

**Economic and Social Council**Distr.: General
18 December 2015

Original: English

Statistical Commission**Forty-seventh session**

8-11 March 2016

Item 3 (j) of the provisional agenda*

Items for discussion and decision: refugee statistics**Report of Statistics Norway, the Turkish Statistical Institute,
Eurostat and the Office of the United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees on progress in the work on
statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons****Note by the Secretary-General**

In accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 2015/216 and past practices, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of Statistics Norway, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), Eurostat and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on progress in the work on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons. The authors report on the outcomes of the International Conference on Refugee Statistics, held in Antalya, Turkey, from 7 to 9 October 2015. Participants at the conference proposed the production of a handbook on official statistics on refugees, which would serve as a practical guide to improve the collection and dissemination of official refugee statistics. They also underscored the importance of building more efficient information systems that would serve both administration and official statistics. It was also suggested that a committee be established comprising experts from both national statistical institutes and international organizations. The Commission is invited to discuss and endorse the suggested way forward contained in paragraph 40 of the report.

* E/CN.3/2016/1.



Report of Statistics Norway, the Turkish Statistical Institute, Eurostat and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on progress in the work on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-sixth session, the Statistical Commission, Statistics Norway and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) presented a joint report on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons (E/CN.3/2015/9). The challenges associated with the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics on refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons were set out in the report.

2. In its decision 46/104, the Statistical Commission supported the proposal to organize an international conference on refugee statistics that would bring together international organizations and experts from national statistical offices to explore how best to incorporate statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons into national statistical systems and to develop a set of recommendations for improving those statistics. The Commission also noted the need for a handbook on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons, which would serve as a practical guide for the collection, analysis and dissemination of that information, taking into consideration existing methods and initiatives.

3. In follow-up to Commission decision 46/104, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), Statistics Norway, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Eurostat and the Statistical Office of the European Free Trade Association organized an international conference from 7 to 9 October 2015 in Antalya, Turkey. In the present report, the authors build upon the conclusions of the conference.¹ While recognizing the importance of improving statistics on internally displaced persons, participants at the conference focused on refugees and asylum seekers; the observations and recommendations included in the present paper are limited to those two groups.

4. At the conference, participants understood that refugee statistics should form an integral part of national population or migration statistics. However, they also reconfirmed the often-limited connection between national statistics on refugees and national figures on migration and population. The lack of comparability between national and international refugee figures was also identified as a key challenge.

5. Participants at the conference highlighted the need to improve the understanding of flows and stocks of refugees and asylum seekers by building efficient information systems that would serve both administrative and official statistics needs. Such common systems follow in the tradition of official statistics by using administrative data as a source. In addition, discussions highlighted the extreme sensitivity of refugee data and the importance of confidentiality and data protection in refugee statistics.

¹ See www.efta.int/seminars/refugee.

II. Evaluation and need for action

6. More than 13 million people were newly displaced in 2014 owing to armed conflict and persecution, pushing the total number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide to 59.5 million by the end of the year. This is unprecedented in the post-Second World War era.² With new humanitarian crises continuing to unfold, these figures have further increased during 2015.

7. It is in that context that the Governments of refugee-hosting countries and the broader international community need to call additional attention to the refugee issue and contribute to solutions. An important contribution would be to enhance the accuracy and comparability of data on the phenomenon of forced displacement. Currently, statistics on refugees and asylum seekers are collected and published annually by many countries and international organizations. However, there are challenges with those statistics, and improvements will therefore be needed with regard to data access, comparability, quality and timeliness.

8. The process will require achieving a series of objectives, including ensuring consistency of terminology; standardizing concepts, definitions, classifications and techniques at the national and international levels; improving data-collection methodologies; and integrating data on refugees and asylum seekers, often managed within immigration departments, into national statistical systems. The standardization of concepts and definitions, which would allow for the production of internationally comparable data, will be of particular importance. In addition, further analysis and research is needed on statistics for measuring refugee integration.

III. Proposal for a handbook on refugee statistics

9. The development and production of a handbook could contribute to the enhancement of statistical data collection on refugees. The handbook would serve to describe international agreements on definitions and principles and as a practical reference guide for national and international statistical work. The proposed title is “International recommendations on refugee statistics”; it would contain articles that have been specifically commissioned and existing or modified studies or articles that meet acceptable standards.

10. The handbook would include seven chapters, as follows: the introductory section would provide background information, including the purpose, scope and target audience; the second chapter would cover international and regional legislation on asylum seekers and refugees, including definitions and procedural considerations; the third chapter would tackle the standardization of relevant concepts and techniques in the collection and analysis of refugee statistics; the fourth chapter would focus on measuring refugee numbers, with special reference made to administrative records, national population registers, censuses and household survey programmes; the fifth chapter would provide information on measuring socioeconomic variables about refugees and a description of the integration of refugees; the sixth chapter would provide an examination of coordination issues at the international, regional and national levels; and the seventh and final chapter would include considerations on future developments, such as

² See www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html.

innovative data-collection activities or types of analysis, or the implication for the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

11. There is also a need for standardized instructions for statistical operations, consistent with the recommendations contained in the handbook. As such, it is suggested that a refugee statistics compiler's manual be produced to supplement the handbook, providing clear operational instructions on how to collect statistics on refugees and related categories.

IV. Scope of the initiative

12. This aim of the initiative is to improve statistics on an important aspect of international migration and to improve common information about a situation with a significant impact on global welfare. The production of official statistics requires a statistical system that includes definitions of intended statistical units, the composition of those units, the definitions of variables and classifications. Within the system, data and statistical methods are also needed, together with dissemination and quality principles.

13. The production of statistics on refugees and asylum seekers requires a clear distinction between stocks and flows. Given that flows are defined as individuals who migrate as asylum seekers or as refugees within a given time period, the asylum process needs to be accurately reflected, and the conditions for the considerations of individuals as refugees clearly stated. Stocks, while an aggregation of the flows and subsequent population changes, need to reflect changes in status as well.

14. In addition, refugee statistics need to be consistently managed as an integrated part of population statistics in each country, while there is also a need to ensure consistency between countries. It is important that statistics on refugees and asylum seekers satisfy the needs of both national and international users. Based on users' needs, it is also important to collect background variables that make it possible to describe quality of life or other concerns when analysing the integration of refugees.

V. Definitions and classifications

15. In their report, Statistics Norway and UNHCR introduced the legal definitions of the population of concern. They also provided guidance on the statistical application of the term "refugee", which may include persons under complementary forms of protection or temporary protection, as well as individuals considered by UNHCR to be in a refugee-like situation.³ Moreover, under national asylum laws, a person who has applied for asylum or refugee status but whose claim has not yet been determined is generally considered to be an asylum seeker. Unless refugees are recognized on a prima facie basis, a refugee needs to go through an asylum procedure, during which his or her eligibility for refugee status is determined.⁴ It is

³ For definitions of each of these categories, see Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *World at War: Global Trends — Forced Displacement in 2014* (Geneva, 2015), available from <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

⁴ Under international refugee law, recognition as a refugee is declaratory because the material conditions of refugee status would be met beforehand.

essential that all the above categories be clearly distinguished within refugee statistics.⁵

16. Although such legal definitions are generally recognized nationally and internationally, operational details related to their practical application in the data-collection process need further discussion. In many countries, definitions of refugees and related categories may not be based on internationally accepted concepts, but may instead use terms derived from national administrative and legal practice. It is of utmost importance, however, that consistent definitions and classifications be agreed upon for statistical reporting, in order to ensure full comparability of international data. Common definitions and classifications need to reflect the specific requirements of data sources used in the compilation of refugee statistics.

17. When agreeing on statistical definitions, distinctions must be made around the different types of populations of concern, including flows of refugees (including asylum seekers and refugees arriving under resettlement programmes) and the stock of the refugee and asylum seeker population in a given country (including any backlog of asylum seekers in the determination procedure as well as both recognized and resettled refugees residing in the country).⁶ Terms such as “refugee” may also require specific characteristics in statistical reporting, depending on national norms.⁷ National practices also differ in terms of integration and naturalization measures, implying fundamental differences in statistical reporting, particularly in relation to the stock of refugees.

18. The handbook could contain a proposal for a classification system that incorporates details surrounding refugee status determination together with its various outcomes, including non-status decisions. It is recommended that an internationally agreed classification of reasons for flight associated with asylum also be adopted.

19. There is also a need for standardized techniques in data collection, including for the collection of statistical information from sample surveys and censuses. Optimization of existing sources is important, given the high costs of adding supplementary variables or questions to existing surveys or implementing surveys dedicated to dispersed refugee populations.

20. Finally, measuring other aspects of refugee statistics — for instance, integration — must be made operational through the introduction of variables and classification systems, while bearing in mind existing international frameworks for measuring the socioeconomic situation of migrants.

⁵ Internally displaced persons are not the subject of these recommendations but may become so upon completion of the handbook on international recommendations on refugee statistics.

⁶ *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1* (RSIM, Rev.1), Statistical Papers, Series M, No. 58/Rev.1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14), available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/seriesm_58rev1e.pdf. This provides methodological and technical recommendations on dealing with international migration and how the stock and flow of migrants should be tabulated. It includes references to asylum seekers, refugees and related categories under the heading of foreigners admitted into a country for “humanitarian reasons”. The proposed international recommendations on refugee statistics will take these recommendations into consideration, as deemed applicable and relevant.

⁷ Depending on data source/collection, the term “refugee” may have permanent or temporary characteristics.

VI. Data strategy

21. In principle, data on refugees and asylum seekers may be collected by various actors, including Governments, international organizations and national non-governmental organizations. There are many challenges associated with collecting these data, and the various sources available have strengths and weaknesses, with different sources providing different perspectives. Some sources are relevant for establishing stocks, such as population registers and population censuses, while immigration authorities are better positioned to provide data on flows.

22. From a country perspective, it is important to recommend systems that are cost efficient and minimize the response burden. In addition, data should be stored and made available for reuse. On the use of administrative data, it is important to remember that the one-way flow of microdata goes from administration to statistics but not in the other direction.

23. Civil registration should play an important role in the development of refugee statistics. Refugees and asylum seekers are not always included in the resident population covered in population registers. The development of a system for civil registration and vital statistics, either by a designated authority or by the national statistical office, is highly recommended. If this is not possible, at a minimum a migration register should be developed, which may include refugees and related groups.

24. Information contained in the systems for population registers can be linked. In some countries, this can take place through a unique identifier such as a personal identification number or through a set of standard variables. If refugees are included in the resident population, an identification code should be provided in order to distinguish these groups from non-refugee migrants. A system also has to be in place for covering asylum seekers whose cases are still pending, persons who have been granted temporary stay and those whose asylum application has been rejected, as these instances will normally not be covered in such registers. Having such a system in place will facilitate the production of refugee statistics on both stocks and flows.

25. In the absence of a population register, a census could be used to obtain information on refugee stocks, provided that it also covers refugees and related populations. Refugees should be included in the usual resident population count if they comply with the usual residence criteria. On most census forms, the questions needed to identify migrants are already included, and the addition of a single question on the reason for migration would allow for the estimation of the refugee stock. To measure the flow of migrants and refugees, however, a number of additional questions would need to be developed, increasing the cost of the census.

26. It is suggested that supplementary instructions be issued to the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*. These would aim to ensure that refugee populations, when applicable, are identified in the census population and that instructions for the required tabulations are included.

27. Household surveys are recognized as appropriate sources for obtaining detailed information about refugee stocks. However, given that in most countries the refugee population is relatively small, this approach would require special designs

to ensure that a statistically significant number of refugees is obtained. Moreover, it is recommended that refugees and related categories be included in the target population of international surveys such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and the Demographic and Health Survey. In addition, specially designed household surveys could be developed to obtain information on the flow and other characteristics of refugees, although these are complex and resource-intensive undertakings.

VII. National coordination

28. National statistical offices coordinate their national statistical information systems. Cooperation between national statistical offices and agencies responsible for the admission of foreigners or determining refugee status is essential for the development of accurate and reliable statistics on refugees and asylum seekers.

29. Official statistics on asylum seekers and refugees derived from administrative registers are typically produced and disseminated by agencies that use these records for their own purposes. Thus, national statistical offices play an important role in forming standards, setting up classifications and converting data from registers into statistics. As such, it is important to support such offices in preparing statistics that conform to international definitions and categories which are based on administrative registers or other information available to these offices.

30. While all stakeholders should be involved in the production of refugee-related statistical information, national statistical offices should be responsible for ensuring that these processes comply with international standards of statistical data collection. UNHCR country offices are encouraged to coordinate their data-collection activities with the relevant national statistical office, as deemed applicable.

31. Issues regarding national legislation may constitute a challenge. National statistical offices could be responsible for technical coordination, but coordination at the policy level is country specific. Ideally, regional and international coordination should be based on existing statistical and policy mechanisms, potentially including a lead role for UNHCR or for the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat.

32. Finally, international financial and technical support to countries is required for all aspects of enhancing refugee statistics. However, the independence of each national statistical office is crucial for the coordination and dissemination of reliable statistics on refugees.

VIII. International cooperation

33. Refugee statistics may be produced by national statistical offices, national immigration authorities or international organizations such as UNHCR, and the quality of such data depends heavily on international consensus and cooperation.

34. International cooperation is certainly required during the development of the handbook. More broadly, however, such cooperation is needed for operational reasons, in order to gain an internationally consistent system for refugee statistics. Not only do closer links need to be established among national statistical offices but

the links between these offices and regional or international organizations such as UNHCR also must be improved and strengthened. At the global level, the Statistical Commission and its Secretariat, the Statistics Division, are essential to fostering such cooperation.

35. In order to maintain the initiative's momentum, there should be a core goal to establish an international network of practitioners in refugee statistics. Countries would be invited to join such an initiative with the objectives of promoting cooperation and the exchange of best practices and of encouraging research. A key recommendation would be to establish a designated expert committee, with participants drawn equally from international organizations and national statistical offices.

36. Coordination at the regional level should be achieved through collaboration with relevant regional agencies and organizations. During the first International Conference on Refugee Statistics, several countries suggested holding regional conferences on refugee statistics, a process that would enhance awareness of the need for improved national and regional statistics on this population. Such a conference would also provide impetus to make the necessary administrative and technical arrangements to enhance the production of these statistics. Where applicable, this initiative should be closely coordinated with existing regional programmes in statistical development.

IX. The way forward

37. In their present report, the authors summarize some of the main findings from the International Conference on Refugee Statistics and identify a strategy for better national and international cooperation on the topic. Participants at the conference highlighted the need to develop a set of recommendations — the handbook on international recommendations on refugee statistics — that can serve to consolidate international agreement on definitions and principles and provide guidance for national work. The handbook also needs to be supplemented by a refugee statistics compiler's manual, which can provide clear operational instructions on how to collect refugee statistics.

38. At present, the formation of a committee of experts is envisaged, which would serve as a professional meeting place for refugee-focused statisticians to lead and follow the development of the recommendations. The committee of experts should be established under the auspices of the Statistical Commission, and its membership should be open to national statistical offices and international organizations. The Commission should establish the committee of experts and request the development of its terms of reference with a clear timetable for the production of the handbook. A timetable, adequate funding and operational arrangements for such an initiative will need to be agreed upon and, if required, submitted to the Commission.

39. Given the success of the international conference, a follow-up event could also be anticipated in the third quarter of 2016. The event could address progress made on the handbook and additional documentation, cover a certain topic in greater depth (e.g., refugee sample surveys), or promote discussion on a new topic, such as statistics on internal displacement.

X. Points for discussion

40. The Statistical Commission is invited to discuss and approve the suggested way forward, particularly with regard to the following:

- Establishing a committee of experts on refugee statistics, with participants drawn from both national authorities and international statistical organizations. The research community may also be invited.
 - Organizing a second international conference on displacement statistics in 2016.
 - Developing the international recommendations on refugee statistics as well as a refugee statistics compiler manual (both tentatively set for issuance in 2017).
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