

## 2-Week National Census Kicks Off

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Instead of alarm clocks, some Muscovites were to be woken early Thursday by text messages from the State Statistics Service informing them that a nationwide census — the first since 2002 — is starting.

The census will run for two weeks, until Oct. 25. During that time, some 600,000 census takers, many of them students, will be trying to convince every human being in Russia to open the doors of their homes and tell the truth about their nationality, income, language skills, housing facilities and many other personal matters.

Citizens' privacy will not be infringed upon, First Deputy Interior Minister Mikhail Sukhodolsky said Wednesday, promising that the police would guarantee the confidentiality of personal data collected during the census, even deploying guards to offices where the information is stored.

Only the State Statistics Service is permitted to access the forms filled out by census participants, but leaks of personal data collected by authorities are a common occurrence,

with various classified databases available for sale on Moscow's computer markets.

Sukhodolsky also warned people to check the documents of census takers knocking on their doors to make sure they were not criminals — who used the last census as a pretext to rob homes.

An authentic census worker will only show up between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. and can be identified by a blue cap and a scarf, a whistle, a flashlight, a blue bag and an official certificate, the State Statistics Service said.

People may decline to answer any question, and their own conscience will serve as a guide against providing false data because census takers will not be allowed to ask for proof of the information they collect, said Grigory Simonovich, a spokesman of the State Statistics Service.

The 2002 census yielded a number of unusual nationalities, including “hobbits,” “Scythians” and “Earth citizens.”

“One can name any nationality he or she considers to belong to and doesn't have to prove it,” Simonovich said by telephone.

Foreigners staying in Russia during the census will also be asked to participate but will face a different set of [questions](#), such as the aim of their visit and the length of their stay.

If a foreigner does not speak Russian, he should ask friends or relatives for help because only select census takers speak foreign languages, Simonovich said.

Even people officially diagnosed with mental disorders will be covered, with census takers accompanied by police officers to the interviews, Simonovich said.

About 350,000 residents of remote areas, such as Altai deer keepers, have already been counted.

The census will cost 16.5 billion rubles (\$551 million) — an almost fourfold increase from 2002, which cost about 4.8 billion rubles, Expert magazine [said](#) Wednesday.

The previous census put the population of Russia at 145 million, but estimates say it had shrunk to 142 million by 2010.

A former head of the State Statistics Service, Vladimir Sokolin, accused the government of manipulating census figures shortly before his resignation last year.

Following these accusations, The Other Russia opposition coalition pledged to boycott the census and held a demonstration Thursday under the slogan, “Don't Let Them Count You.”

*Editor's note: Expert magazine estimated the cost of the census to be 16.5 billion rubles, or \$551 million. In an earlier version of this article, the dollar conversion was given incorrectly as \$540,000.*

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