REPORT
on the training for officials of the Main Department of Population Living Standards Statistics and Household Surveys of the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus
Development of a model set of questions for the household budget survey
Prepared for UNECE by Rafkat Hasanov

Introduction

The training was devoted to the development of a model set of questions for HBS. Two presentations were presented, which were based on the report "Developing a model set of questions for the household budget survey" for the second phase of the UNECE project and covered the following topics:

- Analysis of country surveys of household budgets in order to harmonise survey questionnaires.
- Development of a model set of questions for HBS.

The first part of the training included general developing questions, as well as the development of separate sections, in particular, modules on expenditures, incomes and deprivations. This part of the training was described in detail in the reports on the results of the missions to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, so there is no need to repeat the description of the results of this part of the training.

The second part of the training: discussion of selected issues

After the presentation, a number of issues were discussed, the content of which is summarised below.

Discussion of the consumption expenditures module

1. How appropriate is it to keep household expenditures on food intended for feeding farm animals in the "Diary of expenditure on food products"? Is it possible to move these questions to the section of the Quarterly Questionnaire on personal agricultural farm? How will food products purchased for pets be encoded in the future: in the group 09.3?

Comment: it was explained that the expenditures of food purchased for feeding pets and farm animals are coded, respectively, in the class 09.3.4 COICOP and in the respective classes of expenditures on personal agricultural farms.

2. The list of services in the table "The expenditures for services" of the Journal of monthly expenditures is limited to communal utilities, transport and communications services. Why it does not include personal services (e.g., hairdressing) / entertainment (e.g., cinema, theatre) / repair or dry cleaning of clothes?

Comment: it was clarified that the most repetitive (typical) services are listed in the Journal form. At the time of filling in the Journal, household members should record in the table all services during the month.

3. In the present form of the Quarterly Questionnaire of Table 2-5 of Section II "The expenditures for buying clothes, shoes, household goods, household appliances and other goods" have a simple sequential recording format. How expedient to structure the table, especially the table 4 and 5 (for expenditures on durable goods and other goods, highlighting at least a group of expenditures)? This would facilitate the work of a specialist and reduce the risk of errors in codifying expenditures.
Comment: this format is traditional for Belstat under the conditions of the existing specialisation of labour of employees participating in the HHS. When conducting a survey, a specialist records in the Journal the expenditures of a household, and then other employees implement data coding.

4. The title of the section III "Expenditures for payment of some types of services" seems incorrect – what does the term "Some types of services" mean? Are only personal / personal services and repair services for clothes and shoes included? Does this section include other services, such as maintenance and repair of household appliances, durable goods for recreation and cultural events?

Comment: agreed with the remark and ready to consider recommendations on the title and content of the section, as well as examples on the inclusion of "tips and reminders" for the main classes of services.

5. Why housing subsidies are included in the section IV "The expenditures of housing and utilities"?

Comment: it was explained that this is the traditional practice of Belstat.

6. The section V "Personal Agricultural Farm and Landscape Gardening" keeps records of both consumer and non-consumer expenditures of households, which is methodologically not entirely correct. It was proposed to take out the section of personal agricultural farm as a separate section after the sections on household expenditures (and before income), and take into account other issues on landscape gardening.

Comment: it was explained that this is the traditional practice of Belstat. The coding of data on the expenditures of landscape gardening is subsequently carried out according to the class 09.3.3.

7. Why are expenditures on health and education counted in one section?

Comment: it was explained that this is the traditional practice of Belstat and agreed with the expediency of splitting this section into two separate sections "Expenditures on health care" and "Expenditures on education".

8. Section VII "Other expenditures" keeps records not only of payment for services, but also of payment for goods (for example, gasoline, spare parts, etc.). This distinguishes the Quarterly Questionnaire of Belarus from the questionnaires studied earlier, where in the last section "Other expenditures" accounting services were carried out.

Comment: it was explained that this is the traditional practice of Belstat.

9. The section VII "Other expenditures" itself looks extremely cumbersome: it integrates current expenditures for transport, real estate repairs, leisure, sports, entertainment and tourist trips, as well as capital expenditures on the purchase / construction of real estate, and household financial expenditures.

Comment: it was explained that this is the traditional practice of Belstat. Belstat specialists agreed with the expediency of a clearer structuring of the section on services and are ready to consider an example. Belstat specialists also agreed with the recommendation to form a separate section "Other financial expenditures" on the format of the proposed Model Questionnaire.

10. Why tourist travel expenditures have such exclusive attention? Moreover, in the Quarterly Questionnaire, this group of expenditures is given a place (3 pages), more in volume than in the sections on health and education combined.
**Comment:** it was explained that there was a need for more accurate accounting of tourism expenditures. Belstat specialists agreed with the proposal to put these questions in a separate thematic section of the Quarterly Questionnaire, similar to the issues of self-assessment of poverty and satisfaction with health care.

11. The Quarterly Questionnaire itself looks rather cumbersome because of predilection for closed questions that require answers "yes – no – I don’t know the answer". These questions, strictly speaking, do not carry a semantic load.

**Comment:** it was clarified that such questions are appropriate and convenient if a large table follows the questionnaire; Belstat specialists also agreed that the transition to the format of relatively compact subdivision tables would eliminate the need for such issues.

**Discussion of income module**

12. Are there any additional guidance documents, where definitions and composition of household income are given, apart from the Guidelines for completing the 4-dx form and the Codifier?

**Comment:** It was clarified that the sent Codifier is no longer valid, and since 2017 the country has moved to a new classifier, that coincides with the COICOP. As for incomes, it was noted that due to the legal subtleties of the procedures for approval instructions, most of the explanations are given in letters from the Main Department of Population Living Standard Statistics and Household Surveys to its regional offices.

13. Is there a working document according to which the codification and aggregation (summation) of expenditures and incomes is carried out?

**Comment:** The "Algorithm of Forming Aggregated Income Indicators" was presented. After discussing the issue of how flexible this document was, it was explained that it was easy to make changes to it.

14. Is the STATISTICAL CLASSIFICATOR SC 00.007-2015 "Institutional units by sector of the economy" used during the processing of HHS data in order to determine the sources of income?

**Comment:** No, this classifier is not used in the HHS.

The following issues were considered for individual components of income:

15. Income from employment

15.1. Is there a description of what income is the income from employment?

**Comment:** Convection definitions of wages is used. As a rule, enterprises provide pay slip on wages to employees, respondents take data from there.

15.2. Why when wage is questioned, it asked as net of taxes and alimony, and in the Instructions, in clause 34, with deduction of housing and communal services, communication services, etc.?

**Comment:** This is also indicated in the pay slips and since it is convenient, the respondents remember the amounts received only in "net" form after all deductions.

15.3. How financial assistance is defined? This term repeats several times.

**Comment:** It was noted that this is a common practice. Respondents understand this term; specifically this type of income should be understood in the context of those incomes that are surveyed in questions where this term is used.
15.4. How are entrepreneurship incomes taken into account?

**Comment:** It was discussed that this type of income is not fully considered in the questionnaire. However, all agreed that the method used in the questionnaire allows for taking into account the income of an unincorporated enterprise, without dividing it into entrepreneurship income and income from self-employment.

16. Current transfers

16.1. Why such a small question on pensions?

**Comment:** It was explained that the Law "On Pension Provision" establishes various pensions:

- a) labour pensions: by age; disability; on the occasion of loss of the breadwinner; for long service;
- b) social pensions.

There is also a separate legislation on the following aspects:

- Pensions for military personnel, commanders and foot soldiers and their families.
- Pensions for citizens affected by the Chernobyl disaster, other radiation accidents, and their family members.
- Pension of civil servants.
- Pension related to work with special working conditions and in connection with the employment of certain types of professional activity.

Despite the existence of various pensions, respondents, as a rule, do not know exactly the content of the pensions received and cannot divide them into separate types.

16.2. Is the list of benefits and allowances in the question 9.2 exhaustive list? Is it possible to classify financial assistance as an allowance for poverty?

**Comment:** Basically, yes, and the features of individual benefits were explained. In particular, the care allowance for a person of 80 years of age is actually an old-age benefit. With regard to financial assistance, it was agreed that clause 11 can be changed by adding "State targeted social assistance" to the title.

16.3. Is it possible to divide financial assistance from relatives, charitable organisations into various origin sources of payment?

**Comment:** Agreed to separate them recommendation.

17. Property income

17.1. Income from intangible assets are not specified.

**Comment:** Agreed, however, indicated that if such income is determined, it will appear in the table of other incomes. Also agreed that in this case it will be classified as other income.

17.2. The general question is whether the sale of non-financial assets in total income?

**Comment:** Yes, included, it was shown on the example of Algorithm.

Discussion of deprivation module

18. Deprivations assessment in current HHS statistical forms.

**Comment:** Consultant with NSC representatives discussed current statistical forms and changes that were made to them in 2018. Consultant pointed out that the HHS Wellbeing Questionnaire, main Questionnaire and ICT questionnaire contain large number of questions, which fully or partially coincide with the Model.
questionnaire. Belstat representatives mentioned that they added questions about **material deprivations based on EU-SILC methodology** in 2018. In total eight material deprivations for adult individuals and four material deprivations for children under age of 18 were added.

**19. Deprivation identification methods.**

Comment: Belstat representatives underlined that the HHS uses a separate methodology for identifying deprivations. The methodology is described in the Methods for calculating statistical indicators of living standards, chapter 5 "Calculation of the level of material deprivation of population (households)". For calculation of the material deprivation level, a list of material deprivations is made every five years. This list is formed in accordance with the results of the sample survey of households, in which they are asked about deprivations reflecting poverty in the country. The final list comprises deprivations recognised as such by the majority (no less than 85%) of the respondents and they are specific to the minority of the respondents.

**20. Education deprivations**

Comment: NSC RB representatives answered that the questions about deprivations in education, which are proposed in the Model questionnaire, are not relevant for Belarus. That is because the coverage of basic education in the country is unified and everyone has equal access to education.

**21. Deprivations in social system.**

Comment: NSC RB representatives mentioned that the National statistical committee is not responsible for regulation of the procedures for paying social benefits.

**22. Development of harmonised forms based on country forms and the Model questionnaire.**

Comment: Based on the analysis of current statistical forms, Consultant proposed a set of recommendations to harmonise them with the Model questionnaire. The recommendations were discussed and NSC RB representatives gave the following comments:

1. The NSC agreed to expand the list of material deprivations. They mentioned that some of the model questions are not relevant for Belarus, e.g. rent, mortgage and loan payments. Consultant mentioned that given the dynamic development of financial markets, these questions are gaining more relevance.

2. The NSC RB agreed to expand questions about housing conditions in order to ensure international comparison. With that they mentioned that some answer options can be irrelevant (for example, it is estimated that the share of households using stove for cooking in Belarus is less than 1 percent). Nevertheless, the consultant recommended including them for international comparison.

3. The Belstat agreed to add questions and answer options about main sources of water supply, toilet type and heating methods.

4. With respect to deprivations in education, the Belstat representatives mentioned that in case of need for international comparison, they would find alternative sources for this.

5. In order to ensure international comparison, the Belstat representatives agreed to include questions about deprivations in access to healthcare.

Overall, consensus about the proposed recommendations on the Model questionnaire between NSC RB representatives and the consultant has been achieved.