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**INTERNATIONAL MIGRANT STOCK: COUNTING THE NUMBER OF
INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS IN THE WORLD**

Submitted by United Nations Population Division

1. The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is currently revising and updating the global estimates of the number of international migrants it periodically produces. Built upon on the estimates of the migrant stock in each country or areas of the world, the new revision will include the global estimates for both sexes in every five years between 1960 and 2005. In order to produce these estimates, the Population Division has gathered the data on migrant stock, primarily from population censuses, but also from other statistical sources, such as population registers, nationally representative surveys and registers of foreigners. This paper reviews the availability of information on migrant stock and discusses the challenges in producing the estimates at the world level.

2. The number of international migrants as estimated by the Population Division represents the number of persons born in a country other than that in which they live. That is, international migrants are equated with the foreign-born. However, information on place of birth, which can generate the data on the foreign-born population is not collected or enumerated in some countries. Instead, the information on the country of citizenship (i.e. legal nationality) has been gathered. For those countries, the information on citizenship has been used to identify international migrants, equating them with foreigners.

3. It is important to keep in mind that each criterion identifies a different subset of the population. Namely, individuals of foreign citizenship are not necessarily born abroad—in countries where nationality is acquired by descent, for instance, children born to foreigners are foreigners at birth. Conversely, foreign-born individuals are not necessarily foreigners, if they have naturalized in a country where they reside. In European countries, the number of foreigners is currently lower than the number of foreign-born individuals owing to naturalization, and trends in the number of international migrants differ significantly depending on the criterion used.

Availability of the data on migrant stock

4. As of March 2005, the Population Division had gathered the data on migrant stock from at least one source of information corresponding to the decennial rounds of censuses from 1950 to 2000 for 215 countries and areas, covering 94 per cent of the world. For 13 countries or areas, no information about the number of international migrants was available. This group included several countries that had been affected by conflict and some countries with small population, thus none of which were expected to attract large numbers of international migrants.

5. Table 1 shows the number of countries and areas for which the Population Division had obtained information on migrant stock by criterion used and reference period. It should be noted that, although priority is given to data on the foreign-born as a basis for estimation, both types of data – foreign-born and foreign population – were collected if available in a given source. As shown in the table, availability of information varies by type and period.

6. For each decennial round of censuses, except the last round, the information on the foreign-born was available from at least one source for some 55 to 63 per cent of countries in the world. Relatively less sources of information were available from the most recent period; only 38 per cent of countries in the world reported the data classified by the place of birth for the period 1995-2004. In some countries, population census took place in the early 2000s, and the results are therefore not yet tabulated or not been fully made available to the public. It is expected that the availability of the data would increase with the arrival of more census results in the future.

7. In general, information on the number of foreigners was less widely available, compared to that on the number of the foreign-born. Thus, the proportion of countries from which the data on citizenship could be obtained ranged narrowly between 35 to 43 per cent during the periods considered. Again, the availability of the information has been relatively limited for the most recent period, 1995-2004.

8. Table 2 shows the number of countries for which the Population Division had obtained the information of migrant stock by region. As shown in the table, data availability varies significantly from one region to another. The Division could gather data on the number of the foreign-born for all the traditional countries of immigration, namely Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand, all “Other” European countries as well as from all successor States of the former USSR. The information was also available from most countries of the old 15 Member States of the European Union (EU) and countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, data availability is relatively low in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and in Oceania.

9. Data on the foreign population were available for all the traditional countries of immigration and all old 15 Member States of the EU. In Western Europe, information based on citizenship has been most often available. This is due to the wide availability and use of

population registers and, to a lesser extent, foreign population registers, administrative data on the number of residence work permits and labour force surveys, as the main sources of information on international migrants. The information on the foreign-population was high and more obtainable than the foreign-born population in Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia. The coverage of data on foreign population was noticeably low among the countries in the former USSR and in the Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in Oceania.

10. While interest in the gender dimensions of international migration has grown, information on the number of international migrants by sex is not always available. As of March 2005, the Population Division had gathered sex-disaggregated data on the migrant stock from at least one source of information for 188 countries and areas, that is, 87 per cent of those countries had at least one source of information. As shown in table 3, overall, sex-specific information is more often available by place of birth than by citizenship. Thus, for the most recent period 1995-2004, 83 per cent of the countries with information on the foreign-born had data classified by sex. The corresponding figure for the foreign population was 91 per cent.

11. The extent of data availability by region, shown in table 4 is similar to that of the total migrant stock. All the traditional countries of immigration and the old 15 Member States of the EU had the information on the foreign-born classified by sex. The coverage was also satisfactory in countries of the Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, poor coverage of sex-disaggregated data on the foreign-born characterized the countries of the former USSR. Indeed, less than a third of those countries could make that information available.

12. As for the data on the foreign population, the data classified by sex were available from all the old 15 Member States. The information was also available from the overwhelming majority of countries in Northern Africa and Western Asia, as well as those in Latin America and the Caribbean. The least satisfactory in obtaining the sex-disaggregated information on the foreign population was the region of Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Challenges of estimating the world migrant stock

13. The major challenges encountered in producing the estimates of world migrant stock have been the lack of information and the comparability of the data gathered. Having the data on the foreign-born population enumerated at the country level as bases for the estimate, the quality of the estimates of world migrant stock heavily depends on the availability and type of data produced by each country. Brief overview of the data on migrant stock in this paper revealed that the information on the foreign-born in a country is still missing from a significant number of countries and, therefore, needed to be complemented by the information on the foreign population.

14. Our experience shows that countries are not always able to provide needed international migration statistics. Although population censuses are carried out in many countries at regular basis, dissemination of information generated has often been limited, or been slow if it is ever released. This is often the case in developing countries where two-fifths of the world's international migrants live. There has been often a lack of funds to produce needed information on international migrants and of expertise to make the information internationally comparable. In addition to such operational problems, political considerations sometimes influence whether or not, and how, migration statistics are reported in a number of countries.

15. Tackling such challenges requires concerted efforts. As the primary responsibility of data production will still be at the country level, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity of relevant national offices to collect, produce and disseminate the migration data. It is crucial to devise mechanisms to promote a more through exploitation of census information, so as to better understand the characteristics of international migrants out of the existing sources. Governments are also encouraged to improve the cross-national comparability of the statistics that they produce, while understanding the importance of seeking a common framework for the identification and classification of international migrants. All these efforts should be guided by a mutual trust among Governments in sharing the migration statistics and by the spirit to manage international migration as a global priority issue.

Table 1. Number and proportion of countries and areas with data on the international migrant stock by classification criterion and period.

Period	Number of countries with information on migrant stock by criterion		Percentage of countries with information on migrant stock by criterion	
	Place of birth	Citizenship	Place of birth	Citizenship
1965-1974	119	78	52.2	34.2
1975-1984	128	81	56.1	35.5
1985-1994	125	88	54.8	38.6
1995-2004	86	79	37.7	34.6

Table 2. Number and proportion of countries with data on migrant stock by criterion and region or area, 1965-2004.

Region	Number of countries	Number of countries with information on migrant stock by criterion		Percentage of countries with information on migrant stock by criterion	
		Place of birth	Citizenship	Place of birth	Citizenship
Sub-Saharan Africa	49	38	44	77.6	89.8
Northern Africa and Western Asia	22	15	19	68.2	86.4
Other Asia	27	22	22	81.5	81.5
Eastern Europe	12	10	10	83.3	83.3
Former USSR	15	15	7	100.0	46.7
EU15	15	14	15	93.3	100.0
Other Europe	12	12	9	100.0	75.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	47	46	26	97.9	55.3
Northern America, Australia and New Zealand	7	7	7	100.0	100.0
Other Oceania	22	17	11	77.3	50.0

Table 3. Number and proportion of countries and areas with data on the international migrant stock by sex, according to the criterion used

Period	Number of countries with data classified by sex		Percentage of all countries with data on migrant stock	
	Place of birth	Citizenship	Place of birth	Citizenship
1965-1974	99	67	83.2	85.9
1975-1984	118	74	92.2	91.4
1985-1994	107	80	85.6	90.9
1995-2004	71	72	82.6	91.1

Table 4. Number and percentage of countries with data on the international migrant stock by criterion and region or area, 1965-2004.

Region	Number of countries with data classified by sex		Percentage of all countries with data on migrant stock	
	Place of birth	Citizenship	Place of birth	Citizenship
Sub-Saharan Africa	20	21	52.6	47.7
Northern Africa and Western Asia	9	17	60.0	89.5
Other Asia	16	14	72.7	63.6
Eastern Europe	7	6	70.0	60.0
Former USSR	4	5	26.7	71.4
EU15	14	15	100.0	100.0
Other Europe	8	5	66.7	55.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	43	22	93.5	84.6
Northern America, Australia and New Zealand	7	4	100.0	57.1
Other Oceania	11	2	64.7	18.2
