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Future work

Use of longitudinal data for regular production of migration statistics

Proposal for Future Methodological Work by UNECE Steering Group on Migration Statistics

1. A longitudinal approach is well suited to the analysis of the migrant population because settlement into a new country is a long-term process. In many cases, the key questions when analysing migrant settlement are whether and how the socio-economic outcomes of migrants change or improve with increased length of stay or whether native-born off-springs fare better than their parents. Further analytical benefits include the possibility to study transition between circumstances, such as unemployment to employment, as well as duration to events, such as acquiring citizenship.
2. Many countries use longitudinal data for the analysis of migration flows and the integration of migrants in the host society. Challenges for collecting longitudinal data through panel surveys include the high cost of such surveys and the possible high panel attrition. Furthermore, longitudinal or cohort studies are often stand-alone studies. They are rarely used for regular or annual migration statistics.
3. Many uses of longitudinal data are reported in this and previous Work Sessions, confirming interest in this topic.
4. The task force report “Measuring change in the socio-economic characteristics of migrants” (2015) illustrated the benefits of using longitudinal data and recommended that countries develop data linking methodologies to acquire longitudinal data sets.
5. In addition, the Task Force on Data Integration for Measuring Migration (2017 draft report) brings up several examples where integration of different datasets leads to longitudinal data.

6. As the use of registers and other administrative sources spreads, the perspectives for longitudinal measures improve. The three examples presented in the meeting were based solely on registers – Austria, Netherlands and Switzerland. Obviously, countries that can collect such data by linking administrative records have an advantage.

7. Of particular interest is how the analysis of longitudinal data can be incorporated into annual migration statistics and complement the available cross-sectional measurements.

- i. What could be a set of harmonized longitudinal key figures and indicators that could/should be calculated at a regular basis?
- ii. How do they compare with cross-sectional key data or indicators?
- iii. What is their added value in comparison to cross-sectional data, including to data with retrospective content?
- iv. What are the good practices production, analysis and dissemination?
- v. What could be the recommendations to statistical offices?

8. One of the benefits of the work could be a recommendation on the kind of longitudinal data that allows estimating circular migration, on which the new definition was established recently by a UNECE task force on circular migration (2016). Identifying and promoting further use of the circular migration concept could be a welcome follow-up to that work.

9. The challenge would be to give some recommendations or define longitudinal variables (or tables) that are universal while the potential sources for longitudinal data vary greatly.

10. Another aspect that could be addressed using longitudinal data is family migration, i.e. the analysis of a family unit that migrates together and whereby family members are not looked at as individuals who seemingly migrate independently of each other. What types of families migrate and why? Closely related to this is the topic of family reunification, i.e. family members who do not migrate together – e.g. a spouse joining his/her partner or a parent joining an adult child who moved to the destination country a long time ago. What patterns do exist? Are there common characteristics? How can the study of family migration contribute to the understanding of current migration patterns, integration of migrants and emerging forms of migration?

11. A collection of good practices of measuring this could be helpful and lead to a recommendation on collecting and publishing statistics using some variables that characterize such family situation (possibly collecting information on the country of residence of family members).

12. If this reflects the consensus about future methodological work in this Work Session, the Steering Group is ready to work out terms of reference for a new task force on longitudinal data for measuring migration.
