

Communication and dissemination campaign of the Population and Housing Census data in the Republic of Moldova: Experience, challenges, plans

The Census History

The 2014 Population and Housing Census (2014 PHC) data were collected within the period 12-25 May 2014. The data coverage was around 98% in the rural areas, but 59% in the capital of Chisinau, because of difficulty to reach the urban population, and high drop-out rate among urban enumerators¹. Due to various reasons, which included difficulty securing the state budget funds for census data processing and dissemination because of changing governments, the data entry started with a two years delay, and was successfully accomplish with the support of UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund, and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Finally on 31 March 2014, the main census results were released.

The communication and Dissemination Strategy

In order to communicate and disseminate the Census results, a Communication and Dissemination Strategy was created, which included the evaluation of the current perception of the census. Within it, a media analysis and a focus group was performed, which identified insufficient trust in the census results, and a need for a pro-active communication campaign on behalf of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova to overcome the trust issues, and to promote the use of the census results.

The following causes of the public perception of the census were acknowledged as a result of media analysis and focus group as being conducting to the lack of trust in the results:

- High undercoverage in the Chisinau area, where the most opinion-setters live.
- Two years delay in the presentation of the census results.
- Public's mistrust in the state institutions, including NBS

As a result, the following goals were proposed for the communication campaign:

- Increase the awareness of the general population about the census results and the demographic situation and trends in Moldova.
- Increase the trust of the stakeholders and the general public in the 2014 PHC results.

¹ Evaluation report of the 2014 Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Moldova by Eliahu Ben Moshe

- Promote a better understanding on how public authorities and civic actors at the national and local levels can use the Census data to take evidence-based decisions, elaborate, implement and evaluate public policies.
- The timely information of the NBS employees on the 2014 PHC progress.

Addressing the goals:

These goals were addressed with the following activities within the census communication and dissemination, which fall within three categories: 1) Data Visualization app; 2) events with experts and media, 3) digital campaign, and 4) the information of NBS staff.

Census Data Visualization Web-App

At the request of NBS, a separate web-app was developed to interactively present the census results. Compared to other data dissemination platforms like PxWeb and Redatam, the newly developed app directly connects to the census database, aggregates all the available statistics, and presents them in a visually appealing way. The app has 2 main sections: the data Visualization tab for regions, and localities and a data tabulation tab. The visualization part presents a statistical profile with main indicators for the entire republic, a region, raion, commune or village as an infographic. The infographic with the profile can be downloaded or embedded into a website. The tabulation part allows the users to create their own tables, according to their own needs, grouping the variables in various ways.

On 11 July 2017, the Web-app to visualize the census results was launched in a public event held at the National Bureau of Statistics with the occasion of the World Population Day. Within the 24 hours after <http://recensamant.statistica.md/> web application was published the following data on its access were registered: 1582 sessions, 1386 users; 17 thousand page views; 71% computer, 29% mobile device; Average time on page 45 sec.; Most Popular Page - Tables / People (768 views); The most wanted profile was for Chisinau; The peak time was 17:00 (359 hits); Access channels - Direct - 40.3%, Reference - 32.1%, Social networking - 15.7%, Organic search - 11.3%. The most queries were from Moldova (75%), but also Romania and Italy (around 5%), but also Russia, USA and UK (around 2% each).

Digital Campaign

Facebook posts

Almost 70 messages were disseminated via the NBS Facebook page. The posts emphasized the most appealing data from the 2014 PHC, as the declared spoken language, ethnicity and religion of the responders, their educational level, the size of a household, holding of a second citizenship, number of children in a household, largest villages, occupied dwellings, access to water and sewage system etc.

During the digital campaign, from 15 March to 1st May, the number of followers of the NBS Facebook page increased by 65% - from 2180 to 3174. The increase went up both by advertising and activation of FB suggested posts. The increase is due to the optimization, creation and orientation of advertising to a

relevant audience that is reached by the messages "NBS" and, being interested (fan) joins the community.

Within this period, the post reach and the page reach made up 851 276 users. The engagement rate was 21 087. The page got 98 840 clicks on the posts.

The click indicator is important for the social media activity as it represents the interests of users towards the brand and information it offer. The images attracted most clicks - 78 208 (or 84% of all clicks). The content of other clicks type ranks the second, with 11 674 of clicks, these are usually made for video/gif, wishing to see in more detail.

The post reached, primarily, users within the age group 25-34 y.o. (40%), and, secondarily, users within the age group 18-25 y. o. (22%). The information on the language and religion generated the highest engagement rate, while the posts on household and housing the lowest.

Infographics and Videographics

6 Infographics and 3 video-graphics were elaborated and released during the communication campaign, covering dynamically the most expected information, like the information on the population structure, language, ethnicity and religion, or the household situation. The infographics were distributed in a printed manner during events, were embedded into news portals, and served as a primary material for the Facebook posts. The videographics were the most viewed of all campaign materials, with 84 thousand views, the one on population size alone having more than 45.000 views, which is equivalent to (1,6% of the Moldovan residents, or 6% of the Moldovan Facebook population).

Video interviews and News articles

UNFPA and NBS worked closely with 3 news portals to elaborate complex and appealing articles based on the census results.

NBS, with UNFPA support, had a series of 5 video-blitz interviews (4110 views) on Agora, one of the most popular Moldovan news platforms. The goal of these interviews was to present in details different aspects of the census process. It involvement the NBS Director General, the Head of the Census and Demography department and an international consultant, in order for the public to understand in detail the census process, and correct the public opinion that the most time and effort consuming part of the census is data collection, neglecting all other stages like data entry, processing, storing and disseminating.

Events

Meeting with the experts:

Census results are interpreted by demography, statistics and sociology experts, who assess the entire process, and present their opinion to the media. Thus, NBS invited them, for a session on the assessment of coverage and quality of census using PES and administrative data. Among participants were the leaders of the top sociological agents and the chiefs of university statistics departments.

Unexpectedly for NBS, which expected criticisms, the participants, as regular survey organizers, mentioned that they understand the multiple logistical issues that NBS faced during Census. In this context, the experts appreciated the complex methodology that NBS used to evaluate the census quality and coverage. From now on, however, from their point of view, NBS should focus on the larger implications of the results, namely for the revision of the official statistics.

Press Club and Storage Visit

To debunk some census related myths existing in the society, like all census questionnaires are in bad condition, and cannot be read, due to poor storage, NBS organized a press-club, where Vitalie Valcov, the NBS General Director, explained the census process to the journalists, and invited them to visit the storage facility, to see the storing conditions of the census questionnaires, and that all of them were kept in reasonable conditions.

Launching of the Census Events

The census results announcement press conference took place on 31 March 2017. The main speaker was the Director General of the National Bureau of Statistics Vitalie Valcov. The press conference was livestreamed. One of the livestreaming channels accumulated 45 thousands views, thus up to 2% of the Moldovan resident population viewed the conference live. The associated results, tables, maps and infographics were published on the NBS website in Romanian, Russian and English. 79 media articles reflected the results during 31 March – 7 April. Most articles were informative and neutral, presenting only the census results data, with an emphasis on population size, ethnicity, the spoken language, age and religion.

Informing the NBS staff

The NBS staff most often conveys information on the census to the public. Thus, NBS top-management sent newsletters to the staff informing it on the correct proceedings related to the census.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- Maintaining proactive public relations during the entire census process allows the NBS show its professionalism and debunk the myths that appear in the society.
- All relevant criticisms should be immediately and proactively addressed by the NBS.
- Maintaining a good collaboration with the demography, statistics and sociology community could allow NBS to have supporters among the experts.
- NBS should communicate about the census not only outside the NBS, but also within NBS, in order to assure that NBS personnel convey correct information.
- Allow researchers access to microdata.