Concept Note

International Forum on "Population Censuses: Challenges and Opportunities"

Background:

Announcing the next round of population and housing censuses in June 2015, the UN called on governments of countries to conduct at least one population census between 2015 and 2024. However, the global COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on census operations almost all over the world. Many countries have had to postpone their planned census activities or take special measures to ensure that the census does not contribute to the spread of the virus. The postponement of the census often entailed problems with its financing, since the funds intended for this work were reallocated to other purposes.

Despite the difficulties encountered, a significant number of countries have now conducted national population censuses. In the CIS region at the beginning of 2023, eight countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan) had completed the stage of field work and, in most cases, the processing of information, and began to disseminate the results of national censuses. Moldova and Uzbekistan plan to conduct a census in 2024.

A feature of this census round is the accelerated introduction of modern data collection methods, primarily the use of electronic devices instead of paper questionnaires, as well as the opportunity for the population to answer questions via the Internet. A significant number of countries use data from registers or administrative databases to obtain population data. A number of countries use a combined census model using several sources of information. Thus, there is a departure from the traditional census model and a search for the most appropriate ways to obtain information. To a large extent, this is due to the growing reluctance of the population to provide data about themselves.

The rapid development of information and communication technologies, as well as the ever-increasing demands of users, challenge the national statistical offices to ensure the availability of information not so much in the form of pre-generated tables, but to anonymized microdata bases that allow generating census results based on disaggregated data in any combination of characteristics. "Linking" the census results to specific geographic coordinates significantly increases the information value of the census.

On 22-23 May 2023, the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, jointly with the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-Stat) and UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia plan to organise the International Forum on "Population Censuses: Challenges and

Opportunities." The Forum will provide a unique opportunity for countries to share and learn from the experience of others on census planning, preparation, and operationalization as well as on the use of census data for planning, policy formulation, and monitoring of National Programmes, SDGs and ICPD. In the run-up to the UNECE regional ICPD30 review, this Forum will convene relevant stakeholders to exchange practical experience in conducting and disseminating the results of population censuses carried out in the 2020 round of censuses and apply these to planning censuses for the 2030 round. Population and Housing censuses provide a backbone for assessing the progress towards implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs, and this makes the upcoming ICPD30 review an important milestone to revisit progress.

Census data provide the basis for developing national policies for sustainable development, assessing progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and implementing the Program of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In the context of the UNECE Regional Review, dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the ICPD, the Forum will provide a platform for reviewing progress made.

The objectives of the Regional Forum are strongly linked to UNFPA's Demographic Resilience Programme, which assists countries in the region in strengthening their capacity to understand and anticipate the population dynamics they are experiencing and ensure they have the skills, tools, political will and public support to manage demographic changes. Demographic resilience is an aspiration that involves the ability to predict demographic shifts, understand their implications and develop appropriate policy responses that are based on evidence and human rights.

The Forum will also promote South-South cooperation and transfer of knowledge among countries in population censuses, reflecting on different census methodologies and modalities of data dissemination and use of data for policy formulation and monitoring of National programmes and International commitments.

Key features of the event

The event is organized by the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS (CIS-Stat) and UNFPA.

Dates: 22-23 May, 2023.

A meeting of the Council of Heads of CIS Statistics Offices will take place after the CIS Census Forum on 24 May, 2023.

Location: Hotel *Double Tree by Hilton* Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Participants:

- Representatives of national statistical offices (NSOs) of the CIS member states (three representatives, including a chairperson, a population census specialist, and a data dissemination expert);

- Representatives of institutions that are typical census data users: SDG coordination body, Ministry in charge of population issues (demographic issues), civil society, insurance companies, pension funds, academia;
- Representatives of international organizations (UNFPA, UN Statistical Department, UNECE, ILO, IOM, UNWomen, UNDP, CIS Executive Committee, CIS Statistical Committee, Eurasian Economic Commission and others);
- Experts from selected NSOs outside the CIS;

The approximate number of participants is 100 people.

The event will be held in a hybrid format: a combination of offline and online participation.

The working languages of the Forum will be Russian and English (with simultaneous translation).

Objectives of the Forum:

The forum's objective:

- Reaffirm the importance of the population census as the most important source of information on population for the development of national policies for sustainable development;
- exchange of national experience in preparing, conducting, disseminating and analyzing the results of the 2020 round of population and housing censuses in CIS countries;
- take stock of accumulated knowledge of the 2020 census round to benefit the 2030 round census planning.

Preliminary Agenda of the Forum - 2 days:

Opening remarks by the organizers:

- Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- K.E. Laykam, Chairperson of the CIS Statistical Committee
- Florence Bauer, Regional Director, UNFPA

Speakers setting the stage

- CIS countries - NSO chair
- CIS countries - SDG coordination body/Policymaker from Ministry of Labor

A panel discussion on regional and global developments in relation to population and housing censuses and use of data for policy making will follow the opening remarks. The panel will be composed of:

- Representatives of national statistical offices (NSOs) and data users (line ministries, national stakeholders) of the CIS member states
- Representative of the United Nations Statistics Division
- Representative of UNECE
- Representatives of the CIS Statistical Committee
- Representative of the Eurasian Economic Commission
- Representatives of UNFPA

The Agenda of the Forum consists of five main sessions, including speeches by participants and discussion:

Session 1. Population census - National and International Aspects. The session is devoted to the importance of population censuses for the country and the world community. It will highlight the role of censuses in the national statistical system along with the increasing complexity of conducting population censuses.

Session 2. Census data utilization: developing effective policies and forecasts for the national socio-economic development. This session will look at how data can be used to design effective economic and social policies, using examples from around the world and the international community. The importance of looking 'beyond averages' when analyzing data to measure progress towards national development agendas, the SDGs, the ICPD PoA and other international commitments will be discussed. The session will also cover the use of census data for business development.

Session 3. Data collection - experience and practice of the CIS countries. During this session countries will share their experience in using multimode data collection for collecting the census data. The countries will also share the lesson learned and make recommendations for the 2030 round of population and housing.

Session 4. Participation of the population in the census: problems and solutions. During the session, it is planned to discuss whether, in modern conditions, it is expedient to legally establish the mandatory participation of the population in the census with a penalty (fine) in case of refusal, or whether engagement should be carried out by other methods. The importance of the work of the media in creating a positive background for the census and its role will also be discussed.

Session 5. Population census - new technological solutions for data processing, visualization and dissemination. Within the framework of the session the issues of processing, visualization and analysis of population census data using modern means of communication will be considered. Use of geospatial data. Country experiences in making census data available to the public, the private sector, government agencies, local authorities and the academic and research communities.

Closing of the Forum.