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**Modalities for the intergovernmental negotiations
of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration (A/RES/71/280)**

Better Statistics for Migration

— Background document for information —

Better Statistics for Migration

Background document for UNECE input to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, for discussion at the 94th meeting of the UNECE Executive Committee on 6 November 2017

I. Introduction

1. In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants¹, Member States committed to negotiating and adopting a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration that would set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings regarding international migration in all its dimensions.
2. The United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/71/280 defines the preparatory process leading up to the negotiations, including a series of informal thematic sessions as well as regional consultations. It requests the United Nations regional commissions, in collaboration with other relevant entities of the United Nations system, particularly the International Organization for Migration, to examine regional and sub-regional aspects of international migration and to provide inputs, in accordance with their respective mandates, to the preparatory process of the global compact. According to this process, the Global Compact should be adopted at an intergovernmental conference on international migration in autumn 2018.
3. UNECE involvement in migration issues mainly concerns the work under the Conference of European Statisticians² to support national statistical systems in producing migration statistics. In addition, a policy brief³ on migration and old age was recently prepared in the context of follow-up to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its implementation strategy for the UNECE region.
4. In view of UNECE's limited mandate on migration issues, and given the importance of better data and statistics for evidence-based migration policies, EXCOM decided at its 92nd meeting to hold a regional discussion with a focus on UNECE's work on migration statistics as a dedicated agenda item at its 94th meeting. The modalities and agenda were further refined in informal consultations with interested delegations. A Chair's summary of the discussion together with this background document would constitute UNECE's input into the intergovernmental stock-taking conference for the Global Compact taking place in Mexico in early December.

¹ Resolution A/RES/71/1, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 September 2016

² The Conference of European Statisticians is the UNECE sectoral committee on statistics. It coordinates international statistical work in the region, develops guidelines and recommendations on statistical methodology, builds capacity to improve national statistics, and collects and disseminates internationally comparable statistics. It is composed of national statistical organizations in the UNECE region and includes in addition Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Japan, Mexico, Mongolia, New Zealand and Republic of Korea. The major international organizations active in statistics in the UNECE region also participate in the work, such as the Eurostat, OECD, CIS-STAT, IMF and the World Bank. More information is available at <http://www.unece.org/stats/ces.html>.

³ UNECE Policy Brief N. 17 (2016) "Migration and older age: older migrants and migrant care workers". http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE-WG.1-24.pdf

II. UNECE work in measuring migration

5. International migration can have great societal and economic impacts on both individuals and countries of origin and destination. As international migration continues to grow, the better understanding of migrant groups becomes increasingly important. To enhance our knowledge about the conditions of migrants the collection and quality of migration data needs to be improved.

6. Member States have recently reaffirmed the importance of improving migration data. This was expressed at the highest level in the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants of 2016, the Declaration of the 2013 High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development, and in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In all these documents, Member States recognized the importance of improved data collection, and committed to enhance international cooperation. In the 2030 Agenda, there are 10 targets on migration (see infobox below), including target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration. The United Nations Statistical Commission recommends that all Sustainable Development Goal indicators be broken down by migratory status where relevant, and target 17.18 calls to enhance capacity-building support for achieving this.

Infobox: Migration issues in the targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

- Eradicate human trafficking (5.2, 8.7, 16.2)
- Retain the health workforce in developing countries (3.c)
- Increase the number of scholarships for study abroad (4.b)
- Protect labour rights of migrant workers (8.8)
- Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration (10.7)
- Reduce transaction costs of remittances (10.c)
- Establish legal identity, including through birth registration (16.9)
- Dissaggregate data by migratory status (17.18)

7. Under the Conference of European Statisticians, UNECE has been working for better measurement of migration for more than 30 years to respond to the evolving policy needs. This has been done in close collaboration with the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) and has led to solid methodological guidance to national statistical offices of UNECE member States.

8. Annual work sessions convened jointly with Eurostat provide a forum for experts in national statistical offices to exchange experience, improve knowledge and strengthen capacity in responding to the demands for migration statistics from policymakers. This year's work session on 30-31 October features, among others, the measurement of socio-economic conditions of migrants, labour mobility, and asylum seekers and refugees — topics that are all pertinent to the thematic areas of the Global Compact.

9. Methodological guidelines and practical recommendations have the aim to improve the efficiency, quality and comparability of official migration statistics. The Conference of European Statisticians creates task forces of experts from national and international statistical organizations who carry out the methodological work. Recently, the UNECE Statistical Division published methodological guidance on how to use administrative sources and surveys to measure international

migration (2016)⁴, on defining and measuring circular migration (2016)⁵, and on measuring socio-economic conditions of migrants (2015)⁶.

III. Key measurement issues in the UNECE region

A. Socio-economic conditions of migrants

10. The need for information on migration generally falls under two streams, one focusing on how many migrants reside in and move to and from a given country, and the second one on the socio-economic characteristics of migrants, to gain insights into the adjustment and settlement experience of migrants in the receiving country. The latter is related to the important policy issue of migrant integration.

11. From the perspective of a destination country, migrant integration relates to the absorbing capacity of its various social institutions, such as the labour market, education system, civil society organizations and local communities. Positive integration experiences could mean a successful use of the knowledge and skills of migrants. In contrast, a failure to adjust could marginalize the migrant population. From the perspective of a country of origin, the immediate impact could be brain drain when skilled people leave the country, while remittances (transfers of money) or return migration could have longer term implications.

12. Some work has been done to identify relevant migrant socio-economic characteristics and their statistical indicators. These indicators have mainly addressed the question of how migrants are faring at a given point in time, for example, at the time of a population census or other data collection. They often cannot address the question of whether migrant socio-economic outcomes improve or worsen over time. Additional statistical data is also required on the integration of descendants of migrants.

13. It was in this context that a UNECE task force examined how the change of migrants' conditions over time can be better measured.⁷ The most important dimensions for understanding migrant socio-economic characteristics are demographic, education, economic, and social and civic life. Under each, a number of indicators were identified and the existing and potential data sources examined.

14. Data for measuring change in the socio-economic conditions can best be collected using longitudinal surveys, that is, surveys where the same respondents are followed up over time. As these surveys are expensive to conduct, guidance is also provided on other options, such as establishing time-series from a number of cross-sectional measurements, and linking data from different sources.

⁴ UNECE (2016). Handbook on the use of administrative sources and sample surveys to measure international migration in CIS countries. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44114>

⁵ UNECE (2016). Defining and measuring circular migration. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44717>

⁶ UNECE (2015). Measuring change in the socio-economic conditions of migrants. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40542>

⁷ UNECE (2015). Measuring change in the socio-economic conditions of migrants. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40542>

B. Circular migration

15. With globalisation and increasing labour mobility, the traditional pattern of permanent migrant settlement is progressively giving way to temporary moves. This has particularly been the case in the integrated labour markets in the European Union where many workers take up jobs in other countries without intending to move there forever. An increasingly frequent pattern is repetition of migration by the same person between two or more countries, denoted as “circular migration”. Such migration is typical for seasonal workers who move to another country to work, for example, during a season of harvest in agriculture, return to their country of origin when this is over and repeat such moves in subsequent years. Other examples include short-term contract work that can occur in different countries or moves related to studies in different countries (achieving target 4.b of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “Increase the number of scholarships for study abroad”, is set to increase this type of migration further).

16. Circular migration is seen as one of the key ways to increase the contribution of international migration to development when it occurs voluntarily and connects to the labour needs of countries of origin and destination. It has also become a priority for many countries of origin as a way of ensuring the temporary nature of their citizens’ emigration.

17. Circular migration can be a triple win proposition, providing gains to countries of both origin and destination, as well as to the migrants themselves. In countries of destination, it can alleviate labour needs and increase economic production. In countries of origin, it can provide unemployment relief and gains both in financial and human capital (in terms of skills and resources brought back to the country), as well as counteract population loss due to emigration. Individual migrants also often benefit via increased income, greater work experience, and the development of their human capital. However, circular migration may also be a result of difficulties to integrate in the labour market or to find adequate training, both factors which do not allow for a longer-term settlement.

18. To understand circular migration and its impact, it is necessary to measure the extent to which existing international migration patterns become more (or less) circular over time and to evaluate policies aiming at facilitating (or restricting) such migration. Comparisons between different countries and their policies regarding circular migration, both countries of destination and of origin, are also becoming more relevant for policy development and evaluation purposes.

19. The concept of circular migration is challenging when it comes to finding a statistical definition that applies to the variety of migration trajectories concerned. To meet the target of statistical measurability that should allow the production of the first internationally comparable figures on circular migration, a UNECE task force worked out a definition that statistical offices can practically use in compilation of their data.⁸ For this, practical tests were carried out with register data from Italy and Sweden where individual records of emigration and immigration were linked over a ten-year period. For statistical purposes, a circular migrant is now defined as a person who has crossed the national borders of the reporting country at least three times over a ten-year period, each time with the duration of stay (abroad or in the country) of at least 90 days.

C. Labour mobility

20. In recent years, labour mobility has become a topic of growing policy importance in many countries. Labour mobility comprises all movements of natural persons for the purpose of work. This

⁸ UNECE (2016). Defining and measuring circular migration. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44717>

refers to several distinct population groups, including those who have changed their usual residence for work, those who commute regularly across borders for work, and service suppliers employed in a country other than that of their usual residence.

21. Knowledge about labour mobility is essential for the political debate on migration management as well as for negotiations on trade in services. Target 8.8 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to protect labour rights of migrant workers. Areas which are affected by labour mobility include:

- a) Working conditions (e.g. wage and social protection of mobile workers) ;
- b) Taxation and social security contributions (e.g. volume of taxable earnings);
- c) Industrial relations (e.g. work standards, skill formation and bargaining);
- d) Irregular migration (e.g. trafficking of forced workers);
- e) Production (e.g. volume, productivity);
- f) Development (e.g. remittances, unemployment);
- g) Size and structure of population (e.g. age, qualification, ethnicity).

22. Migrants often participate in the labour force differently than the native born population, having a different rate of participation, working in different industries and occupations, and having a different status at work etc. In order to allow for estimations of the effect of migrant workers on the local labour force and economy it is important make the distinction between: a) employees and self-employed persons and, b) employees of enterprises resident in the country and of enterprises not resident in the country. The former distinction is common in labour force statistics while data are not regularly collected on the latter.

23. One impact of globalisation is that labour demand can be more easily met by international supply of services. This implies forms of labour mobility that are distinct from the conventional classification of labour migration, including services that involve cross border movement of workers. In certain industries, temporary cross border movement of workers is likely to supersede actual migration as the dominant mode of cross border movement of labour.

24. Policymakers have an interest in understanding both the short-term and long-term effects of labour mobility. However, while there is an increased demand for statistics on labour mobility, producing comprehensive and comparable statistics on the topic remains challenging as it cuts across several statistical domains. For example, migration statistics do not cover non-migrant foreign workers. They also more often measure long-term migration than short-term migration, and do not always include the purpose of the move. Tourism statistics measure short-term moves but not workers. Labour market statistics measure workers but often lack information on mobility.

25. Harmonization of concepts and improved data availability are required to provide a suitable answer to the policy needs and changing economic realities surrounding labour mobility. A UNECE task force is currently conducting methodological work in this direction.

26. While migration-specific surveys are excellent for in-depth analysis of migrants and their outcomes, providing data on the stock of labour migrants (that is, labour migrants currently residing in a country) on a regular basis may be most successful by making slight changes to existing surveys like the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

27. Administrative data on border crossings, visas and permits is the main source for measuring the flows of migrants and migrant workers to and from a country. Exchange of data between countries can build a more complete and holistic picture of labour mobility and can be particularly helpful among countries with freedom of movement where permits are not required.

D. Remittances

28. Remittances, that is the transfers of money that migrants send back to their countries of origin, play an important role in the development of many countries, contributing to economic growth and to the livelihoods of less prosperous households. In 2016, for example, it was estimated that remittances amounted to 30 per cent of the gross domestic product in Kyrgyzstan and 27 per cent in Tajikistan⁹. Remittances play significant role in poverty reduction in low or middle income countries.

29. A specific policy issue is how these transfers are made and what related monetary costs are (target 10.c of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to reduce transaction costs of remittances). National balance of payments statistics do not capture data on those private transfers of migrants that do not pass through commercial banks. It is therefore important to collect data on remittances via household surveys from migrants in destination countries as well as from the households of migrants in countries of origin (recipients of the remittances).

30. Survey data showing the high costs of transfers could help governments convince money transfer operators to lower their fees, which has happened in some countries in recent years. Surveys can also seek to identify whether funds sent by emigrants or technology brought back by return migrants contribute to the creation of new businesses and employment or to technological advances in countries of origin.

31. The impact of remittances on origin households depends on the size of remittances compared to the income of the household. This evidently requires household income data in the survey. Finally, there may be a wide range of specific effects of emigration and subsequent receipt of remittances on origin households, such as on their labour force participation, education and health expenditures.

32. In a project financed by the World Bank, UNECE has started to develop harmonised survey tools to measure migration and remittances in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

E. Asylum seekers and refugees

33. The number of asylum seekers and refugees has increased dramatically over the past few years. Countries of destination are working to accommodate growing numbers of refugees while facing economic constraints. For countries to make informed policy decisions, they need reliable statistics on asylum seekers and refugees. These are also needed for monitoring the Sustainable Development Goal target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration, and targets 5.2, 8.7 and 16.2 on eradication of human trafficking.

34. Persons who have applied for asylum or refugee status but whose claim has not yet been considered, are generally considered asylum seekers. Statistical information on asylum seekers is important because, even though not all asylum seekers are recognized as refugees, such data show the number of persons who left their country of origin and have sought protection in another country.

35. Data on asylum seekers and refugees are collected by countries, international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as by non-governmental

⁹ World Bank database, available at data.worldbank.org, accessed on 6 October 2017

organizations. Some sources such as population registers, population censuses and surveys are relevant for establishing stocks of migrants, that is migrants currently living in a country. Immigration authorities are generally better positioned to provide data on flows (people who moved within a certain period of time, usually a calendar year), relying on border crossings and other administrative data. Governments are expected to register refugees and asylum seekers specifically as such.

36. There are many challenges with the statistics on refugees and asylum seekers produced from the mentioned sources. Progress needs to be made towards a consistent terminology, standardized definitions, data-collection methodologies that capture this group of migrants, and towards integrating data on refugees and asylum seekers into national statistical systems. Further analysis and research is needed on statistics for measuring refugee integration.

37. The United Nations Statistical Commission has established an expert group to address these matters and to develop a handbook on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons. From the perspective of UNECE member countries, the topic is recurrently addressed at the UNECE-Eurostat work sessions on migration statistics.

F. Data integration for measuring migration

38. To improve migration statistics, it is important that governments make full use of the information collected by their different agencies. Integration of different data sources has been identified as a very promising avenue for improving migration statistics. Data integration is a statistical activity on two or more datasets resulting in a single enlarged or higher quality dataset. Most countries in the UNECE region already use more than one source for generating migration statistics.

39. Any single source has its shortcomings that can be remedied using another source. For example, nationals living abroad and foreigners (citizens of a foreign country) who have left the country should be removed from a country's population register, but in reality this may not happen because they do not see a motivation to notify the authorities of their departure. At the same time, some foreigners may not want to be recorded in the population register, especially if they overstay their residence permit or have entered without authorization. A way to correct these situations is to analyse so-called "presence signals" of persons in different other administrative sources that pertain, for example, to employment, education, retirement, social security benefits, taxation, and residence and work permits.

40. Several countries use advanced statistical techniques to account for resident population from evidence in different administrative registers. In this way, they can reduce inaccuracies in the measurement of migrants currently present in the country (migrant stock) as well as in the measurement of migration flows to and from the country in a given year. Furthermore, such data integration enriches migration data by adding socio-demographic or economic dimensions to existing data.

41. In other cases, non-administrative data sources can provide information that is missing from administrative sources. For example, information not included in registers could be obtained from household surveys. Further uses of data integration come up in reconciling different estimates of "hard-to-count" migration populations, such as irregular migrants or emigrants.

42. Inter-agency cooperation on the national level needs to be strengthened in view of the fact that the national statistical office, which reports migration statistics, is rarely the producer of

administrative data. At the same time, statistical operations such as data linkage or statistical matching may have to be carried out to make those administrative data fit for purpose.

43. To respond to the increasing policy demand for information on migration, the potential of many different data sources has to be fully utilised. To meet this need, a UNECE task force is developing guidance on how to integrate data from different sources for the purposes of measuring migration and understanding its drivers.

Question for discussion: Which are the main challenges for member States with regard to migration data, and how do they address them?

IV. Building capacity

44. Methodological guidance alone is not sufficient for better measurement of migration. Regular capacity-building workshops promote and support the use of the methodological guidance in member States and facilitate communication between producers and users of migration data.

45. At UNECE, this is achieved through several avenues. A programme supported by the Russian Federation has led to practical recommendations on the use of surveys, registration systems for place of residence, work and residence permits and asylum, and data collection systems at borders. The capacity-building workshops have mainly involved the managers in charge of migration statistics in national statistical offices of countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. In the work with administrative sources, officials responsible for such sources from other government agencies (typically a migration agency) have also participated. This has led to an improved understanding of statistical challenges among those officials and improved inter-agency cooperation, which are essential for advancing migration statistics.

46. Starting this year, UNECE is working with the World Bank to develop harmonised tools for measuring migration and remittances in national surveys in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Currently, these countries use different approaches in their surveys. Comparable measures are needed to be able to assess the situation in the context of other countries of the region and apply best practices in data collection.

47. Both these issues – follow-up to the recommendations on administrative sources and development of harmonized survey tools for measuring migration and remittances – are addressed at the workshop on 1-2 November for countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia.

48. The secretariat has built efficient partnerships with the International Organization for Migration, European Free Trade Association, United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to strengthen further its activities in capacity-building in migration statistics.

Question for discussion: Which are member States needs and priorities with regard to capacity building for better measurement of migration?

V. Utilizing migration data: UNECE Clearing House (database) on Migration Statistics

49. Administrative sources typically underestimate emigration due to the low motivation of emigrants to register the event of moving out of the country. However, immigration data of countries where the emigrants go could cover these events. This can be checked using the so-called 'mirror statistics' that show the migration flow from country A to country B through the lenses of emigration statistics of country A and immigration statistics of country B.

50. Furthermore, data from destination countries can provide information on the number and characteristics of emigrants and citizens of a country of origin. Exchanging data with other countries can thus be very useful for understanding migration processes and for improving their systems of measuring migration.

51. In Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, most of international migration occurs among the countries of the region, which makes such data exchange particularly useful for them. To enable the data exchange among these countries, UNECE developed the Clearing House (database) on Migration Statistics¹⁰, which it maintains since 2011. The data pertain to foreigners (citizens of a foreign country) and foreign born population currently living in a country as well as annual numbers of immigrants and emigrants by citizenship and country of origin or destination.

¹⁰ Available at www.unece.org/data