problems. The paper also considers the possibilities of improving the methodology of collecting data on the structure of emigration, immigration and commuting, through changes in approach to respondents, and possibilities of using data from administrative sources.
I. Historical background

1. During the entire 20th century, there were intensive migratory movements of population throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The first half of 20th century was marked by the biggest wars in the history (the First and the Second World War) which inevitably caused significant movements of the population.

2. The migrations continued also after the World War II. First, during the agrarian colonization (1946-1948) significant number of people immigrated from other republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) to AP Vojvodina, while intensive industrialization (1948-1961), concentrated in a smaller number of centers, caused intensive relocation, mostly of the rural population, within the Republic of Serbia.

3. After 1961 new channel of spatial mobility of the population opened up, this time on the economic basis, when the countries in west Europe started to have the need to engage labor force from South and East Europe. This resulted in significant outflow of work-capable population from Serbia, starting with the mid-1960 until the end of the 1980’s.

4. Due to renewed war conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the end of 20th century is characterized by new migrations which are reflected in the inflow of refugees from the territories of the former Yugoslav republics and internally displaced persons from the territory of the AP Kosovo and Metohia.

5. In addition, owing to an unfavorable political and economic situation, the period after the dissolution of the SFRY, until today was characterized by a new wave of emigration of the population abroad, as well as abandonment of undeveloped areas and concentration of the population in several larger urban centers within the Republic of Serbia.

6. Demographic history of Serbia can be summarized in one word - migration. Perhaps it is not coincidence that the name of, probably the best Serbian novel ever, is “MIGRATIONS” (Miloš Crnjanski, 1929).

II Migration statistics in the Republic of Serbia

7. As a territory with significant movements of population, especially emigration, Serbia has interest to analyze data on migrations from any possible angle. Besides worrying estimates of the number of emigrants from Serbia, average age of total population in Serbia is 42.2 compared with 34.7 years of age which is average age of persons who work/reside abroad is another alarming data.

8. For this reason, in recent time more attention is paid to this issue, but waiting for concrete steps of the state authorities (national strategy and legal framework) we have to work on improvement of information provided from census.

9. The idea of estimation by mirror statistics of migration, based on comparing data on immigrants/emigrants between countries comes as the only valid solution that can provide more precise number on migrants. But in this way we get a data on number of emigrants but not the data on population structure and territorial distribution within the country of origin or other characteristics that can be obtained from the census.
10. Also the mirror statistics cover only European countries (EU), which leaves unsolved problem of number of emigrants to overseas countries (USA, Canada and Australia) which were popular countries of emigration of our population during nineties.

III Methodological “traps”

11. Implementation of the concept of usual residence from the total population excludes persons who are absent for 12 months or longer, as well as persons who are absent for less than 12 months, but with the intention to be absent for at least one year.

12. Question on “intention” is source of subjective interpretation. Namely, it allows that unreliable data on an uncertain event that can be someone's ungrounded desire, becomes determinant for migration. Especially it is unreliable to be determinant for the total population. Subjectivity of this information is especially pronounced when the answer was not obtained by the person itself, but by some other member of household.

13. At the other hand, exclusion of one member of household due to concept of usual residence causes, during data processing, corrections and imputations of information, regarding marital status, household and family structure, household incomes, etc.

IV Labor migrants and “returnees”

14. Despite the fact that census is focused on the usual resident population of certain territory which allows coverage of immigrant population, but keeping in mind that census is only source of data on emigrants and labor migrants, we statistically monitor the departure of population of Republic of Serbia to work/reside abroad, for over four decades. The beginning of monitoring our labor migration is linked to the 1971 Census in Serbia (Yugoslavia). That was the first time that persons on temporary work abroad were enumerated. In addition to the other questions in the census forms, in 1971 Census, data on the foreign country in which they work and on the year of the last departure from the country (SFRY) were collected. Also, the data on the members of their family (household) who were residing with them abroad were collected.

15. In the previous censuses (1981-2002), in order to get the best possible quality of answers, during the phase of the pre-enumeration for persons who work/reside abroad distribution of the auxiliary census forms was organized through our diplomatic and consular offices, through local municipal bodies in the country, by personal handing at the border crossings at the time of massive visits during holidays. The auxiliary census forms, filled out by the migrants themselves, had to be distributed back to Serbia by mail so they could be used in the census. Also, during the enumeration in the country, members of household (children, parents or other) were giving data on members absent abroad who did not send previously filled census forms.

16. The pre-enumeration of “persons abroad,” with minor variations in the organizational and methodological solutions, was present in the censuses of 1981, 1991 and 2002. On account of large financial assets that are required and poor results, this action was abandoned in the 2011 Census. Therefore, the basic sources of information on this migrant contingent were members of their households in Serbia.

17. Quality of these data is not fully satisfactory due to incomplete coverage (when all household members are abroad) and the fact that, in some cases, data were obtained from individuals who, due to distance and lost connections, are not familiar with the current situation and cannot give complete information. Resulting contingent, although underestimated, can be considered as good sample for the analysis of different structures
and it can be used as one additional resource for measuring international migrants and labor migrants.

18. Until the 2002 Census persons who “temporary” work abroad as well as members of their households who reside abroad with them, have been counted as part of total population of the Republic of Serbia.

19. Labor migrants are especially interesting. They go on "temporary work abroad" leaving their families in the country and they do not have feeling of changing place of residence (even if they come home once or twice a year - for holidays). After retirement they return to Serbia, creating a whole new category of migrants – “returnees from temporary work abroad”. This group includes household members who resided with him abroad. The "returnees" have migrated at least twice during the life time, and they should be counted and analysed separately from other immigrants.

V Autochthon and immigrated population

20. The 2011 Census in the Republic of Serbia was conducted fully in accordance with the CES Recommendations, respecting the concept of usual residence as basic pillar of the Census methodology.

21. Identification of the contingent of autochthon and immigrated population was enabled by using “extensive method” i.e. through the question “Does the person continuously from birth live in the place of residence”. For the persons who have not lived from birth in the place of residence, previous place of residence ought to be indicated, as well as the month and year of arrival. If previous place of usual residence was within the country data on the settlement and the municipality were collected, and if previous place of usual residence was outside the country only the country from which they had moved was collected. The data on previous residence and year of arrival in the current place of residence have been collected in all censuses since 1961.

22. Measuring the migration in Serbia could be improved by introducing the question on the place of usual residence one year prior to the census or in some other period of time. This would enable getting completed data and possibility to record recent migrations. Comparing this information to the corresponding information provided by the extended mode could resolve cases of incomplete information on migrations, regardless of whether it is the failure of enumerators or the information was provided by a member of the household (sometimes according to answers in the census forms is not possible to find out is the person temporary present or temporary absent). In this way, the determination of the usual population would be also improved.
A. International migrants

23. All data in the 2011 Census are collected on the territorial division at the time of the census. The fact that the Republic of Serbia was member of former SFRY requires that all questions where the territory is the main determinant had to be treated with special attention during data collecting and processing. For example, data on whether the person ever resided abroad had to be collected through the question: Has the person ever lived/resided outside the Republic of Serbia continuously one year or longer. In order to avoid misinterpretation by the enumerators and for total precision, it was necessary to stress, in the methodological guidance and during trainings, that certain groups of the population should not be considered that have lived abroad if they resided in the countries of the former Yugoslavia due to their education or military service. But, if a person has resided for at least 12 months, in some of the former SFRY republics after its independence, he/she should be considered as an international migrant.

![Diagram](image)

B. Country of birth

24. Country of birth, as one of core topics from the migration set that should be used to distinguish between native born and foreign born residents, also requires special treatment in all countries formed from the former common country. In our case Persons born in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Montenegro after declaration of independence are to be considered as “foreign born”, but persons born in those countries before the independence cannot be considered as “native born”.

25. In order to avoid the misinterpretation of the number of immigrants it was necessary to introduce new categories of population:

- persons born in the countries that were part of former country(es) before the declaration of independence and
- persons born in the countries that were part of former country (es) after the declaration of independence.
Population by the place/country of birth and citizenship, 2011 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Born in the Republic of Serbia</th>
<th>Born in the countries that comprised SFRY/SRY/SMN before the declaration of independence</th>
<th>Born in the countries that comprised SFRY/SRY/SMN after the declaration of independence</th>
<th>Born in other countries</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Serbia</td>
<td>7,186,862</td>
<td>6,339,783</td>
<td>740,213</td>
<td>21,679</td>
<td>60,416</td>
<td>24,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Serbia and another country</td>
<td>6,855,013</td>
<td>6,274,918</td>
<td>508,716</td>
<td>11,183</td>
<td>36,510</td>
<td>23,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another country</td>
<td>281,548</td>
<td>61,554</td>
<td>198,670</td>
<td>8,278</td>
<td>12,358</td>
<td>688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without citizenship</td>
<td>44,350</td>
<td>3,311</td>
<td>27,335</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>11,361</td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. This is certainly a burden for data processing, tabulation, analysis and interpretation, but it is necessary due to the fact that, of total number of migrants in the Republic of Serbia (3,237,065), almost every fifth person came from the territory of former SFRY.

VI Conclusions

27. The 2011 Census in the Republic of Serbia was conducted fully in accordance with the CES Recommendations. Therefore the difficulties that occurred were related to individual cases which do not affect significantly the overall census results and cannot be considered as methodological omission. Data collection concerning migration topics, in 2020 census round will not differ significantly from the 2010 census. Some differences regarding migration may occur during data processing due to changes in terms of usual residence (e.g. if some students in tertiary education are going to be excluded from the household of their parents).

28. For the 2021 Census in the Republic of Serbia possibilities of moving forward from the traditional census, are considering. One of possibilities is use of administrative source in combination with the full enumeration. In the scope of preparation for the next census there is ongoing project on pilot survey with aim of testing possibilities of establishing statistical population register on the basis of relevant administrative sources. Another possible way of data collection is full enumeration with use of some alternative ways of collecting data.

29. In any case in the 2021 census a certain number of enumerators are going to be engaged. The success of the field enumeration largely depends on them. First of all they have to understand the terms and definitions that appear in the methodology and mechanisms and principles of the census (which sometimes do not match the real life). Also, they have to be patient in conversation with the respondents in order to obtain complete and accurate answers and of course to be conscientious to finish the job as expected.

30. Due to limited funding, training of instructors and enumerators in the last census was limited to three days. Longer training (5 days) with an entire day dedicated to migration topics, where special attention is given to the problems that are typical for a specific area, and lots of examples, can help to enumerators to understand better what is
expected of them. Also, the possible engagement of a smaller number of enumerators, combined with more days of enumerating, can improve the quality of data obtained, due to the fact that the enumerators after initial problems in first days later work better (example of the Croatian 2011 Census).

31. Introduction of alternative ways of enumeration in certain areas (internet) in order to avoid the influence of enumerator and to obtain information directly from respondents also has advantages and disadvantages. Besides all difficulties regarding organization and security etc., freedom given to respondents and possible lack of understanding of methodological explanations is one of major concerns.