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Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Workshop on the International Recommendations on Statistics on Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Statelessness

Geneva, 2–4 October 2024

Report

Note by the Secretariat

I. Attendance

1.   The workshop was held on 6 May 2024 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. It was jointly organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS), with financial and organisational support provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

2.   The workshop was attended by participants from the following countries and organizations: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Belgium; Canada; France, Georgia; Germany; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyzstan; Luxembourg; Mexico; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Russian Federation; Slovenia; Tajikistan; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; United States of America; Uzbekistan; European Union; International Organization for Migration (IOM); United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK); Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CISSTAT); Stiftelsen Flowminder; Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS); Lomonosov Moscow State University; Sapienza University of Rome and International Institute in Geneva. There were 61 participants.

3.   The attendance of many participants was supported financially by EGRISS, UNHCR and IOM.

II. Organization

4.   The following topics were discussed at the workshop:

(a)   Introduction to EGRISS and the Recommendations;
(b)   Panel I: Using national population census and/or national household surveys to improve official statistics on refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and/or stateless persons through inclusion;

(c)   Panel II: Using administrative data sources to produce official statistics on refugees, IDPs and/or stateless persons;

(d)   Group discussion: how to improve the production of statistics on refugee, IDP and statelessness at the national level, and enhance regional cooperation.

5.   The workshop took place immediately before the meeting of the UNECE Group of Experts on Migration Statistics (7 and 8 May 2024).

6.   The workshop programme and contributions are available on the UNECE website.

III. Summary of proceedings

A. Introduction to EGRISS and the Recommendations

7.   This session, facilitated by Natalia Baal (EGRISS), consisted of two presentations by the EGRISS and Hungary.

8.   The representative of EGRISS presented briefly the group, that was established in 2016 to develop the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS), consisting primarily of countries hosting refugees. Subsequently, the mandate was extended to develop the International Recommendations on Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (IRIS) and the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS). Support implementation and use in practice of the recommendations is also part of the activities of the group.

9.   EGRISS also invests in and promotes capacity development through regional engagement, with dedicated "task teams" making efforts to build on existing platforms/processes (with this workshop as an example in practice). In addition, online training materials through an E-learning course and technical guidance presented in the EGRISS Compilers' Manual aim to build capacity of staff working in NSOs and other relevant organisations. Thematic priorities for EGRISS activities including research and events are identified by members, e.g., inclusion of refugees and stateless persons in national census, or visibility of forcibly displaced persons in the SDGs.

10.   In the discussion, it was noted that synergies should be improved between statistics on migration and those coming from EGRISS at international, regional and national levels, since sometimes these two conversations are somewhat isolated from each other. In fact, only in 2023 at the UN Statistical Commission were statistics on IDPs included as an integral part of migration statistics in the classification of official statistics. This demonstrates a shift in understanding that IDPs are not only perceived as a humanitarian challenge but should be included in broader development plans and national statistical efforts.

11.   The future of EGRISS depends on what the group members (currently including 57 countries and 38 international and regional organisations) would like the group to focus on, with the majority expressing support for the continuation of the group. The momentum is growing, however, it takes time to implement statistical recommendations. The commitment by EGRISS members gives an indication how to prioritize issues and data sources. The Global Refugee Forum of 2023 that generated over 100 pledges for statistical inclusion of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, clearly demonstrated this commitment and presents an opportunity to bring discourse on policy making and statistics together for greater impact.

B. Panel I: Using national population census and/or national household surveys to improve official statistics on refugees, IDPs and/or stateless persons through inclusion

12.   The panel was composed by Karine Kuyumjyan (Armenia), Aurelia Spataru (Republic of Moldova), Jan Eberle (Germany), Clément Soulignac (France), and Gulkhumar Abdullaeva (Kyrgyzstan). The discussion was facilitated by Giorgia Tornieri (UNHCR).

13.   The panellists presented briefly how, in their respective countries, the population census and household surveys are used to improve official statistics on refugees, IDPs and stateless persons.

14.   In Germany, statistical matching is used to link surveys and administrative data. According to administrative data, 2.3 million people were looking for protection by the end of 2023, but this does not show how well they were integrated and how well they were doing at the job market. For that purpose, data from the German micro census are used.

15.   In Kyrgyzstan, stateless persons are reflected in the constitution. The analysis of statistics on stateless persons resulted in the conclusion that the international standards are not fully applied and therefore efforts have been taken to fill this gap. The last census took place in 2022 and a publication on the census results is being prepared. The questions on migration, including stateless persons, have been developed and included in the census questionnaire, building on guidance from EGRISS. Stateless persons were considered those having no Kyrgyz citizenship and no proof of other citizenships, while refugees were persons seeking refuge in Kyrgyzstan.

16.   The panellist from the Republic of Moldova explained the main issues related to data collection on refugees and IDPs from the population census and administrative data, and demonstrated how the EGRISS Recommendations had been utilized in practice. Although an identifier exists to link the various datasets, linking data to census is a challenge and the population is reticent to provide their identifier. The state population register with an algorithm is used to get the full identifier, for that purpose.

17.   In Armenia, the EGRISS recommendations on refugees and IDPs were used in the census. Six months before the census the listing of addresses was prepared, using data from the population register. The list was used to identify places with issues, by checking the existing address lists. After several checks and cleaning of address lists, a sample was created for use in the census. The population register was checked several times. Information from the population register and border information systems were matched. The percentage of cases that could not be matched was 0.1 per cent, which was considered not problematic.

18.   In France, for the survey on integration of refugees, letters were sent to the address to request contact information, including both fixed and mobile phone numbers. The interviewers interviewed only one person per household, asking questions on other household members.

19.   In Germany, the national sample is composed by one per cent of private households. The model used can predict the chance that a non-EU refugee is a Syrian male between 25 and 30 age, based on data, for example.

C.   Panel II: Using administrative data sources to produce official statistics on refugees, IDPs and/or stateless persons

20.   The panel was composed by Etibar Khalilov (Azerbaijan), Cathal Doherty (Ireland), Kåre Vassenden (Norway), and Nurlan Khanzhigitov (Kazakhstan). The discussion was facilitated by Ivona Zakoska-Todorovska (IOM).

21.   The panellists presented briefly how, in their respective countries, administrative data are used to improve official statistics on refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, and what are the main issues.

22.   The panellist from Ireland mentioned that, in the absence of a population register, information is gathered from multiple sources, the social security database being the main source. The social security number is replaced by an anonymous PIK number to make administrative data legally usable.

23.   The panellist from Norway observed that in that country stateless persons are accounted, although in a system based on registers, statelessness could be difficult to account for. In Norway there is much more interest in the place of residence than in citizenship, while citizenship is more relevant for border crossing purposes.

24.   In Ireland, although a population register does not exist, the NSO is looking at the possibility of using admin sources to produce a register of persons and households. Good progress was made regarding the register of persons, while the register of households is a challenge. A lot of work is done to use a household identifier, pool address data that has the same identifier and allocate it to different records. Accounting international applicants for protection and undocumented people is quite difficult, also when using survey data. With the immigrants who have an identifier the registration works well. The Labour Force Survey is currently used to estimate migration flows in Ireland, but the NSO is moving to using more administrative data as primary source and survey as a secondary source for the country of origin or country of birth.

25.   Azerbaijan collects from different ministries administrative data, including data on where refugees and IDPs reside, and data on households. Data on stateless person are collected from state migration services on a quarterly and annual basis. There is no distribution by different categories of stateless persons.

26.   The panellists were asked about the procedures to determine statelessness in their countries. In Kazakhstan, a wide campaign was conducted by a government agency in 2020–2022 and managed to identify 8,600 stateless persons, but it is very difficult to register them. In the 2022 census, over 2,000 individuals were identified, and in the campaign even more. In Ireland, administrative data are used. If no country of nationality was entered, then the person is considered stateless.

27.   Communication issues were also discussed: how these statistics are communicated to a wide variety of users that are not always experts in those statistics? Ireland produces quality reports that describe the methodologies, their deficiencies, and assessments of the quality of data. Norway does not have a system to communicate difficulties associated with the data.

D.   Group discussion: how to improve the production of statistics on refugee, IDP and statelessness at the national level, and enhance regional cooperation

28.   In this interactive group discussion session, the participants were divided into four groups and discussed good practices from national level production of statistics on refugees, IDPs and stateless persons, related challenges and opportunities, and the role of regional cooperation. The main conclusions of the discussions in the groups are reported below.

Group 1 - Countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia

29.   In the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the measurement of refugees and IDPs is most often based on information from corresponding administrative procedures. In most cases, statistics are collected by the national ministries of the interior and transmitted to NSOs, including the basic characteristics of migrants.

30.   The peculiarity of measuring forced migration in this region is that most migrants are either representatives of the main ethnic group of the destination country, or persons with common cultural and ethnic characteristics, since migration mainly occurs among neighbouring countries that were previously part of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the issue of measuring the phenomenon is mainly related to estimates of the number of people who can be assisted by the state. Integration issues are usually not relevant or of limited relevance.

31.   The problem of completeness of the assessment of the volume of forced migration is widespread, firstly because many forced migrants who have crossed the borders of the state do not seek help since they have relatives or friends in the country of destination. Relying on the help of the close ones and on themselves, such migrants are not motivated to start the application process and undergo a lengthy procedure for granting the status of a resident. The second measurement problem is that many forced migrants have citizenship of the host country even before moving.

32.   Some countries include questions about the respondent's refugee status in the census, but this is done depending on the relevance of the issue for the individual country at the time of the census.

33.   Many issues related to the exchange of experience and data in the region could be solved with the help of CISSTAT that has the mandate to collect statistical information from the participating countries.

Group 2 – Countries of immigration with population registers

34.   Reaching refugees and stateless people is difficult and costly, therefore administrative data should be used as much as possible. In order to exploit at the best the data that are potentially available, administrative data should be as exhaustive as possible. Challenges in use of administrative data sources should be addressed in order to find solutions. Challenges in communication presenting this type of information should also be addressed.

35.   Unique identifiers should be created and used in order to match data as much as possible across different sources. If matching is not possible, then machine learning algorithms should be used. Countries need to be creative and identify what is best in their case. Sharing data is challenging, and new methods of anonymisation should be developed.

36.   It is important to keep track of transitions between refugees that become citizens by naturalization, and stateless persons that acquire the citizenship and are not stateless anymore. This can influence the population size substantially.

37.   Measuring migration flows is difficult, especially in cases like the Schengen zone where people can move freely.

38.   Comparisons are needed, within countries by longitudinal analysis, and across countries.

Group 3 – Countries with significant emigration flows

39.   It is very important to select the administrative sources that can be used to identify stateless, IDPs and refugees. Quality of data and lack of resources are at the top of the long lists of challenges related to the use of administrative sources. Combining administrative sources with census data can improve data quality and give NSOs the possibility to save resources and reduce respondent burden.

40.   In some countries different administrative sources are managed by one public institutions, which may facilitate access and use of data for statistical purposes.

41.   Data coming from administrative sources not always is acceptable for statistical purposes and may need additional quality checks.

42.   Statistical systems may need to be strengthened to establish transparent and more developed statistics on stateless, IDPs and refugees.

43.   Regional cooperation is of utmost importance to develop standards and draft recommendations on how to move forward and improve the production of relevant statistics.

Group 4 - Countries of significant immigration flows without population registers

44.   Countries in this group, for which migration is by far the main driver of population growth, have to rely on censuses, surveys and administrative data to measure migration, given the absence of population registers.

45.   The group identified some **good practices**. Since migration is measured using different sources, developing a data-driven conceptual framework is relevant to avoid missing migration forms or groups of migrants. In principle, the available data allow measuring most types of migrants, including asylum seekers who, by definition, enter the statistical systems as well as migrants who receive subsistence payments. A good practice would be to use those data as well as data from any special programmes, such as those for refugees from Ukraine. In absence of a unique identifier that would allow easy linking of data, a good practice is to identify and use other proven record linkages techniques. Regular engagement with stakeholders and data providers

allows developing data exchange agreements and understanding better the content and quality of the data that NSO can access.

46.   The group also discussed about **main challenges**. The first one is not having population registers, as in this case countries have to rely on several other data sources. Some population groups are very challenging to measure with administrative data, notably undocumented immigrants and visa overstayers. Census data are often limited by the lower coverage for these migrants and by their cross-sectional nature (events such as statelessness can change over time). Another challenge is the political context. Statistics can be criticized, and administrative data can change rapidly following the implementation of a new policy. Moreover, data privacy can become an issue for vulnerable populations such as asylum seekers, or when social security numbers are used to do record linkages. Timeliness is a challenge since migration can change rapidly following a crisis such as a conflict abroad or following changes in migration policies. User needs might also evolve quickly, and NSOs have to react quickly to provide good statistics while keeping the trust of users and explaining the limitations of the data. Finally, internal collaboration is an additional challenge: NSOs have to rely heavily on administrative data collected by other departments, that often have different goals and priorities which could impair collaboration or have different definitions and concepts that are less relevant for demographic statistics and that need to be reconciled or explained to users.

47.   The group proposed two **suggestions for the future** for countries that have no population registers. Since data integration becomes very relevant at the micro and macro levels, these countries would benefit from improvements in record linkages (particularly when they don't have a common ID among all sources), machine learning and demographic methods to improve further the accuracy, timeliness and coherence of statistics. Another suggestion is to improve data acquisition, getting access to data on healthcare or border data, which could help improving statistics. This requires very good collaboration with data providers at many levels of government.

48.   Concerning **regional collaboration**, the group agreed that collaboration with other NSOs, especially those without population registers, would be beneficial, in particular to share experiences on indirect use of data and models. Groups such as the UNECE Expert Group on migration statistics were considered very useful in that regard. The experts also advocated for creating mirror statistics for flows using country of citizenship and country of last residence, while currently those mirror statistics are often limited by the use of the country of birth, which exclude emigrants who are born abroad (in a third country). Finally, regional agreements (like the one between Canada, Mexico and the United States) were mentioned as good examples of collaboration between countries to improve their migration statistics.

E.   Wrap up and conclusions

49.   In the closing session Natalia Baal (EGRISS) thanked all experts for the rich and varied discussions and made the following concluding remarks.

50.   The main reasons for improving data on stateless, IDP and refugees is to have more complete population statistics, ensuring that statistics cover the vulnerable population that are temporarily or permanently staying or passing through, and to understand mobility in all its different forms.

51.   There are lots of good practices to learn from, and willingness to share, for instance on:

(a)   accessing data and broader cooperation between NSOs and other national administrations, facilitated by good legislation, new technologies and unique identifiers;

(b)   considering the different facets of integration of these population groups and better identifying them within existing data sources;

(c)   systematic and coherent measurement of refugees, IDPs and stateless persons across time and countries, relying on the adopted international recommendations.

52.   Looking forward, and thanks to various recently completed or ongoing efforts by different countries, more data on refugees, IDP and stateless population will become available. The statistical community needs to plan for the communication and dissemination of these data and consider comparing data produced through different sources to inform future methodological improvements.

53.   This workshop was welcomed by participants, demonstrated by the large number of countries represented and discussions documented during the sessions. Interest to continue the dialogue on forced displacement and statelessness statistics within relevant UNECE-coordinated platforms, should be considered.

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