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UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE STATISTICAL PROGRAMME AND WORK OF THE CONFERENCE'S TEAMS OF SPECIALISTS

PROGRESS REPORTS ON OTHER TEAMS OF SPECIALISTS WORKING UNDER THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Note by the secretariat

Addendum

Report of the Joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics

I. INTRODUCTION

1.   The joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics was held on 3-5 March 2008 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Moldova, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Palestinian Authority, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat and MEDSTAT II Programme. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Food and Agriculture

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Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Fund for Children (UNICEF), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were also represented. Experts from University of Southampton (United Kingdom), Moscow State University (Russian Federation), University of Milan (Italy) participated at the invitation of the UNECE secretariat.

2.   The Work Session was organized in collaboration with UNFPA. A number of participants could attend the Work Session thanks to the financial support provided by UNFPA and European Commission.

3.   Ms. Victoria Velkoff from the United States of America was elected as Chairperson of the meeting.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

4.   The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:
- Selected methods to improve emigration estimates
- Methods to improve estimates of migration flows
- Challenges in defining and measuring difficult-to-count migrants
- Producing migration data through household sample surveys

5.   The following participants acted as Discussants:

- Ms. Bohdana Hola, Czech Republic
- Mr. Marcel Heiniger, Switzerland
- Ms. Angela Me, UNECE
- Mr. David Thorogood, Eurostat
- Ms. Margaret Michalowski, Canada

6.   The discussion at the meeting was based on invited and supporting papers. The papers are available on the UNECE website at the following address:
http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008.03.migration.htm

7.   The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.

III..SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

A.   Selected methods to improve emigration estimates

Documentation: Invited papers by Lithuania, Italy, UNECE, Moscow State University (Russian Federation), UNECE/Eurostat Task Force on Measuring Emigration Using Immigration Data, presented by Canada. Supporting paper by Switzerland.

8.   The discussion focused on two different approaches to improve emigration data:

(a) Use of population-based sources in sending countries;
(b) Use of immigration data of receiving countries.

9. The papers by Lithuania and Italy presented experiences in using household sample surveys to estimate unreported emigration. In both cases promising results have been obtained. Lithuania reported that only around 40 per cent of emigrants appeared to declare their departure to the authorities. The main challenge for both countries regards the feasibility and opportunity to use this approach to improve regular demographic estimates, in terms of adjustments to current data on migration flows and population estimates. The meeting also discussed issues related to how transnational families were defined and treated in household surveys. It was agreed to ask the CES Task Force on new forms of families and households to consider transnational families in their work to produce guidelines on how to measure new forms of families and households. The importance of addressing return and temporary migration in some countries was also mentioned.

10. A UNECE study was presented on the use of a census module to estimate emigration. The experience of four countries (Georgia, Moldova, Poland and Tunisia) that included questions on emigration at the last census round was presented. Data from these countries were compared with statistics produced by main countries of destination. This analysis indicates that emigration data from the census do not provide an accurate count of the total number of emigrants residing abroad. This is due mainly to the difficulty of capturing households where all members have left the country. However, it was emphasized that such approaches can be useful to collect information on selected groups of emigrants. Countries wishing to include an emigration module at the next census should make a clear distinction between count of resident population and count of emigrants. A further area to explore is the development of adequate demographic models to estimate emigration, similarly to the indirect techniques used to estimate fertility and mortality.

11. An additional approach to improve emigration estimates is to use immigration data of receiving countries. A UNECE/Eurostat Task Force developed the "Guidelines on the use and dissemination of data on international immigration to facilitate their use to improve emigration data of sending countries" and the final version was presented at the meeting. The Guidelines are based on four feasibility exercises carried out in different regions. The meeting welcomed and approved the guidelines. It also recognized the efforts undertaken by the members of the Task Force and congratulated them for their results.

12. The Draft Guidelines were used to guide an exchange of data among CIS countries which was coordinated by UNECE. An expert from Moscow State University, engaged in this project by UNECE and UNFPA, reported on the successful results of this exchange showing that the Guidelines can indeed be a useful tool to identify the proper content and process for data exchange among sending and receiving countries. The main deficit found at this exercise was the difficulty to access data at national level.

B.   Methods to improve estimates of migration flows.

Documentation: Invited papers by the Netherlands/Belgium, the University of Southampton (United Kingdom), and the United States. Supporting paper by Tajikistan.

13.   As many countries lack reliable statistics on migration flows, a variety of methods used to derive information on migration flows were presented. The Netherlands and Belgium presented joint analysis comparing exchanged data on migration between the two countries. An expert from the Southampton University presented initial results of a statistical model to provide harmonized estimates of migration flows between EU countries and between EU countries and the rest of the world. The model was developed under the Eurostat funded project MIMOSA (MIgration MOdelling for Statistical Analyses). This project aims to help EU countries meet their obligations under the new EU legislation on migration statistics. The US Census Bureau presented their methodology for estimating net international migration using the American Community Survey.

14.   Several countries expressed concerns that national estimates of migration flows may differ from those produced by international and supranational agencies (e.g., Eurostat). Data users could potentially misunderstand these differences and data providers should explain them carefully.

15.   Given the different administrative and legislative systems and the unique needs of national users in the various countries, full harmonization of national migration data across countries is a difficult challenge. Concerns were expressed by countries that the need for producing harmonized data at regional and international level may lead to the dissemination of two data series, one to be used by National Statistical Offices (NSO) for national needs (where more disaggregations are needed) and another one to be used by international organizations where national data are adjusted to be comparable with the other countries. It was suggested that in general countries could also attempt to overcome their constraints with administrative/legal requirements by utilizing adjusting procedures. Some harmonization of legislation at EU level could also produce more harmonised data.

16.   It was noted that it is important to consider what data are needed, for what purposes, and in what detail when identifying a method to estimate migration flows. Given this, it is important to consult country/regional experts when developing model-based estimates.

C.   Challenges in defining and measuring difficult-to-count migrants.

Documentation: Invited papers by Medstat II programme, Italy, United States, Austria, and United Kingdom. Supporting paper by Australia.

17.   Participants discussed challenges related to the counting and characterization of irregular and short-term migrants. The task of estimating irregular migrants and producing data on their characteristics was discussed as one of the most challenging ones for demographers. Because of their nature, irregular migrants are normally not recorded in any register or administrative source, and most surveys and censuses do not cover them or may not cover them completely.

However, in many countries, particularly immigration countries, information on irregular migrants is strongly needed, for instance to formulate policies on immigration and integration.

18.   The meeting discussed whether the NSOs should produce statistics or estimates on irregular migrants. In many countries it is not the NSO, but rather other research institutions or Government Departments (such as immigration agencies) that are active in this field. Especially in countries where administrative sources are used to produce population estimates, there are often limits given by the rules for the registration of the population and the counting of resident population. However, it was noted that as the "shadow economy" is currently measured by NSOs, irregular migrants could be assimilated in a certain sense to a "shadow population" and therefore be measured in the framework of official statistics.

19.   Regardless of what institution tries to measure the phenomenon, there is a number of serious definitional and methodological challenges. The possibility of asking direct questions on legal status in on-going data collections should be discouraged, given the sensitivity of the question. There is also the problem that irregular migrants are often invisible in standard lists and sampling frames used in the regular production of statistics.

20.   The meeting reviewed a broad variety of methods that can be adopted to estimate the number and the characteristics of irregular migrants, including direct, indirect and mixed approaches. Participants appreciated the presentation of a classification of the existing methods which differentiates direct and indirect methods. Each method is based on a certain number of assumptions and has advantages and disadvantages. The meeting agreed that there is not a "best" solution because this would depend on national circumstances. However, it was emphasized that some are more solid than others and that not all methods can be applied at the national level. It was also stressed that it would be advisable to use methods which can provide estimates of the associated errors. Another point that was raised in relation to direct methods relates to non-response. Irregular migrants are more likely than others to not participate in population-based data collection and direct methods to estimating irregular migrants could be used only if the non-response rate is at an acceptable level.

21.   Given the difficulty of measuring the phenomenon and the large assumptions involved in any approach, there was discussion of the possibility of considering various independent methods, and then bringing the results together to assess their validity and develop a benchmark for future estimates.

22.   The discussions related to the use of methods to estimate irregular migrants focused on measuring the size of this population group. However, it was also stressed that the estimation of the size of the sub-group should only be the initial step since the needs for data are more often related to the socio-demographic characteristics of irregular migrants.

23.   Two approaches to estimate irregular migrants were discussed in detail: a direct method adopted in Italy and an indirect method adopted in the United States. In the approach presented in the Italian paper, data are collected through interviews conducted in selected centres attended by immigrants. In the United States, unauthorized immigrants are indirectly estimated as the difference between the total foreign-born population (estimated using the American Community Survey) and the legally resident foreign-born population.

24.   The second part of the discussion was dedicated to the measurement of short-term migration. In many countries there is an increasing demand for data on short-term migration. However, very often migration statistics focus on long-term migration only. The regulation on migration statistics recently approved at the EU level, for instance, is limited to long-term migration.

25.   Austria and the United Kingdom presented their work in producing statistics on short-term migration. Their efforts are aimed at meeting users' requirements making use of available sources, particularly population registers, permits of staying, or passenger surveys.

26.   Various types of short-term migration can be considered, depending on the length of staying (for instance: 3 to 12 months, or 1 to 12 months) and the reason for the movement (employment, study, other reasons). Different types of migration estimates can meet the needs of different users. For this reason it is important to set up mechanisms to identify these needs.

27.   From the discussion, various methodological difficulties emerged, concerning the quality of administrative data (for instance, the frequency of short-term migrants who do not de-register from administrative registers when they leave), the difficulty in establishing the boundary between visitors and short-term migrants, the difficulty in establishing the net flow of short-term migrants, and so on.

28.   Notwithstanding these difficulties, the participants agreed that it is worthwhile to make an effort to improve statistics on short-term migration, in addition to the data currently provided on long-term migration.

D.   Producing migration data through household sample surveys.

Documentation: Invited papers by Spain, France and United States.

29.   Household sample surveys are conducted in response to an increasing need for data on migration and migrants. During the meeting, the national experiences from Spain, France, and Australia were presented. These countries developed specialized national household surveys to collect data on migrants because data from population registers and censuses do not provide enough information to analyze migrant characteristics. It was emphasized that surveys can be a rich source of data to enhance existing data from other sources (i.e. administrative data).

30.   Specialized surveys to measure migration are important as the samples can be designed to target specific types of migrants. It was noted that the national context is important in developing and designing household sample surveys. At the same time, international comparability needs to be taken into account. There are also different information needs for immigration and emigration.

31.   It was proposed to set up the Suitland Task Force on the contributions of household surveys to the measurement of migration and remittances. The focus of the Task Force will be on survey content and methodology for better measuring migration and remittances. The specific

aims include: advancing the methodological work on household surveys to measure migration and remittances; developing international recommendations; and developing a survey module or modules on migration and remittances. There was support in the meeting of the need to develop specific modules on migrants for use in household surveys. These modules would contain a core set of questions asked in all countries in the same manner to allow for international comparisons. The experience in Canada on the development of standard modules was briefly discussed.

32.   Another activity of the proposed Task Force is the development of standards for tabulation of migration data. There is a need for standard analytical tools to allow for basic comparability at the national and international level.

33.   The following three points were raised during the discussion:

  (a) It is important to have a reference population for comparative purposes with the migrant group.
  (b) Sufficient sample size is required to ensure detailed cross classifications.
  (c) In addition to developing new surveys, full use of existing sources should be made. Where possible, the linkage of existing data source should be considered.

34.   The sample is limited to the immigrants who remain in the country. It is unclear to what degree those who have left differ from those who remain.

35.   The meeting discussed that there could be two approaches to collect data on migrants in a survey:
  (a) through a specialized survey such as the ones done in France, Australia, Spain and Norway, and
  (b) through a module in an on-going survey, such as the labour force survey. Countries with a large number of emigrants, highlighted the need to collect information about emigrants rather than immigrants. They requested assistance in including ad-hoc modules into existing surveys such as the labour force survey.

36.   UNICEF also addressed the need to develop specialized modules which could be included in the next round of Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS). It requested the Task Force on measuring remittances and migration to consider on a priority basis the development of such a module.

37.   In order to help countries to better learn from the experience, participants requested that existing methodology and questionnaire be widely disseminated.

IV. FUTURE WORK

38.   The meeting recommended undertaking the following activities and presenting their results at the next work session on migration statistics:

  (a) Compilation and comparative analysis of definitions used by ECE countries when collecting stock and flow data;

(b) Compilation of best practices when estimating the size and characteristics of difficult to measure migrant groups (e.g., irregular/illegal migrants, return migrants, short term migrants, etc.);

(c) Assessment of the impact of different duration thresholds on migration estimates;

(d) Creation of a task force on using household surveys to measure migration and remittances, with the following main objectives:

(i) advance the methodological work on household surveys to measure migration and remittances;

(ii) develop international recommendations on how to best design and implement household surveys to measure migration and remittances;

(iii) develop a survey module or modules on migration and remittances to be included, where relevant, in existing international and national survey programs.

(e) Development of a discussion forum and a user-friendly internet site organized according to identified issues to disseminate the results of the activities associated with the work plan.