

Distr.: General
30 October 2017
English

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Work Session on Migration Statistics

Geneva, Switzerland

30-31 October 2017

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

Information on regional initiatives

Recent progress and plans for the development of migration statistics in the Mediterranean countries under MEDSTAT and MED-HIMS

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Abstract

Since the end-2013, the Euro-Mediterranean statistical cooperation plays on a series of working groups on migration statistics and other priority sectors that are assisted by the MEDSTAT Programme. Besides, the working group on migration statistics (EMWGMS) also contributes to and receives support from MED-HIMS, a programme of the European Commission and other international organisations developing the model tools and supervising the implementation of migration-specialised surveys in the Arab countries participating in MEDSTAT.

These regional frameworks represent very useful platforms of exchange and collaboration between the involved countries. This particularly applies to the methodological development and the sharing of first national experiences under MED-HIMS. On the other hand, the development of shared data collection tools and the production of national statistics based on other data sources and working modalities such as the use of individual records and the integration of registers lack the consolidation and reproduction of good practices tested a decade ago in some participating countries. The extension of coverage to all the categories of immigrants and establishment of “light” model tools under MED-HIMS as well as the shared implementation of a set of migration questions in general household surveys and a tabulation based on residence permit data may currently represent the immediate

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means towards wider, improved, harmonised and more frequent migration statistics in the region.

I. Introduction

1. Traditionally migration had an important meaning for the socio-economic development of states, its regions/provinces and local communities as well as for the conditions of individuals and households. New determinants, modalities, paths and consequences of migratory flows featured the last decades and in particular the recent years, including movements of economic migrants, circular and returning migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and other categories of migrants often in vulnerable conditions. In parallel with the evolution of migratory flows, the principle of evidence-based policy on migration is receiving more attention. The demand of information, originally addressed to numbers and basic characteristics of migrants evolved towards the reasons, consequences and prospects of migration and the evaluation of impact of migration on development.

2. In front of these needs, improving the collection, quality and use of migration data is a generalized concern for introducing and monitoring policy decisions. However, only few countries worldwide have satisfactory systems for the collection, elaboration and analysis of data, and anyway they have to further develop, extend and combine the use of different existing means. Despite their wide geographical location, the Mediterranean (MED) countries¹ share a series of similar concerns. Alongside with the historical emigration patterns towards Europe and the Gulf countries featuring most the countries and movements within the region, including the massive flows due to crisis and wars, most these countries witness immigration and transit migration from outside the region. All have similar challenges deriving from the fast natural population increase, urbanisation and internal movements.

3. Since 1996, the *Euro-Mediterranean Statistical Cooperation Programme* (MEDSTAT) of the European Commission aimed at strengthening the national awareness, the coordination at national and regional levels and the capabilities and tools for producing improved, fresher and more comparable migration statistics based on administrative and statistical sources. The data collection and the statistical production on migration in the MED countries at beginning of programme was overall not satisfying and unfortunately the situation has not evolved dramatically since then.

4. Considering the last decade only, MEDSTAT II (2006-2009) mainly encompassed initiating new work modalities based on the elaboration of individual records available from the administrative registration and allowed to initiate drafting model tools for the regionally coordinated programme called *Mediterranean Household International Migration Surveys* (MED-HIMS) to be implemented outside MEDSTAT. MEDTAT III (2010-2013) mainly contributed to the further development of MED-HIMS tools, the definition and promotion of MED-HIMS

¹ The Southern Mediterranean or Mediterranean (MED) countries considered here are those falling under the European Neighbouring Policy– South (ENP-South) of the European Union, i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia and Syria, although the latter is currently not actively involved in the Euro-MED statistical cooperation.

projects in most the interested countries and its implementation in Egypt and Jordan. On the other hand, no progress was made towards the better use of administrative data. MEDSTAT III ended with the creation of the *Euro-Mediterranean Working Group on Migration Statistics* (EMWGMS), an entity operating under the coordination of the Central Administration of Statistics (CAS) of Lebanon in a parallel to other priority working groups under a new statistical cooperation framework supervised by the *Forum of Euro-Mediterranean Statisticians*. The ongoing MEDSTAT IV (2016-2019) aims to directly assisting the formulation and implementation of the EMWGMS Work Programme, by mainly contributing to the coordination and development of methodological tools of MED-HIMS at regional level and strengthening the inter-institutional coordination and better use of other migration data sources at national and regional level. The EMWGMS and MEDSTAT aim to interact with other entities, programmes and initiatives funded and supported by the European Union (EU) as well as other international organisations.

II. Migration surveys

5. The migration-specialized surveys represent a targeted means for investigating on migration. In particular, the most frequent household migration surveys are the ideal source to inform about the determinants of migration and its consequences and impact on socio-economic development, i.e. the migratory histories, profiles, ways of life, attitudes and future plans of individuals and households. However, the methodological specificities and the generally high costs make that they are often undertaken only rarely. These surveys depend on the sampling and the measures adopted for generalising the results and the adoption of specific methodological features such as the choice of the ‘*cut-off period*’, the answers from the ‘*proxy respondents*’ and the place of data collection.

6. Few migration surveys were implemented in the MED countries, at least under the national statistical systems, apart from the recent cases of MED-HIMS. As already reported to previous joint UNECE/EUROSTAT work sessions², MED-HIMS in a survey programme proposed in 2008 by the Arab countries participating in MEDSTAT and implemented with the funding, support and coordination of the European Commission and other international organisations³. It aims to study the recent trends, causes, determinants, dynamics and consequences of international migration and mobility, and the inter-linkages between migration and development, and to explore scenarios for a closer cooperation in the area of migration and development between the origin and destination countries. The MED-HIMS Model Questionnaires (MQs) are designed to collect data that are multi-topic, multi-level, retrospective and comparative. The data collection mainly covers the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of migrants, the behaviours, attitudes, perceptions and cultural values of people with regard to international migration, the

² As last reference: *Main features, status and outputs of MED-HIMS*, note prepared by Samir Farid and Giambattista Cantisani on behalf of the MED-HIMS Programme Steering Committee for the Joint UNECE/EUROSTAT Work Session on Migration Statistics held in Geneva on 18-20 May 2016.

³ In addition to the European Commission, MED-HIMS is currently supported by the World Bank, UNFPA, UNHCR, IOM, ILO and the League of Arab States. Since May 2014, these organisations compose the Programme Steering Committee, under the chair of EUROSTAT.

processes leading to the decision to migrate, the migration experiences and practices, the impact of migration on labour dynamics, the type and use of remittances and their impact on socioeconomic development, and the migration intentions. In addition, it covers the socio-economic status of households.

7. The target population of MED-HIMS initially included the categories of current migrants, return migrants, non-migrants and forced migrants. The corresponding versions of MQs were adopted for the execution of the two national surveys implemented so far, i.e. the Egypt-HIMS in 2013, the Jordan-HIMS in 2014 as well as a pilot of Morocco-HIMS carried out in 2013-2014, with focus and publication of results on the region of Tadla-Azilal. The two full surveys above had respectively no or marginal deviations from the MQs. On the other hand, these surveys suffered for delays in the availability of international funding, in particular for the harmonised technical assistance, as well as in the issuance of full results⁴.

8. Following the implementation of first surveys and considering new proposals, in 2016-2017 the set of MED-HIMS MQs was revised for marginal improvements and for the integration of an individual MQ for immigrants (non-forced) useful to cover all categories of immigrants present in the country of data collection. As from the development of the MQs and other model manuals, this revision work was undertaken by the Chief Technical Adviser, with the assistance of other international experts and representatives as well as the collaboration of experts belonging to the participating NSIs, in particular through an experts' meeting and a new regional workshop organised under MEDSTAT IV respectively in Paris (September 2016) and in Marrakech (July 2017).

9. Since September 2016, the involved national and international partners discussed the proposal for a MED-HIMS "light", i.e. a short version of the full MQs that could be used, for example, between two full surveys, in order to reduce the burden of carrying the survey using large questionnaires and to be able to produce frequent results. Therefore, at last regional workshop they decided for the MED-HIMS "light" as a specialized stand-alone household survey and covering all five target groups of the full version. The "light" MQs should be drafted and jointly discussed by early 2018.

10. The NSIs of the Arab MED countries renew the interest and commitment towards the consolidation and extension of the MED-HIMS methodology and the implementation of new national surveys through the full and "light" modality. Following the concretisation of the European Commission funding, new surveys are expected soon in Morocco (with fieldwork already planned in summer 2018), Algeria and possibly Tunisia (the latter in principle for a "light" survey).

III. General statistical operations

11. The population census is historically a primary source for determining the stocks and flows of migrants as well as other migrant categories like the refugees

⁴ As most recent reference, three papers on the results of the MED-HIMS of Egypt, Jordan and the Moroccan region were presented in a Special Topic Session of the 61st ISI World Statistics Congress held in Marrakech on 18 July 2017. These papers are available at congress's website. The complete reports of these surveys are accessible through the websites of the responsible national institutions and the EUROSTAT website.

residing in the country and the exact places of residence. This is obtained by collecting data on the country of citizenship, place of birth of individuals and possibly their parents', place of usual residence at a specific date in the past or duration of residence or year of arrival in the place of presence or residence. In addition, the traditional census may be used to inform about emigration abroad by asking about current and former household members who went abroad (although missing the migration of entire households after the implementation of the census) or even the intention to emigrate by the respondents. The censuses of the MED countries are carried out through the traditional fieldwork data collection, with the only exception of Israel, a country implementing an Integrated Census.

12. In Morocco the 2014 Census adopted a very short 'emigration module' for establishing the number of household members emigrated abroad in the last 10 years disaggregated by sex (in fact, it aimed simply to identify the households with at least a current out-migrant or even a returning migrant for assisting the sampling for a future Morocco-HIMS). In Tunisia the 2014 Census used a quite long set of questions on household members residing abroad who were part of the enumerated households five years prior to the census, i.e.: name of person, relationship with the head of household, sex, year of birth, year of emigration, reason of emigration (as new request, compared with the 2004 census), country of current residence and level of education before departure (new variable). In the case of Jordan, following the recent migration evolution, in particular for the massive arrival of Syrians, the list of migration questions in the 2015 Census was adapted taking into account following: place of birth, country of citizenship, place of usual residence (always using 6 months as threshold for usual residence), place of current residence, place of birth of mother, main reason for residence in the country (for non-nationals), duration of current residence, place of residence 12 months before the census date of arrival and country of arrival. Concerning the Jordanian members of enumerated households who emigrated abroad, the census asked about those who are abroad for 'permanent residence' since at least 12 months. In Egypt, the 2017 Census collected data on the nationality, the reasons for staying in the country (including seeking asylum and refugee as possible answers), the holding of social insurance and health insurance, the number of years spent in the current place of residence, the change of residence in the last 10 years, the reasons of that change, the holding of a Egyptian ID card and the correspondence between the place of residence and the place reported in the ID card. On the other hand, this census excluded the module on Egyptian residing abroad, given the low quality of data collected through the previous census and the low expectation of that from the census pre-test. Finally, the new Population, Housing and Establishment Census of Palestine, which will be carried out in December 2017, will collect the same migration-related data of the two previous censuses, i.e. the nationality, the mother's place of residence upon delivering, the usual place of residence, the period of usual residence, the previous place of usual residence, the reason for changing the place of residence and the refugee status. Among the remaining countries, the Integrated Census is planned at reference date of 31 December 2020, with the innovation of the coverage of non-nationals too.

13. Apart from the census, questions and modules on migration are often used in more general statistical operations, particularly in household surveys, depending on the objectives, opportunities and/or circumstances such as the needs of frequent measurements on the socio-economic characteristics and patterns of migrants and their households and the marginal costs from using operations regularly undertaken,

for instance the LFSs. Obviously, this asks for specific requirements and shrewdnesses at the level of design, size and selection of samples of households and respondents, the identification of the targeted units and the means of data collection (for instance, a module on the use of remittances addressed to the household as a whole). Among other delicate features, the household surveys include the data collection through ‘*proxy respondents*’ and the coverage of households that have emigrated as a whole during the reference period.

14. The MED countries represent different practices of measuring international migration through general surveys. Among the main national experiences, Egypt adopted several components of the ILO Labour Migration Module in a LFS carried out in 2007, focusing on the employment and remittances of current and former migrants and their households, also including a number of questions useful to identify persons involved in occasional on unpaid employment activities (e.g., agriculture production) during the reference week, what caused a significant break in series. Second, Morocco included specific modules to study the migration from/to abroad in the last National Demographic Survey of 2009-2010, that was a panel survey based on three waves at six monthly intervals. The immigration module investigated on the persons who resided abroad and came back into the household during the previous five years, collecting data on the basic demographic characteristics, the level of education, the type of activity, the country of residence abroad, the year of immigration, the duration of stay abroad and the reason for immigration. On the other hand, the emigration module covered the persons who were members of the households five years before but residing abroad at moment of the survey, collecting data on the basic demographic characteristics, the level of education, the type of activity, the country of first emigration, the year of emigration and the reason for emigration. The sample size of about 104.000 households was enough to ensure quality results, also for attempting to know about the households that entirely emigrated between two successive data collection waves. As a third, regularly implemented practice, Tunisia adopts a migration module in the second quarter of the National Population and Employment Survey, using a nationally representative sample of about 45,000 households for identifying people who migrate in the last 12 months and collecting a series of specific information on them (e.g., type of economic activity abroad) and their households. This procedure allows to estimate some information on migration flows and mainly to sort out the reasons and other qualitative aspects of migration.

15. Considering the usefulness of more frequent measurements, the EMWGMS is aiming to take benefit from the introduction of specific, possible shared questions and modules on migration in existing general household surveys. A regional workshop recently organised by MEDSTAT IV at Hungarian Central Statistical Office⁵ convened in a parallel session several migration statisticians and labour statisticians from six out of the nine currently participating countries. After the review of national practices and some proposals from international organisations, the group of experts preliminary agreed on the systematic use of a set of questions general household surveys, mainly the LFSs, built on the one proposed by UNSD at a recent international event⁶ plus an additional question on the main reason of

⁵ *Regional Workshop on Strengthening the Migration Data Collection in the ENP-South Countries*, Budapest, 17-19 October 2017.

⁶ *United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Improving Migration Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda*, New York, 20-22 June 2017.

immigration. A further question for the household has been proposed by the MED-HIMS Chief Technical Adviser. Thus, the current proposal provides for the following:

- a. The country of birth
- b. The country of citizenship
- c. The duration of stay in the country for foreign-born persons
- d. The main reason for coming to live in the country for foreign-born persons
- e. Some information on the migration experiences for citizens who are return migrants
- f. The absence of household members due to emigration abroad

16. This proposal seems feasible in the countries of the region and useful for the migration data collection, the production of selected migration-related SDGs' indicators (to be calculated through surveys, when the distinction by "migration status" is requested) as well as some preparatory steps for MED-HIMS. It should now go through further discussion within each country and a then at next EMWGMS meeting which is tentatively scheduled in Paris in mid-January 2018.

IV. Other means for the collection and elaboration of migration data

17. A series of systems at national and local level ensuring the administrative registration of population and specific categories of that may be relevant for migration statistics, depending on conditions such as the existing national policies and legislation, the available resources and infrastructure and the attitude of people to register/deregister. These systems, which include the registers of population and vital events, the border crossing and many other administrative procedures, normally run and are developed on continuous basis, often linked with each other. These features generate the possibility of informing about migration phenomena with limited costs, in particular for the categories of foreigners, for illustrating the migration paths of individuals and their family or household members and for following the administrative procedures. However, as tools normally conceived for administrative purposes, they demand specific shrewdnesses for the statistical production and international comparisons like the utilisation of individual data records. Besides, a series of other means and methods may be applied in the sector, including the use of mirror statistics, the adoption of indirect measurements and estimations (as in the case of hidden phenomena like the irregular migration) and emerging means. In fact, the traditional data sources are often not appropriate to measure phenomena like the short-term mobility or irregular migration. On the other hand, the rapid spread and huge valuable amount of data generated by Internet applications, social media and mobile phones may have an impact on the possible ways to measure migration.

18. Among the MED countries, Israel historically widely used and tried to extend the available administrative data sources. In the framework of MEDSTAT II, Lebanon and Morocco attempted to introduce new work modalities based on the elaboration of individual records available respectively from the registration of issuance/renewal of the residence permits and the border crossings, although without

fully ending with the respective pilot exercises and so without innovations in their official statistical production. More recently other countries assessed their national systems (for instance Jordan, under an action of the European Commission programme called MIEUX - Migration EU eXpertise), however without introducing yet significant changes in their data management procedures and new outputs in the regular statistical production.

19. The MEDSTAT IV workshop recently held in Budapest took note of the improvement of several national registration systems, with the extension of the centralised systems and innovations such as the optical reading of passports at border crossing. On the other hand, it noted that some administrative registration from the procedures of permissions for working abroad or for working placement abroad partially cover the involved population categories and anyway are adopted in a different way. Among other main and general outcomes, despite the consideration of the particular cases represented by Israel, Palestine and Libya, the same workshop recognised the lack of significant and concrete enhancements in the collaboration between the NSIs and the ministerial agencies responsible of administrative registration, the lack of statistics on flows and stocks of international migrants on yearly basis and the limited utilisation of mirror statistics, integration of data sources, estimations and statistical modelling. At end, as documented by the work for a MEDSTAT IV catalogue of guidance and practices under preparation, the regularly compiled statistics based on the border crossing registration do not inform enough about international migration, while the statistics from several other administrative sources are still irregularly or episodically produced, mainly for internal purposes.

20. For the time being, besides a series of recommendations towards integrating the available data sources also in view of partial measurements under the national statistical systems, first for the yearly stocks and flows of migrant on yearly basis, the workshop ended with a proposal of a pilot data collection exercise based on three tables from the registration of residence permits. This set of tables, which is adapted from the EUROSTAT data collection, is composed by the following:

- a. A table on first time residence permits granted by duration, reason and country of citizenship during 2017
- b. A table on valid residence permits by duration, reason and country of citizenship at end-2017
- c. A table on valid residence permits by duration, sex, age group and country of citizenship at end-2017

21. This proposal seems more feasible and useful across the involved countries, although excluding Palestine first (because without a residence permit system) and the expectation of adjustments to the national data for ensuring the regional comparability (due to existence of different types of permits at country level) and possibly to the template tables for a regular data collection on yearly basis. On the other hand, the proposal also aims to start using widely and publicly the residence permit data but also in view of the use of this register and other administrative data sources through other modalities such as the exploitation of individual data records for obtaining, in the medium term, statistics on the flows and stocks of migrants.

V. Conclusions

22. The regional frameworks for the development of migration statistics in the MED countries represent very useful platforms of exchange and collaboration.

23. MED-HIMS certainly represents a good practice for the conception and development of model tools for data collection and the implementation of national surveys in a coordinated manner under the national statistical systems and with the coordination of international organisations. On the other hand, the experience so far revealed some constraints, mainly from the high costs and the slow concretisation of international funding, what determined a limited implementation of national surveys as well as a part of delay in the elaboration, analysis and publication of results of the implemented surveys.

24. Concerning other components of the sector, overall the participating countries witness some limitations in the collaboration with national partner agencies responsible of the administrative data sources. Thus, despite the useful innovation on the main registration systems relevant for migration, most countries lack to consolidate and reproduce some activities that could represent a better use of the administrative data. In particular, they still miss the yearly production of statistics on stocks and flows of international migrants, even with partial coverage or adopting estimates.

25. It is expected that the extension of the coverage of MED-HIMS and the development of its “light” model tools, the implementation of proposals for new shared data collection in the sector recently defined and some enhancement in the systems and elaboration modalities in at least some pioneer countries taking inspiration from the catalogue of relevant national practices may contribute to obtain wider, improved, harmonised and more frequent migration statistics in the region.