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Sources of Israel's Migration Data and Their Potential Compatibility With The UN Recommendations On Statistics Of International Migration

Submitted by the Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel¹

Sources of data for inflows, outflows and stocks of migrants

1. Israel's statistics on migration flows are based on two inter-connected data registration systems, which are administered by the Ministry of Interior: **the Population Register**, and the **Border Control Database**.
2. All citizens, permanent and temporary residents of Israel have a personal record in the national Population Register, which includes an identity number (IN). Residents are required to inform the population administration of their changes of address, and their personal records in the Population Register include, amongst other variables, country of birth (and father's country of birth) and date of immigration. In addition, all entries and departures by Israelis and foreigners are recorded and archived in the Border Control Data base. The IN links records for Israelis in the Population Register with the Border Control Database. Records for foreigners are based on a border card filled out at entry and departure, which includes personal data, passport number, and visa status. As long as passport number remains the same these records can be assembled as personal histories. Records for Israelis are compiled automatically on arrival and departure based on their IN. Finally, Israel's census collects data on date of immigration, country of birth, and father and mother's country of birth. It would appear then, that at least potentially, this system should provide all the data that is required to implement the UN recommendations both on stocks and flows of international migration. The extent to which this is not the case rests on two factors: the concept of *usual residence* is not contained within the administrative regulations on which the statistics are based, and certain aspects of the system are not as reliable as they once were.

The importance of international migration in Israel

3. Israel's political history is linked intimately to migratory events. The establishment of the country was associated both with substantial refugee movements and mass immigration. Israel's very *raison d'être* has been to gather Jewish immigrants from around the world and forge them into a new nation. Therefore immigration has held a very special place in public policy and in the activities of the CBS. The term for immigration in Hebrew—*Aliyah*—expresses this symbolic significance, through its connotation of "ascent", or "pilgrimage". The term for emigration—*Yeridah*—connotes descent and is pejorative. The focus on immigration has not been merely semantic and ideological: from independence until the end of 1998, over 42% of Israel's population growth, or 2.7 million persons, was contributed by net migration. Recently substantial public concern has been aroused by the large inflows of both legal and irregular foreign workers.

¹ prepared by Ari M. Paltiel

The legal basis

4. The legal basis for immigration in Israel rests on two laws: 1. the Law of Return, which establishes the right of Jews and members of their immediate families to settle in Israel and acquire citizenship immediately, and 2. the Law of Entry, which governs the entry of foreigners into Israel, and their stay in the country, in those cases which do not fall under the Law of Return.

Immigrants - *Olim*

5. Israel's immigration statistics refer, principally, to persons entering Israel under the Law of Return, or persons who although they entered under another status, have received the right to settle under the Law of Return (*olim* in Hebrew). Such persons fill out a registration form the content of which establishes their entry in the Population Register, and it is this form which is the basis for immigration statistics. In certain cases, accompanying family members who are not eligible under the Law of Return are granted permanent resident status under the Law of Entry, and they too are included in immigration statistics.

6. Since immigration under the Law of Return entails the right to immediate citizenship, immigrants are not considered "foreigners" in Israeli statistics. It is presumed that they have come to settle, and therefore no time limit is attached to these statistics.

7. Statistics on the number and characteristics of immigrants are compiled monthly, and an annual publication analysing their characteristics is also prepared.

Non-immigrant inflows

8. Immigrants in this sense are not, of course, the only foreign migrants to Israel. Movement of asylum seekers, refugees (who are not *Olim*) and foreign students and trainees have not been significant in recent years. However four groups have been substantial. They are (in order of size, with an estimate of the number entering in recent years): temporary foreign workers holding valid work permits (50-90 thousand); visa-overstayers who entered legally but overstayed their visas and/or are working without a permit (15-25 thousand); immigrating citizens - persons born abroad to Israeli citizens entering the country in order to settle (4 to 5 thousand); family reunification - principally marriage partners of Arab residents of east Jerusalem and other regions of the country (1 thousand).

9. None of these groups is captured by the statistical system governing immigrants. Both immigrating citizens and family reunification migrants are entered into the Population Register, and this event is recorded by the statistical system. However, the population register records their country of birth, but not the country from which they arrived. Moreover, since in Israeli terminology they are not "immigrants" (*olim*), their date of immigration is not recorded in the Population Register (recently the CBS has obtained the agreement of the Population Administration to retain their date of entry in their records).

10. Foreign workers are not considered permanent or temporary residents under Israeli law, but as visitors with permission to work. Therefore they are not entered into the Population Register. Recently a Register of Foreigners has been established, but most of its content so far consists of records obtained from the border cards. From this source we can obtain the number of entries and exits of persons holding work permits, and it is possible to calculate time in the country retrospectively. However, in recent years underfunding of the Border Control Database has meant that data has been entered with a delay of up to 6 months (with the delay being greater for exits), and in addition there has been substantial data loss. This has meant that this source has been considered less than completely reliable, especially for stock data.

11. It would be possible to enumerate visa overstayers reliably if the border control data were reliable. In practice, since a substantial number of exit cards cannot be matched to entry cards, statistical methods have to be used to estimate the number of overstayers. This has been done twice, for 1995 and 1996. Data for 1997 are now being analysed.

Inbound and Outbound flows of Israelis

12. It should be noted that the concept of residence on which the Population Register is based is “legal residence” and not “usual residence”. Persons who have been entered in the Register are required to inform the authorities if they have decided to settle abroad permanently, although few do so in practice. However, persons residing abroad even for prolonged periods may legitimately regard themselves as not having “settled” abroad. For this reason the Population Register cannot be used as a source for emigration data.

13. Because the Population Register does not reflect usual residence, inbound and outgoing migration of Israelis can only be calculated on the basis of movement and duration of stay, as recorded in the Border Control Database. In practice this means that Israeli citizens who are resident abroad but have visited Israel in a given year are counted as departing and entering Israelis. In order to estimate emigration and return migration special annual data files are prepared with a segment of the history border movements of all persons who were abroad continuously for over 90 days. Operationally emigrants are defined as persons who departed Israel in a given year and were abroad continuously for 365 days. They are defined as “usually resident” in Israel if before departure they resided in Israel continuously for 90 days. Similarly, a returning resident is defined as one who was abroad continuously for 365 days and, after returning, remained in Israel for 90 days continuously.

14. Although data series based on these approximations have provided a reliable proxy for inbound and outbound migration of Israelis, it is clear that they are far from perfect. In an age when frequent visit to Israel by Israelis residing abroad is cheap and common, one can no longer rely on the time limits involved in the operational definitions we use. However, until some measure of *usual residence* is adopted by the authorities, it will be difficult to improve our compliance with the international recommendations. One proposal has been to include within the continuous survey of departing Israelis, which is used for tourism statistics, an item asking whether one’s place of usual residence is in Israel or abroad. Implementing this suggestion has faced administrative difficulties.

Short-term immigration and emigration

15. Although in principle the Border Control Database could be used to establish series of short term immigration, interest in these movements has not been sufficient to justify the effort involved. Once again, measures could be derived based on actual length of stay, but the concept of usual place of residence is not contained within this data source.

Stock Data

16. Israel’s current population estimates include annually updated estimates of incoming migration stocks. These estimates are based on the decennial census and are updated yearly from data derived from the registration system.

17. Israeli censuses have traditionally been concerned both with migrant stock and with migration background, therefore in addition to a person’s own country of birth and year of immigration, father’s country of birth (and in the 1995 Census mother’s country of birth) are collected as well.

18. Since the registration system contains data on year of immigration and father’s country of birth, immigrant stock data is updated annually. The reliability of these estimates has been confirmed repeatedly by their close correspondence with decennial census data.

MIGRANT STOCK

Is there a systematic link between the data collection on migrants stocks and the related flow statistics ? **YES**

Categories of migrants stock

CITIZENS LIVING ABROAD

For education and training	N/A
For employment on a permanent base (long term)	N/A
For employment on a temporary or seasonal base	N/A
International civil servants	N/A
With free establishment	N/A
For settlement	N/A
For family reunification or family formation	N/A
Admitted refugees	N/A
For seeking asylum	N/A
Diplomatic or consular status	N/A
Military personnel	N/A
Other migrant stock (please specify)	N/A
TOTAL MIGRANT STOCKS	N/A

NON CITIZENS LIVING IN THE COUNTRY

N.B. In Israel most Immigrants become Citizens!

	BC
	BC
	BC
	BC
	PR C
	PR C
	PR C
	PR C
	PR C
	PR C
	BC
	BC
	BC

COMMENTS :

PR=Population Register BC=Border Control Database
C=Census

Ministry of Interior
Central Bureau of Statistics

COUNTRY :

Israel

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