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International Forum "Population Censuses: Challenges and Opportunities"

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Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan

The International Forum "Population Censuses: Challenges and Opportunities" was held within the framework of the UNFPA Regional Program "CISPop: Better Data for Better Policies", funded by the Russian Federation. The Forum was 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 Statistical Committee) and the United Nations Population Fund for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (UNFPA EECA).

The Forum was attended by around 150 people (including online):

- heads and specialists of statistical offices of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (online), Russia, Moldova (online), Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan;
- representatives of state authorities - ministries of economic and social sectors of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan; deputies of the national parliaments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan;
- experts of national research centers of Belarus, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as well as international consultants.
- representatives of international organizations - UNECE, UNFPA, ESCAP, IOM, UNHCR, World Bank, International Association of Official Statistics (IAOS), CIS Executive Committee, Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS Member States, CIS Statistical Committee, Eurasian Economic Commission (online).

Forum participants highlighted the following:

The Forum provides a significant platform for engaging in meaningful discussions that hold practical value. The topics addressed during these discussions encompassed a range of critical areas, including the results of population censuses and the subsequent dissemination of census data in the CIS countries. Additionally, the utilization of data for socio-economic analysis and forecasting in countries was explored, along with the imperative to develop methodologies for upcoming censuses and the potential for enhancing statistical production within the CIS countries.

The preparation and conduct of the national population censuses of the 2020 round in the CIS countries, as well as throughout the world, took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the difficult epidemiological situation, the statistical offices of most countries in the Commonwealth region managed to conduct their censuses, in some cases with postponement. The convergence of the coronavirus outbreak and a growing reluctance among individuals to disclose personal data to the state served as an additional impetus to explore diverse data collection methods and leverage contemporary digital information technologies.

Forum participants noted the following:

1. The population census continues to serve as a crucial data source for capturing comprehensive information about the population, essential for the analysis and forecasting of socio-economic development in countries, monitoring the progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and related international commitments such as ICPD, CEDAW, and CRC.
2. The results of the census should be publicly available, including the need to provide information on a territorial basis, including at the district (local) level. Considering the diverse needs of users, it is crucial to provide information at various levels of data disaggregation. This includes enabling access to microdata in ways that respect laws and regulations regarding data confidentiality.
3. National Statistical Offices are fully committed to establishing/developing a comprehensive legal framework that will enable them to start preparing for the 2030 round of population censuses. At the same time, the legal framework for conducting population censuses should be interconnected with the legislation related to the protection of privacy/ personal data.
4. It is advisable to start preparing for the 2030 round of population well in advance, taking into account the practice of conducting the 2020 round of censuses.
5. It is advisable to integrate the population census program with specialized socio-demographic survey programs to determine the most efficient approach for gathering information while minimizing the burden on respondents.
6. Further development and application of modern digital technologies can become a means to reduce the burden on respondents and census staff and speed up processing times; improve data quality and expedite the publication of census results.
7. Further progress should be made in efforts towards incorporating administrative sources into official statistics, while simultaneously focusing on streamlining and simplifying the process of statistical production.
8. Acknowledge the valuable expertise of countries in leveraging geospatial referencing during the census data collection process, as well as their utilization of contemporary methods for analyzing and presenting census data, such as business intelligence (BI) systems and other advanced tools.
9. It is recommended to draft a decision by the governing bodies of the CIS to align the dates of the censuses across CIS countries in the 2030 round as close as possible and ensure consistency in their results.