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

Workshop on Migration Statistics

Geneva, 23-24 October 2018

13 December 2018

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, 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), the Eurasian Economic Commission, UN Statistics Division, UNICEF and UNECE also participated. An expert from the Moscow State University participated at the invitation of the UNECE Secretariat, along with UNECE Consultant Anna Prokhorova.
3. The workshop took place over one and a half days, covering the following topics:
 - a) Implementation of the harmonized survey module for migration and remittances
 - b) UNECE clearing house for migration statistics
 - c) Use of administrative data in producing migration statistics
4. Presentations and documents from the workshop are available on the UNECE website: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47810>

II. Objective

5. 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 across the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA).

III. Proceedings

A. Implementation of the harmonized survey module for measuring migration and remittances

6. The workshop started with two presentations from UNECE Consultant Anna Prokhorova, giving an introduction to the harmonized survey module (HSM), then

reviewing the content of the module itself. The module that was presented had been updated with the changes suggested by countries in the previous consultation. The report and questionnaire are available on the website of the meeting.

7. Participants discussed the choice of which survey should be used as the base for the HSM. There are difficulties in finding a sufficient number of migrants in household surveys in destination countries, particularly in the Household Budget Survey (HBS), which generally has a lower sample size than the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This is one reason why the LFS has been used more often than the HBS to study migration in the region. The group considered ways to boost the sample of migrants, such as through snowball sampling, or by organizing a standalone survey of migration and remittances (noting that the cost of this may be prohibitive).

8. There was a broad discussion about how households spend remittances they receive. The categories listed in the HSM are designed to align with those used in the HBS, in order to facilitate comparisons between households that do and do not receive remittances. Remittances include both monetary and non-monetary goods, although in the case of in-kind transfers it is more difficult to quantify the value. Additionally, remittances cannot be easily assigned to specific categories of spending. Given that money is fungible, it is problematic to say that the remittance money was spent on any particular item, more than any other item purchased by the household.

9. While there were suggestions of other questions that could be added to the module, it was agreed that given the existing constraints over the length of surveys, the HSM succinctly covered the most important questions and struck a good balance.

Group discussions

10. The meeting split into three groups, and each group discussed the following questions:

- a) How have countries which have used HBS-type surveys for collecting migration and remittances data overcome methodological challenges connected with sample design (sufficient number of households with migrants), households with all members permanently residing abroad, household members who are permanent emigrants?
- b) Country of birth and country of citizenship – are these questions asked in the household roster in the framework of HBS-type surveys? In other words, is it possible to distinguish between foreign-born citizens and foreign-born non-citizens, based on household roster data?
- c) What are the comparative advantages/disadvantages of HBS-type surveys in terms of collecting migration and remittances data?
- d) What approaches do countries use to ensure the comparability of migration (and remittances) data collected through various household surveys and obtained from other sources across time and across countries?

11. A summary of responses to the above questions is as follows:

- a) Sample design: The participants noted that an increased sample does not guarantee an increase in the number of migrants among respondents, or an increase in the response rate. Some countries have solved this problem by using specialised sampling methods to oversample migrants and by giving people more incentive to respond, either through monetary remuneration, or increased access to free advice or government services. While countries specifically ask about absent household members in their surveys, those who were absent for 12 months or more are not included as part of the household. One group commented that despite being the best survey vehicle for remittances, HBS

surveys were not well adapted for migration, and LFS may be a better solution. Countries considered developing standalone surveys for migration, although this would be very costly.

- b) Questions about the country of birth / citizenship tend to be asked in LFS-type surveys, however they are often not collected in sufficient detail. For example, Russia collects country of citizenship, but it is only recorded as [Russian / not Russian].
- c) Some limitations of HBS type surveys were that migrants are not always covered, questions are not often asked of long-term absent former household members, and even if they are there are, it will rely on proxy respondents being willing and able to respond on behalf of the emigrant. In some countries respondents are unwilling to disclose the amount received in remittances. On the other hand, the advantages of using household sample surveys for migration and remittances include: the regularity of data collection, well-developed methodologies, reduced need for additional staff training, the ability to study different types of migration, and the ability to obtain a wider set of characteristics about migrants and remittance recipients.
- d) Comparability: administrative and survey data are too different to be compared for migration and especially for remittances.

12. UNECE presented the results from a short survey that was sent to all countries regarding their readiness to implement the HSM. As evidenced in the previous session, many countries do not know how or even if they would implement the module, and it was therefore difficult to commit to a timeframe for pilot testing. There was general agreement that the HSM would be beneficial for migration statistics in the region, while Kyrgyzstan also mentioned that there would also be a need to add more questions in the near future to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Only Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Tajikistan expressed that they were considering implementing the HSM by 2020, and the UNECE agreed to discuss further with these countries out of session. Some countries would require financial assistance from UNECE, which could be provided on a needs basis.

13. More detail on the proceedings from the sessions related to the harmonized survey module can be found in the Annex to this report.

B. UNECE Clearing House on Migration statistics

14. UNECE presented on the status of data availability and data sources in the Clearing House for Migration Statistics¹. The Clearing House is available on the UNECE website:

15. There was discussion of the data sources used over time, on a country by country basis.

16. Key themes included: low availability of stock data in non-Census years; difficulties in identifying migration movements of a country's own citizens; expansion in the use of administrative data sources in recent years; along with the need to better specify sources, given large-scale differences in results between data collection methods.

17. Participants provided more information on the processes underpinning the production of their data sources, in particular residence and exit permits. Many countries will be seeking further sources in order to fill identified data gaps where possible.

¹ https://w3.unece.org/PXWeb2015/pxweb/en/STAT/STAT_30-GE_99-MCH_1

18. In the coming months the UNECE will prepare the 2019 Migration Clearing House data request, which will include more clarification and detail around the reporting of data sources.

C. Use of administrative data in producing migration statistics

19. Discussion was based on presentations from CIS-Stat, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The discussion was moderated by invited expert Olga Chudinovskikh, from Moscow State University.

20. CIS-Stat presented a paper on the collection of migration information through Census and administrative data. They discussed the differences in methodologies used throughout the region, for example: varying practices for counting citizens abroad, and the system of migrant registration in the Russian Federation. Due to these differences it is difficult to use mirror statistics to derive accurate data on emigrants within the region.

21. A second paper was presented by CIS-Stat, regarding remittances statistics sourced from balance of payments. These data are sourced from banks, although not all data are gathered in the same way across the region. Balance of payments figures on remittances usually cannot be compared with survey data because some remittances are in the form of goods, and people can move money through other channels, e.g. by personally transporting money while returning to their country of origin.

22. Georgia gave a presentation on the recent history of migration in the country, and current measurement of migration using border crossing data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. While the data are timely and of high quality, drawbacks include a very limited set of available variables, and use of a 6-month duration of stay threshold that does not align with the 1998 UN Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration.

23. Kazakhstan described their process of moving to a fully electronic system for data collection, and consulting with experts to develop a statistical population register. There were some concerns raised over data quality in the new system, since it is now entered by border staff who do not have much incentive to ensure accurate data collection.

24. Kyrgyzstan presented on labour migration in the country, principally recorded through the Integrated Household Budget and Labour Force survey, conducted in 2017. The presentation showed falls in net migration in Kyrgyzstan in recent years, and highlighted the difficulties in comparing migration data from different sources.

25. A presentation from Tajikistan demonstrated the recent migration trends in the country, using detailed statistics generated from migrant cards for returning citizens.

IV. Conclusions

26. UNECE led the concluding discussion on the way forward in improving the production of statistics on migration and remittances. For the harmonized survey module project, UNECE will contact Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Tajikistan to discuss how to progress to a pilot testing phase in 2019.

27. The next workshop on migration and remittances for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia was scheduled for October 2019 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.

Annex: Limitations and potential of using the harmonized module on migration and remittances in sample household surveys in EECCA countries

I. General feedback on the report and harmonized module

1. Participants of the workshop agreed that a modular approach to collecting migration and remittances data can yield more detailed characteristics of various categories of migrants and remittances' recipients, compared to administrative data sources and border crossing data. Additionally, the obvious advantage of using a harmonized migration and remittances module within a regular sample household survey is the opportunity to regularly collect the data.

2. The harmonized module has received positive feedback from the statistical agencies of the participating countries. In particular, the quality/content of the questions and the number of questions of the module were assessed as properly balanced. Some countries, which already have experience in collecting migration and remittances data through regular sample household surveys, indicated that the wording of the questions suggested in the harmonized module will be used (in Armenia) / or has already been used (in Moldova) to fine-tune the wording of the existing questions in a similar module.

3. The amendments introduced into the harmonized module after the first round of consultations with the countries have been also discussed. In particular, the countries' representatives noted that the question on citizenship seems not relevant for sample household surveys, since 90 percent of the respondents have the citizenship of the surveyed country. Additionally, it was indicated that the data on non-citizens is mostly collected through the population census.

II. Limitations of using the harmonized module and possible solutions

A. Small sample size

4. A key limitation in using the harmonized module in a Household Budget Survey (HBS)-type survey is a relatively small sample size which does not cover enough migrants, especially in destination countries – Russia and Kazakhstan. Among migration source countries, Moldova has been already using a HBS-type survey to collect data about migration and finds HBS more appropriate than the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for integrating the harmonized module. The small sample size problem can be solved by conducting a regular specialized survey – an opportunity currently considered by Kazakhstan. In this case the harmonized module questions can be used as part of the longer survey questionnaire. Another solution is to use determined sampling, as practiced successfully by Ukraine when conducting a migration modular survey within LFS.

Table 1. Sample size in HBS type surveys in selected EECCA countries

Country	Number of households surveyed
Kazakhstan	12,000
Georgia	7,000
Azerbaijan	12,000
Russia	32,000
Tajikistan	3,000 (4,000 in LFS)

Source: Group discussions during the workshop

B. Low response rate

5. Importantly, the sample size is not the ultimate problem, because the greater number of respondents does not necessarily solve the problem of enumerating the required number of migrants, due to low response rates (as noted by Armenia and Kazakhstan).

6. The low response rate problem also has a solution: in Tajikistan, the respondents are paid on a monthly basis (\$20), which ensures a high response rate (although creates another problem – rotation of participating households). However, paid participation in the survey did not work out in the case of Moldova, as noted by the representatives of the country.

7. Additionally, the responses to questions about absent household members were reported as not always available or fully reliable, as well as the questions concerning sources of income. As noted by the participant from Georgia, the HBS questionnaire does include a question on migration but the response rate is very low, and therefore, the collected data is not used. In other countries, HBS-type surveys do not include migration-related questions.

8. As a solution to the low response rate problem, several countries (for example, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan) suggested considering the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for integration of the harmonized module on migration and remittances. The advantages of using this survey include higher response rate and bigger sample size. Several EECCA countries have participated in MICS or plan another round of participation (Table 2).

Table 2. MICS in EECCA countries

Country	Year of survey	Status
Azerbaijan	2020	Survey design
Kazakhstan	2020	Survey design
Belarus	2019	Survey design
Turkmenistan	2019	Survey design
Uzbekistan	2019	Survey design
Georgia	2018	Data collection
Kyrgyzstan	2018	Data collection

Source: <http://mics.unicef.org/surveys>

C. Length and logic of the existing HBS questionnaire

9. As noted by representatives of Russia, the HBS-type survey is more suitable than LFS for collecting information about remittances, while LFS is more suitable for data about migrants. Therefore, it was suggested that the harmonized module blocks on migration and remittances should be used separately. Still, destination countries consider a specialized survey to be the preferred way of studying both migration and remittances within one survey.

10. Another issue of using a HBS-type survey for integration of the harmonized module is the length of the HBS questionnaire. Adding questions on migration and remittances will increase the burden on both interviewers and respondents. To address this problem, the questionnaire can be divided so that not all questions are asked during the same visit, as already practiced in Armenia.

D. Sample design

11. In most countries, the latest population census data is used to design the sample for regular household surveys. Considering the approaching next census round in the region (see Table 3), some countries may prefer to postpone the testing of the harmonized module until the next census results are available.

Table 3. Population census dates in EECCA countries

Country	Census dates
Azerbaijan	1-10 October 2019
Belarus	4-30 October 2019
Kazakhstan	1-30 November 2019
Kyrgyzstan	23 March-1 April 2020
Armenia	8-17 October 2020
Russia	1-31 October 2020
Tajikistan	Autumn, 2020
Ukraine	October, 2020
Moldova	April, 2023
Uzbekistan	n/a
Turkmenistan	n/a

Source: Zbarskaya I., *Population census round 2020: new opportunities of the CIS countries*. [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.41/2018/Workshop-Geneva-Sept/Cisstat New opportunities for the CIS region RUS.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.41/2018/Workshop-Geneva-Sept/Cisstat_New_opportunities_for_the_CIS_region_RUS.pdf)

III. Potential/prospects of using the harmonized module

12. As of the date of the workshop, Armenia and Azerbaijan have expressed their interest in testing the harmonized module in 2019. The official confirmation of this commitment is to follow. Moldova is ready to implement the harmonized survey module in 2020, while Belarus, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan do not exclude such a possibility. The rest of the EECCA countries are either not interested/ready to implement the harmonized survey module (Ukraine and Uzbekistan) or have not provided the official response as of the date of the workshop (Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan).

Armenia

13. In Armenia, the LFS and the Integrated Living Conditions survey are regularly used to collect migration data. Several methodological challenges persist, as noted by the participant from Armenia. For example, the existing sample does not allow for the desired level of disaggregation of the data. Additionally, the listing is not regularly conducted before the surveys, which contributes to the low response rate.

14. The country is interested in improving the existing set of questions in the migration module already in use. The testing of the harmonized module within a sample household survey (most likely, it will be LFS), would require financial support, but the country envisages implementing the module in 2019.

Georgia

15. Currently, migration and remittances data in the country is mostly derived from border statistics and national bank remittance statistics. The regular integrated sample household survey does include a question on remittances, but the results show a substantial difference with the figures provided by the national bank. The difference is attributed to the quality of the sample, to the low response rate and other reasons. In 2018, the MICS conducted in Georgia included questions on migration and remittances, but the results of the survey have not yet been analysed. The integration of the harmonized module into HBS is under discussion.

Kazakhstan

16. The country has relevant experience in using a modular approach for collecting migration data through the LFS. However, the sample does not cover enough immigrants, since Kazakhstan is a destination country. Therefore, a specialized survey on migration and remittances is currently under discussion. The implementation of the harmonized module is being considered in the framework of either a specialized survey or the MICS scheduled for 2020.

Republic of Moldova

17. Unlike other EECCA countries, Moldova has been collecting migration and remittances data through HBS and finds it more appropriate than LFS for integration of the harmonized module. However, the harmonized module can be tested not earlier than 2020, within the HBS. The country representative mentioned that technical assistance will be required because the country lacks human resources and software to analyse the data.

Russian Federation

18. The integration of the harmonized module faces several difficulties including: a long HBS questionnaire, technical problems and funding issues. It is most unlikely that implementation of the harmonized module can take place in 2019. However, in general, the statistical service is interested in using the proposed questions of the harmonized module.

Tajikistan

19. The country regularly conducts modular surveys on migration, studying internal migration, external migration and return migration. In the LFS, modules on migration and remittances are run every 5-7 years. In 2017, the new migration module has been tested within the LFS part of the integrated survey, and the results are now being evaluated. In 2019, the

sample used for modular migration surveys will cover more districts for observation (formerly 35, now over 50 districts). Unlike Moldova and Georgia, Tajikistan does not have a problem of low response rate.

Ukraine

20. The country uses LFS to regularly study migration and remittances. The sample is built for 5 years, and determined sampling is used to ensure that enough migrants are found, therefore the districts closer to the western border are chosen for sampling observation units. Importantly, permanent emigrants (household members absent for 12 months or longer) are listed in the household roster, so that even though they are not counted as household members in LFS, information about them is collected. Starting in 2019, a question on the country of birth is to be asked from non-citizens. The Ukrainian HBS questionnaire is very long already, but a few questions on remittances can be added.

Uzbekistan

21. Availability of migration data/statistics in Uzbekistan is very low. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan remains the top migration source country for Russia, and highly dependent on remittance inflows from migrant workers. Currently, the country is participating in MICS 2019, being in the process of the survey design.

IV. Conclusion

22. The workshop discussions showed that the harmonized module is a useful set of most relevant questions concerning migration and remittances, and as such serves as a valuable instrument for data collection. Although the participants were in general sceptical about integration of the harmonized module into HBS-type surveys, they admitted that the module and module blocks can be easily implemented in the framework of other sample household surveys, such as LFS and MICS.

23. In general, the EECCA countries have more experience in collecting migration data through household surveys than in collecting remittances data. Evidently, remittances survey data is hardly comparable with national banks' statistics, just as migration survey data is mostly incomparable with administrative data on migrants. Therefore, the purpose of using harmonized questions on both migration and remittances is to trace the trends rather than confirm the administrative statistics.

24. Mirror statistics have been long discussed but slowly implemented as an alternative instrument for ensuring the comparability of migration and remittances data across EECCA countries. Similarly, the harmonized approach and methodology is not used for migration statistics, even at the country level, because different government agencies producing migration data have different views on what kind of data is the most needed. Considering these constraints, a regular implementation of the harmonized module at least at the country level would be a very positive outcome and would serve as a good practice to be followed by other countries of the region.