

UNECE

Study of the practices of national statistical offices
in adapting to the COVID-19 crisis situation their
household surveys that are used for poverty
measurement

PART 2

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Study on National Statistical Offices' Practices in Adapting Surveys to Measure Poverty and Vulnerability in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Part 2. Development of recommendations:

Introduction

It is the second and final part of the project; the Terms of Reference for this part assumed the following:

1. Engage with national statistical offices in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia to understand their demand for capacity development for poverty measurement in the COVID crisis.
2. Develop proposals and recommendations for providing technical assistance to countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, based on their demand, and considering the recommendations in "Poverty measurement guide to data disaggregation" (UNECE 2020).

This report is also based on the results of the first report submitted to the UNECE on 17 August 2020, the objectives of which were:

1. Compilation of a short questionnaire for distribution to NSOs in the UNECE region.
2. Analyze information received from NSOs through questionnaires and documents, websites and presentations to identify and describe emerging best practices that could be recommended to countries.

The report on the results of the first part of the terms of reference is posted on the UNECE page "[Social and demographic statistics](#)".

Engaging with national statistical offices

In accordance with the Terms of Reference and the agreement with the Social and Demographic Statistics Division of the UNECE Statistical Office, consultations were organized and conducted with selected NSOs. Invitations to participate in the consultations were sent to NSOs of five countries: Republic of Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan¹ and Uzbekistan. The selection of these countries was based on their answers to the question 14 of the questionnaire "Measuring Poverty in the Pandemic" developed at the first stage of this Terms of Reference. This question was worded as follows: what kind of support would your agency need to tackle the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic? These countries responded that they would need expertise for new surveys and expertise for using new data sources.

Representatives of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic responded to the invitations.

In preparation for the consultation and based on the NSO's responses to the Poverty Measurement in the Pandemic Questionnaire, lists of priority questions were developed for each national statistical

¹ Formally, Tajikistan did not respond to the questionnaire, which may have been somehow related to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the previous experience of contacting to the national s statistical office representatives, the authors suggested that they also need expert assistance.

office. The questions clarified some aspects of the activities of the NSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic and, most importantly, questions were formulated to support the activities of NSOs to tackle challenges caused by the pandemic (lists of questions are presented in the Annex 1).

The consultations proved the interest of the NSOs to cooperate with UNECE using its expertise. NSO representatives focused on the most pressing issues complicating the conduct of poverty and vulnerability surveys:

- All NSOs noted *difficulties, both technical and financial, in conducting telephone survey* as the main method to question households in the pandemic: the poor quality and high cost of communication often significantly limited the duration of the call and the accuracy of the answers. Sometimes surveys were forced to be conducted in several stages, sometimes respondents refused to continue the survey.
- The *traditional HBS questionnaires, which are quite lengthy, were not adapted to the telephone survey*, and therefore all NSOs expressed their interest in shortening and simplifying the questionnaires in order to make the interviewers' work easier, while ensuring that all needed variables were calculated. However, in this case, some of data could be lost that is collected by the HBS for other statistical products not directly related to poverty and vulnerability (Kyrgyzstan).
- Almost all NSOs noted *the difficulty of sampling because of absence of opportunity to visit respondents* at home. The telephone numbers of the respondents turned out to be inaccurate, there were also cases when the household did not possess telephone at all, and the office had to contact the household by contact phone number of its neighbors (Kyrgyzstan);
- The issue of the non-response ratio increase was noted and this created issues for mandatory rotation. The intention of some households *to voluntarily take part in the HBS* to a certain extent could solve the issue of receiving the needed number of respondents, however, the requirement of the sampling representativeness and randomness could not be met (Kazakhstan);
- the formal procedures adopted in the NSO to approve survey forms could be a barrier to speeding up the data collection and conducting rapid surveys on the impact of the COVID-19 (or other unforeseen emergencies) on certain aspects of household life.

For example, in Kyrgyzstan, the statistical work plan is agreed annually with the ministries and departments of the Kyrgyz Republic and approved by a decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic.

One of the important issues of the consultations was the issue of the applicability of new methods of the survey-taking – crowdsourcing, self-administered web survey and social media. The consultation showed that, in general, NSOs are aware of these methods, but are somewhat cautious about their use today. There are several reasons for this:

- *doubt that the remote/ rural households and old people can use these methods* (Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan);
- *the small number of visitors of the NSO websites*, and, they are as a rule, representatives of government agencies, researchers, students / postgraduates makes it difficult to meet the requirement of the sampling representativeness (Kyrgyzstan);

- already posted surveys have low *response rate*. Thus, the NSO of Kazakhstan received just slightly over 100 responses to the employment and wages survey during the pandemic.

It should also be noted that all NSOs demonstrated their interest in conducting trainings on new approaches and methods of statistical surveys in accordance with the UNECE methodological materials "Poverty Measurement: A Guide to Disaggregating Data", as well as need to receive the best practices on these issues.

Finally, Kyrgyz representatives raised the issue of providing technical assistance, beyond the scope of the survey on the COVID-19 impact on the poverty and vulnerability. The NSO mentioned its interest in *creating a monitoring system of the COVID-19 impact on the socio-economic situation as whole*: developing a set indicators and appropriate approaches to collecting and analyzing data.

Based on the results of consultations with the NSOs of Republic of Moldova, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a preliminary list of recommendations for providing expert support to the national statistical offices was developed and sent to the NSO for clarification and agreement.

Proposals and recommendations for the providing the technical assistance

Thus, based on the results of the survey "Measuring Poverty in a Pandemic" and consultations, the following priority proposals and recommendations for providing technical assistance to the countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia were identified:

1. *Organization of trainings for NSOs on new approaches, methods and good practices of survey-taking:*

1.1. the possibility of using new methods of survey-taking, such as:

- crowdsourcing / citizen-generated data;
- surveys on the NSO website;
- social media and other methods

1.2. identifying contact details of respondents, including hard-to-reach groups that are specifically suggested by the Guide, and enabling them to participate more actively in NSO surveys, for example:

- creation of a digital database of contacts;
- opportunities for households to take part in surveys voluntarily

1.3. methods to increase respondents' interest to take part in the NSO surveys – by:

- improving the design of the websites and presenting the information that are of interest for users;
- using friendly interfaces for users;
- new methods to disseminate information about surveys through different platforms including social media

1.4. training interviewers and respondents in new methods and techniques in remote work conditions:

- development of training materials: handouts, video instructions;
- creation of online consultants;
- conducting training for trainers

2. *Providing technical assistance on the organization of HBS and rapid surveys in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:*

2.1. improvement of sampling methods:

- ways to solve the rotation issue in the sample given the non-response rate increase;
- opportunity for households to take part in the survey voluntarily; the issue of ensuring the sample representativeness and randomness in this case and the assessment of the consequences of such a replacement;
- inclusion of the hard-to-reach and small groups in the sample and control of sampling errors and weights for small social groups, taking into account the Guide's recommendations regarding disaggregation variables;
- development of appropriate recommendations in the national methodological recommendations for survey-takings

2.2. increasing the share of respondents who answered the questionnaires:

- assisting in the development of national methods for reducing of refusals from interview;
- expanding the access of respondents to surveys through various technical means;
- improving the mechanisms to increase interest of respondents to take part in the surveys

2.3. the problem of evaluating the sample and its characteristics in the case of conducting rapid surveys and ensuring its representativeness;

2.4. ways of revising and shortening questionnaires for their online use:

- separation of HBS questionnaires and thematic rapid surveys;
- simplification of the HBS questionnaires, but subject to the keeping opportunity to receive data for other statistical products;
- transfer of individual HBS modules to other NSO divisions;
- inclusion of key variables from the UNECE Guide to ensure the principle of "no one left behind" and to improve further international harmonization

2.5. training in the development of quality reports to inform about deviation from international standards;

2.6. opportunities and ways to accelerate data collection and publication processes:

- correction of the approved plans of statistical work;
- simplification of procedures for approval of statistical forms for HBS and other surveys.

3. *Providing technical assistance to create monitoring system of the COVID-19 impact on the socio-economic situation in the country:*

3.1. conducting training on good practice;

3.2. assisting in the selection of relevant indicators:

- development of metadata requirements: calculation methods, frequency, measurement units, national and regional aspects, data sources, etc .;
- development of recommendations for monitoring indicators based on surveys and mass statistics;

3.3. conducting trainings on the analysis based on the data included in the monitoring.

4. *Conducting trainings on methodological materials in the field of statistics, developed by the UNECE, and, in particular, on the publication "Measuring Poverty: Guide to Data Disaggregation".*

LISTS OF QUESTIONS for national statistical offices for consultations

Questions to the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

1. In your answer to question 13, you mention that not only a *telephone survey, but also video interview techniques and a website survey* could be used to take COVID-19 survey on vulnerable and disadvantaged people. Therefore, it would like to clarify the following:
 - How realistic is it to use crowdsourcing / citizen-generated data, self-administered website survey, social media survey methods in your NSO?
 - What barriers, in your opinion, can hinder this?
 - What specific expert support can help you with your surveys: new surveys? New data sources? New data collecting and processing methods?
2. I would also like to clarify the reasons for missing the answer to questions No. 1,2 on expert assistance (empty cells): there is no need for expert assistance, is there already? Or is it just missing?

Questions to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic:

1. Answering question 14, you mentioned that it is quite urgent for the NSC KR to provide expert assistance both in the design of new surveys and in the use of new data sources.
 - What new poverty and vulnerability surveys would you like to conduct?
 - Do you consider it necessary to include questions on the COVID-19 impact (or any similar shocks) on poverty and vulnerability?
 - What new data sources would you like to use?
2. In your answer to question 13, you mentioned that *telephone survey* method is expected to be used to conduct COVID-19 research on the vulnerable and disadvantaged. However, you realize: Working in quarantine mode showed that collecting a large amount of information through a telephone survey is very difficult (question 15).
 - How realistic is it to use crowdsourcing / citizen-generated data, self-administered website survey, social media survey methods in your NSO?
 - What barriers, in your opinion, can hinder this?
 - What specific expert support can help you with your surveys: new surveys? New data sources? New data collecting and processing methods?

Questions to the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova:

1. During the pandemic, you have already developed new surveys and new questions related to COVID-19. What surveys and what questions? What difficulties (of a methodological nature) did you face? What has led you to understanding that expert assistance is needed in designing new surveys and finding new data sources?
2. Answering question 14, you mentioned that it is important for the NBS of RM to provide expert assistance in the design of new surveys (urgent) and the use of new data sources (less urgent).
 - Do you consider it necessary to include questions on the COVID-19 impact (or any similar shocks) on poverty and vulnerability?
 - What new poverty and vulnerability surveys would you like to conduct?
 - What new data sources would you like to use?
3. In your answer to question 13, you mentioned that a *telephone survey* is expected to be used to conduct COVID-19 research on the poor and vulnerable groups. However, you said that working during lockdown proved that collecting a large datasets through a telephone survey is very difficult (question 15).
 - How realistic is it to use crowdsourcing / citizen-generated data, self-administered website survey, social media survey methods in your NSO?
 - What barriers, in your opinion, can hinder this?
 - What specific expert support can help you with your surveys: new surveys? New data sources? New data collecting and processing methods?