

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Approved

Second Meeting of the 2005/2006 Bureau
Washington, D.C. (United States), 24-25 October 2005

Item 8c of the Provisional Agenda

WORK PLAN TO IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STATISTICS

Note prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau¹

**PROPOSED PLAN TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF DATA ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION**

The following products will be produced under the terms of agreement discussed in detail below:

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Output #1: | Produce metadata inventory of definitions used to define stocks of immigrants by countries participating in joint UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics. |
| Responsible party: | UNECE |
| Due date: | Spring 2006 |
| Output #2: | Create a crosswalk of various definitions for immigrant stocks such as foreign born and foreign background used by countries participating in joint UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics |
| Responsible party: | OECD, UNECE |
| Due date: | May 2007 |
| Output #3: | Hold a conference to seek agreement on: 1) residency rules for migrants (non-visitors) who are in a country less than 3 months; 2) residency rules for migrants who have been in a country more than 3 months and less than 12 months; and 3) the types of migrants for which countries have an interest in collecting statistical data. |
| Responsible party: | UNSD, UNPD |
| Due date: | Summer 2006 |
| Output #4a: | Design and administer pilot projects to assess implications of different duration thresholds |
| Responsible party: | OECD or Eurostat |
| Due date: | Spring 2006 |
| Output #4b: | Design and administer pilot projects to measure emigration using data collected by the receiving country |
| Responsible party: | UNECE, certain NSOs |
| Due date: | Spring 2006 |
| Output #5: | Evaluate ability of NSOs to agree upon "core" topics and to implement consistent "core" immigration questions across different data collection sources |
| Responsible party: | UNSD |
| Due date: | Spring 2006 |

¹ With input from Statistics Canada

- Output #6: Prepare a data inventory of “best practices” from NSOs in measuring temporary migrant and illegal migrant populations. Information collected would include metadata for estimation methodology, definitions of groups, and questions asked on surveys/censuses
- Responsible party: OECD, UNECE
Due date: Summer 2006
- Output #7: Seek agreement on a common definition of residence rules for temporary workers that reflects both Balance of Payments (economical/financial) and demographic frameworks
- Responsible party: IMF, World Bank, UNSD, UNPD
Due date: Summer/Fall 2006
- Output #8: Recommend the definition and classification of remittances
- Responsible party: World Bank, IMF, certain NSOs
Due date: Fall 2006
- Output #9: Based on the outputs (1 through 8), revise the 1998 UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration.
- Responsible party: UNSD, UNPD, Regional Commissions
Due date: 2007

Summary reports for each output will be sent to the CES Bureau.

BACKGROUND

1. The release of the United Nations’ 1998 Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration provided an opportunity for countries to reflect on the international comparability of international migration statistics. Since 1998, groups such as the United Nations Statistics and Population Divisions, the OECD, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Eurostat, ECLAC, and the North American Migration Working Group have undertaken activities to evaluate the consistency of international migration statistics. The general theme of these evaluations has been that critical data on international migration are either missing (e.g. data on emigration), incomplete (e.g. data on illegal migration), or inconsistent across National Statistical Offices (e.g. data on temporary migration). The 1998 recommendations have not been uniformly implemented worldwide. As a result, the quality of international migration data is insufficient for certain types of international comparisons.

2. In recent years, policy-makers have linked international migration to issues such as national security, balance of payments, international relations, economic development, educational attainment, and international health concerns. These demands for new data have increased the need for comparable international data, thereby highlighting the shortcomings of current data. To address these shortcomings, National Statistical Offices (NSOs) and International Organizations (IOs) must work together to outline a revised framework for the collection of more comparable international migration data. To accomplish this goal of developing comparable data, international economic agencies (e.g. the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the OECD) need to be involved to ensure that the framework being developed includes both a demographic and an economic perspective of international migration statistics.

3. In recognition of the differences in data collection needs of NSOs, we are proposing a series of practical activities that collectively will represent movement towards greater international comparability—for both demographic and economic statistics on international migration. The specific proposals will include suggestions for participation by NSOs and IOs as a way to encourage

countries to prioritize the activities they will address to improve the comparability of international migration data.

4. Critical to success in both the data collection and utility of the data once collected is that they remain independent from politics. The data collected should be based on the needs of policy-makers, among others, to adequately address current and emerging population issues and not to support any specific political interest or party.
5. A broad coalition of NSOs and IOs must be committed to improving the quality of migration data in order for these proposals to be successfully implemented. Without the willing and active participation of both NSOs and IOs, these proposals will either not be incorporated into national statistical systems or will not be directly comparable with international recommendations.
6. These proposals must yield outputs that are measurable and are able to be monitored and completed in a reasonable time frame. Both short-term (completed by the end of calendar year 2005) and long-term (completed in the 2006-2008 period) outputs must be possible in order to show progress toward improved data quality that could be incorporated in time for the 2010 census round.
7. We are proposing activities that should minimize the duplication of tasks within and across NSOs. By reducing such work, NSOs will be able to dedicate limited resources to completing tasks (such as IO data requests) that are designed to yield comparable results across countries and statistical agencies.

CHALLENGES WITH EXISTING DATA ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Issues

8. The recommendations on international migration data released by the United Nations in 1998 have been interpreted differently across National Statistical Offices and international statistical organizations. To improve the consistency of data on international migration, these organizations should outline and complete several specific projects to provide insights into the limitations of the existing recommendations, and to provide baseline information on how the existing standards could be improved.

Definition of stocks

9. Because of the different definitions used by National Statistical Offices to define the stocks of migrants (e.g., foreign-born, foreigners, foreign background), it would be extremely useful to have one clearing-house for metadata on these various approaches. A first step in the development of this common metadata clearing-house would be to have the UNECE collect this information from all participants who attended the March 2005 joint UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics. This information should be available for distribution no later than the next scheduled meeting of that working group. (Output #1).
10. The UNECE should also outline a comprehensive framework for linking these various concepts—or at least making the similarities and differences between them transparent for data users. This comprehensive framework should be available for distribution no later than the 2007 meeting of the UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics. (Output #2).

Definition of residency rules to identify migrants

11. The 1998 Recommendations provided a framework for defining international migration flow by defining long-term migrants (defined as a person who changes countries of residence for 12 months or

more) and short-term migrants (defined as a person who changes countries of residence for at least 3 months but no more than 12 months). These definitions have been difficult for many National Statistical Offices to interpret in recent years because of the increase flows of temporary migrants, circular migrants, and illegal migrants. Among these groups, it is difficult to define residency rules and subsequently ensure understanding among respondents of these rules. To address this growing issue, the United Nations Statistics Division should convene a group of representatives from countries with large shares of temporary migrants to determine the statistical data needs of these countries. Participants in this conference should include the UNSD, UNPD, the OECD, the UNHCR, and representatives from Statistics Canada, the U.S. Census Bureau, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and Eurostat. The outcome of these discussions should include at a minimum the following issues: residency rules for migrants (non-visitors) who are in a country less than 3 months, residency rules for migrants who have been in a country more than 3 months and less than 12 months, and the types of migrants for which countries have an interest in collecting statistical data. These discussions should be completed no later than summer 2006, with the recommendations for changes in the definition of residency rules (and therefore of long-term migrants and short-term migrants) being sent to UNSD no later than fall 2006. (Output #3).

Reconciling population balances and flows of migrants

12. For many countries, especially for those where population statistics are based on administrative sources, it is difficult to change national residency rules to adhere to internationally agreed upon standards. Determining who is and is not considered a migrant can vary from country to country making international comparability more challenging. On the other hand, the effect of differing residency rules on migration estimates is not fully understood. Given the operational difficulties that many statistical agencies face, especially in estimating short-term migration, it is likely that residency rules have less of an effect on the estimates themselves.

13. A pilot project testing the effect of different residency rules will try to assess the consequences of using different durations (3 months, 6 months, one year) on the estimates of inflows and outflows, their composition and net migration. The goal is to measure the impact of different duration thresholds on the estimates of flows and their composition by age, sex and origin. A small number of countries will be identified, making sure that the various typologies of sources are represented. In register-based data different estimates will be produced on the basis of individual records on durations of stay. (Output #4a)

14. Another critical aspect of reconciling migration flows with population balance refers to deficiencies in estimating out migrations. The UNECE should disseminate the results of its pilot project to evaluate the out-migration of populations from a sending country by evaluating the change in the stock of in-migrants from that sending country in the statistical data sets of a host country. This project to reconcile data on emigration flows with stocks of immigrants in host countries will reduce respondent burden and costs associated with new data collection, and will provide timely practical assessments of the feasibility of using other countries data to address the needs of sending countries National Statistical Offices. The pilot project should be facilitated by the UNECE and include participants from the following countries: USA-Canada-UK-Poland-Italy-Australia-The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (subgroup lead by Statistics Canada); Estonia-Finland-Russian Federation; The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia-Switzerland-Italy-Albania (subgroup lead by Statistics Canada). The findings of these exchanges should include the following at a minimum: whether host countries can adequately measure a change in the level of immigration from a particular country, whether the level of change implied by the host country data is consistent with other data sources including anecdotal information, and whether the method of analysis has portability for use by other countries.

15. Countries involved in these exchanges should have findings available for dissemination at the next UNECE/Eurostat meeting on migration statistics in 2006. (Output #4b). The results of these exchanges should also be shared with the UNSD for possible incorporation into revisions of the 1998 recommendations. The pilot project will be carried out by a Task Force set up for this purpose (see TOR for the Task Force: ECE/CES/BUR/2005/13/Add.1).

Portability of questions across data sources on international migration

16. National Statistical Offices usually use one of three data sources to estimate stocks and/or flows of international migrants: population censuses, household surveys, and administrative data. NSOs should work together to identify migrant stocks and their linkages across datasets, across borders. The UN World Programme Technical Subgroup on Internal and International Migration Statistics and the UNECE Task Force on Migration and Ethno-Cultural Characteristics would propose topics and questions related to international migration for the 2010 round of censuses. In addition, they should work with NSOs to determine the portability of questions across data collection instruments—as well as the institutional (i.e., regulatory) or organizational (i.e., data user) impediments to changes in existing data questions and content. The UNSD should work with NSOs to ensure that every question recommended for a core topic for the 2010 round of censuses can be asked consistently across different data collection sources. Any questions that cannot be asked in a uniform manner should be identified as a possible cause for concern about data comparability, and therefore included in future revisions to the 1998 recommendations. Results from this project should be available for distribution by spring 2006. (Output #5).

New data sources/methods on international migration

17. Because of the growing interest in measuring temporary migrants and illegal migrants, many NSOs are evaluating their existing methodologies and data sources to determine their relevance for such activities. As a first step in assisting this process, the OECD and UNECE should collaborate to produce a data warehouse that includes “best practices” from NSOs in measuring these populations. Information collected would include metadata for estimation methodology, definitions of groups, and questions asked on surveys/censuses. This data warehouse should be ready for dissemination by summer 2006. (Output #6).

Harmonizing economic and demographic data on international migration

18. Organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have become increasingly interested in issues related to international migration, and particularly to issues related to temporary migration. The GATS Mode 4 calls for the collection of economic data by presence of natural persons. The definition of residence rules used for temporary workers has not been uniformly defined within either demographic or economic organizations.

19. An important first step is to have the IMF and World Bank host a seminar that included the UNSD, OECD, and selected NSOs such as the United States, Canada, Italy, and Germany with large temporary worker populations to discuss a common definition of residence rules for these workers. This seminar should be convened in early 2006, with results being submitted to UNSD for inclusion in future revisions to the 1998 recommendations on data on international migration. (Output #7; Output #9).

Data on Remittances

20. Many activities are now under way to improve the quality of data on money transfers across borders to family members and communities in migrants’ home countries. A key question that must be answered by NSOs and IOs alike is, “When is a cross-border financial transaction a ‘remittance’?”

21. Due to their important position in the data quality and analysis of economic characteristics, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) should be directly involved in the determination of a single definition of “remittances.”

22. The international community, such as, the Inter-Agency Remittances Task Force, the IMF Balance of Payments Committee, and the UN Technical Subgroup of the Task Force on International Trade in Services on the Movement of Natural Persons should move forward with their efforts to define and classify remittances, to guide the collection and estimation of remittance data, and to estimate the sources and destinations of inflows and outflows. (Output #8).

Flow Chart of Activities for the Work Plan to Improve International Migration Statistics

