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Group of Experts on Migration Statistics

Work Session on Migration Statistics
Geneva, 30-31 October 2017
Item 11 of the provisional agenda
Adoption of the meeting report

Draft Report of the Work Session on Migration Statistics

Note by the Secretariat

I. Attendance

1. The joint UNECE/Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics was held on 30-31 October 2017 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Chile, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Union was represented by Eurostat. The International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), the MEDSTAT IV Consortium, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), World Trade Organization (WTO), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) were also represented. An expert from the Moscow State University participated at the invitation of the UNECE secretariat.

2. A number of participants could attend the Work Session thanks to the financial support from the World Bank ECASTAT project.

II. Organization of the meeting

3. Mr. Gunter Brückner from Germany was elected as Chair of the meeting.

4. The following substantive topics were discussed at the meeting:

a) Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
b) Data integration and administrative data
c) Longitudinal studies of migrants
d) Integration and descendants of migrants
e) Asylum seekers and refugees
f) New methods to estimate migration
g) Labour- and education-related migration

5. The discussion at the meeting was based on papers that are available on the UNECE website.[1]

III. Recommendations for future work

6. The meeting discussed a proposal for future methodological work prepared by the UNECE Steering Group on Migration Statistics. The meeting recommended to pursue methodological work on the use of longitudinal data for regular production of migration statistics and asked the Steering Group to prepare terms of reference for a task force on this topic.

7. The meeting confirmed that the next Work Session on Migration Statistics is scheduled to take place on 25-26 October 2018. The following topics were suggested for discussion in the 2018 Work Session:

a) Integration of data from censuses, administrative sources and surveys for measuring migration
b) Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics
c) Integration and descendants of migrants
d) Labour- and education-related migration
e) Big Data and migration
f) Use of tourism statistics for measuring migration
g) Asylum seekers and refugees
h) Irregular migration
i) Emigration
j) Impact of migration on the host country and the country of origin

IV. Adoption of the report of the meeting

7. The present report was adopted during the closing session.

8. A summary of the discussion in the substantive sessions of the meeting will be presented in an annex to this report, to be prepared by the secretariat after the meeting.

[1] www.unece.org/index.php?id=41274#/

Annex

English

Summary of the main issues discussed at the substantive sessions

A. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Documentation: Presentation of International Organization for Migration (IOM).

At the beginning of the session, UNECE gave a broad overview of the ongoing preparatory process for the adoption of Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018, started after the adoption of New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The meeting participants were informed that following the Work Session, UNECE Executive Committee would meet to synthesize the regional work on migration statistics, including the output of the current meeting, and prepare a coordinated input to this global process. Afterwards, a representative of IOM presented the role of improving migration statistics in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and IOM’s main recommendations on migration data resulting from the thematic consultations already conducted for the Global Compact. He also gave an overview of IOM’s ongoing and upcoming work, such as the launch of the IOM Global Migration Data Portal, the International Forum on Migration Statistics (to be held in January 2018 in Paris), development of Migration Governance Indicators and a report on capturing the value of migration through data.

B. Data integration and administrative data

Documentation: Papers submitted by Canada, Georgia, Portugal and the UNECE Task Force on Data Integration for Measuring Migration.

Discussant: Jason Schachter (United States)

Statistics Canada presented the methodology to enhance editing and imputation of responses to immigration questions in the 2016 population census, by linking administrative data. The representative of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia provided an overview of a comprehensive system being developed to link administrative data on migration collected by different state agencies with a big data technology. Statistics Portugal described how administrative data, in particular from the tax register, are used to improve the estimates of the regional distribution of immigrants and of internal migration. Finally, the Chair of the UNECE Task Force on Data Integration for Measuring Migration presented the draft report of the task force.

In the discussion that followed, with regard to Canada the possibility was discussed to adjust – based on administrative data - the information for those who convert from temporary status (e.g. students) to permanent status. The Canadian representative clarified that the linkage with tax records is done using name, birth date and address, since no unique identifier is available. For edits, the immigration status is used instead of country of birth because in the census, the migration questions are asked to those who were naturalized, and not to the foreign-born respondents (there are many Canadian citizens who were born in the United States).

With reference to the presentation for Georgia, it was noted that the project is very ambitious and that obtaining full cooperation from all the agencies involved, especially with regard to sharing microdata, can be a challenge. It was observed that the project is limited to immigration, based on data on foreign citizens, while it would be very useful to also consider emigration, which in Georgia is more important in numeric terms than immigration. The representative from Georgia confirmed that in the last few years emigration is higher that immigration, but there is political will to focus on immigration, although the system could be extended to cover emigration in the future. Funding was received from the European Union to develop the system, but once it will be completed, the maintenance will be assured by national funding, so the system is financially sustainable. The system is not designed to measure illegal migration, but could provide data to monitor those who stay after the expiration of the permit. Data quality should be monitored, but the main data sources used (border control and civil register) are considered of relatively good quality.

With regard to Portugal, using tax records to improve migration data can be problematic for specific population groups who may not be likely to file tax declarations, like very young or very old people, and foreigners. The representative from Portugal noted that the tax coverage for foreigners is less than 5%. One of the typical problems when using register data to measure migration is that emigrants often have no motivation to deregister when leaving, or report a move. It was reported that in Portugal in general tax payers never deregister, and that inactive taxpayers include those who are deceased. In order to improve the use of tax data to measure migration, it would be useful to obtain information on the place of residence.

For the report of the Task Force on Data Integration for Measuring Migration, the discussant noted that it should be clarified whether data compilation or comparison are part of the proposed definition of integration. It was also noted that the focus of the definition is on creating new datasets, not new statistics. The chair of the task force clarified that data compilation is considered as a type of integration, and that the task force agreed to provide a broad definition. The feasibility of international exchange of microdata was also discussed. Microdata exchange takes place among Nordic countries, but it would be difficult to promote similar activities in other regions. On the other hand, international microdata exchange would be useful for instance to identify and eliminate duplications, which are probably very frequent in several countries (for instance due to retired people who spend long periods in vacation homes in a country different from the home country).

It was also noted that there is increasing demand for longitudinal studies. Measuring outflows is problematic in many countries, and poses a challenge for such studies. However, mirror statistics and methods based on “signs of life” can be useful and may help advancing longitudinal studies.

Eurostat drew the attention of the participants to the document “Framework for the quality evaluation of statistical output based on multiple sources”[2], where six alternative “basic data configurations” are identified, aiming to represent the majority of the cases when multiple sources are used to produce statistical outputs. Perhaps the report of the task force could refer to this document and discuss its relevance for the case of migration statistics.

[2] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cros/system/files/final_report_wp3.pdf

The representative of the ILO noted that the conclusions of the report refer to the difficulties of implementing the definitions included in the international recommendations on measuring international migration, and suggested elaborating more on these difficulties. It was also noted that, generally, data collected for administrative purposes fit the purpose for which they are collected, and this may affect the possibility of compare data across sources or countries.

The participants also discussed about coordination at the national level between the various agencies. The representative from Austria reported that in that country the NSI has legal mandate to access relevant administrative data. The results of data processing produced by Statistics Austria are shared with other agencies. Latvia reported that cooperation is relatively good with some agencies, and less good with others, and in some cases a long time is needed to obtain the data required. Eurostat reminded that under European legislation, the national administrations should give free access to data to the NSI, and that NSI should be consulted when decisions are taken that could affect the data collected.

The possibility to use “big data” in the field of migration statistics was also discussed. In Spain, INE is in discussing with providers of telephone services in order to use their data to measure migration. Some countries are also considering using data on flight passengers, but work in this field is still at preliminary stages.

Summary points:

a) Presentations exemplified some of many possible ways of integrating multiple data sources for producing migration statistics: use of administrative data to improve quality of traditional data sources, use of administrative data to produce otherwise unavailable subnational estimates or combining multiple data administrative sources together.
b) As underlined by the Task Force report, potentially relevant administrative data sources are numerous and strongly depend on the specificity of the country. Similarly plentiful are the methods to combine them, which makes it a challenging task to establish their taxonomy. Eurostat drew the attention of the participants to the document “Framework for the quality evaluation of statistical output based on multiple sources”, where six alternative “basic data configurations” are identified, aiming to represent the majority of the cases when multiple sources are used to produce statistical outputs, which could be a reference for the task force report.
c) Scope of the term “data integration” may not always be clear, e.g. whether data comparison or compilation are also included. It was suggested therefore that the report of the Task Force on Data Integration for Measuring Migration should provide a broad definition.
d) It can be observed that administrative data sources are more frequently used for measuring immigration than emigration. There is no incentive or sometimes even a mechanism, for migrants to deregister at their origin countries. [leveraged]. Moreover, administrative data is ill suited to measure undocumented or illegal migration based of the very nature of the phenomenon.
e) A necessary step in using administrative data for producing migration statistics is getting access to the relevant data from appropriate administrative agencies, which requires cooperation and political will. This often remains a challenge, especially if many agencies are involved, even though, as Eurostat reminded, under European legislation, national

administration should give free access to data to national statistical offices and also statistical offices should be consulted when decisions are taken that could affect the data collected.

f) Usability of particular administrative sources for statistical purposes depends on the specificity of country's administrative procedures – contents of the form, coverage of foreigners in the registers or the quality and completeness of collected data.

g) If a unique ID is used across the registers, linking multiple administrative data sources is significantly easier. However, even if there is no unique ID, other attributes can be used to match records in different registers even though it requires more effort. The Georgian delegate described the use of big data technology to facilitate data integration across different administrative registers.

h) Because of more and more countries being able to link multiple administrative data sources, it is increasingly more common for the countries to build longitudinal datasets enabling longitudinal studies.

i) The feasibility of international exchange of microdata was also discussed, as it takes place among Nordic countries, but it would be difficult to promote similar activities in other regions. On the other hand, international microdata exchange would be useful for instance to identify and eliminate duplications, which are probably very frequent in several countries (for instance due to retired people who spend long periods in vacation homes in a country different from the home country).

j) The potential of using big data, such as from providers of telephone services or data on flight passengers, was also mentioned, however it was emphasized that there have still not been cases where it was successfully used for official statistics and in particular, migration statistics.

C. Longitudinal studies of migrants

Documentation: Papers submitted by Austria and Switzerland.

Discussant: Jeroen Ooijevaar (Netherlands)

A representative of Statistics Austria presented a study of three cohorts of migrants using linked data from several administrative registers. The study focused on how long immigrants stay in the destination country and how their participation the labour market compares to other groups present in Austria. Subsequently, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (FSO) described the creation of a new longitudinal database for measuring migration and the structural integration of migrants and showed the first results of analysis of collected data.

The discussant appreciated the depth of the analysis that was possible in both studies thanks to the application of longitudinal studies, which are particularly well suited in the analysis of influx of migrants and their integration as a long-term process. In the past, such approach would be based mostly on panel surveys hence very costly and effort-intensive. When relying on administrative data, as in presented examples, the approach becomes significantly less expensive and NSOs can consider including it as part of regular statistical production.

With the increased number of countries being able to construct longitudinal datasets, such studies are becoming more and more common, but many questions remain open:

a) The scope of analysis varies from country to country and would often depend on the availability of data in the registers.
b) It still remains to be seen how the data obtained from the longitudinal studies can be compared with data from cross-sectional studies with retrospective questions and whether some cross-sectional measures can be replaced by longitudinal measures.
c) As in any study based on administrative data, an important aspect to consider is also the coverage of the registers. For example, Switzerland has a longer time-series on foreign born that native population, which makes it impossible to make a comparison for older cohorts. On the other hand, Norway includes in their registers only the resident population, which means that asylum seekers, numerous in recent years, would be completely absent from the analysis based only on the population register.

Regarding the Austrian presentation, the discussant mentioned that it would be interesting to see the analysis not only by country of origin but also by reason for migration to follow the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The presenter admitted that it would be a good idea for the improvement of current research, but it would require linking another database to the current dataset.

Norway pointed out the difficulty of producing statistics on migrants using their registers, because the personal identification number is only issued for resident population so in their case 3000 asylum seekers were not included in the database. Austria in turn shared that they include asylum seekers in their databases 2 months after the application is submitted.

The participants expressed interest further analysis that will be conducted by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office on the newly created database. The Swiss delegate noted some upcoming reports, but also emphasized that for the first few years; the research is led by University of Geneva and only after the database will be taken over by FSO for the regular statistical production.

D. Integration and descendants of migrants

Documentation: Papers submitted by Italy, Mexico and Slovenia.

Discussant: Scott McLeish (Canada)

Mexico National Institute of Statistics and Geography presented the analysis of sociodemographic and economic characteristics of its international immigrant population based on the census and intercensal survey. The presentation noted the transformation of Mexico from a transit and migrant-sending country into a destination country as well as compared the socioeconomic characteristics of accumulated immigration, recent immigration and the native population of Mexico. Interestingly, the presenter noted that unlike in many European countries, the immigrants in Mexico have usually higher educational status and labour participation than the native population, especially the immigrants with Mexican ancestors.

A representative of Slovenia Statistical Office spoke about the analysis of participation of children with migratory background in pre-school education in Slovenia, conducted based on the Central Register of Participants in Education and Central Population Register. Pre-school education is not compulsory in Slovenia but it is perceived as highly beneficial and is usually the cheapest option of childcare, hence the participation rate among Slovenian children is very high. The application process is, however, very complex and takes into account the permanence of residence, therefore the success in it may be an indicator of immigrant integration.

The discussant highlighted how both papers focused on children who are a significant group of immigrants. The children and young people are often the first ones in the household to speak the official language through participation in education and can often be a vector of integration for their families. It was suggested that further analysis of changes in migrant socioeconomic status using a longitudinal approach would be an appreciated continuation of presented studies. The representative of Mexico welcome such possibility but underlined that this would require basing the analysis on the administrative data and not census and intercensal survey. The presenter from Slovenia mentioned that the office has very limited time to do this type of analysis but encourage researchers to consider this idea.

The general discussion touched also upon the term of second or third generation of migrants, which is sometimes felt as derogatory and in fact not precise: the term “migrant” is linked to the way of entering the population so it applies to people born abroad. In case of children born to migrants in their destination country, they are children with foreign-born parents and, if applicable, descendants of migrants. They could become migrants if they leave the country when they were born.

E. Information on regional initiatives

Documentation: Papers submitted by the MEDSTAT IV Consortium and presentation of UNECE.

In this session, a representative of MEDSTAT IV Consortium presented recent progress and plans for development of migration statistics in the Mediterranean countries under the project. The project is providing a platform for development of data collection tools and their implementation under national statistical systems in a coordinated manner.

Afterwards, UNECE gave an overview of its new project supporting countries from Easter Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in improving the production of comparable statistics on international migration and remittances through household surveys. To this end, UNECE is going to develop and pilot test a harmonized survey module that can be included by the countries in their regular household surveys.

F. Asylum seekers and refugees

Documentation: Papers submitted by Eurostat, Netherlands and Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics.

Discussant: Stephan Marik-Lebeck (Austria)

A representative of Eurostat presented a proposal of classification of asylum seekers and refugees in the migration statistics and in the population statistics in general. According to the proposed approach, the refugees should be included in international migration stocks and flows based on the intention of stay from the country perspective. Asylum seekers who were not granted protection should not be included although it was acknowledged that this might be problematic – asylum seekers might not necessarily leave the country even if their application is rejected. It is also recommended that the vital events occurring to refugees and asylum seekers are included in statistics based on intended duration of stay in order to avoid inflating the vital statistics in places where asylum seekers stay temporarily.

Statistics Netherlands presented a longitudinal study of recent cohorts of refugees in the Netherlands. The study analysed various indicators of integration of refugees and asylum seekers that can be of high policy relevance, for example providing insights on how to provide housing and education for refugees.

Afterwards, a German delegate presented the German experience in quantifying the stock of foreigners seeking protection in Germany based on residence permit data. The presentation highlighted the challenges related to the quality and completeness of administrative data, in particular in a situation of operational difficulties of timely registration of large influx of asylum seekers. The speaker described also possibilities of linking them with survey data and emphasized the political sensitivity of the topic.

Finally, two representatives of the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics from UNHCR and Joint IDP Profiling Service presented the progress of work of the group on the international recommendations on refugee statistics and a technical report on IDP statistics, respectively. The two documents are being finalized and are soon to be sent for global consultations, followed by the submission to the UN Statistical Commission.

The session was dedicated to the statistical challenges related to a recent big increase of asylum seekers and refugees in UNECE countries and related high demand for reliable and timely data.

The two main issues related to:

- How to measure stocks and flows of asylum seekers and refugees and the specific phenomena occurring to this group
- How to include these in the population statistics:
    - What should be the basis of inclusion in the census, international migration statistics and vital events statsicis

G. New methods to estimate migration

Documentation: Papers submitted by Israel and Eurostat.

Discussant: Marcel Heiniger (Switzerland)

In this session, a representative of Israel described a new approach for measuring of emigration from Israel. The new method uses updated definitions of an emigrant and a returning migrant, allows higher frequency than annual and provides data on the stock of emigrants. In the old definitions, the stay abroad had to be uninterrupted for a year, but the new definitions allow for counting as emigrants the people who changed their residency to abroad but still periodically visit Israel. The new definitions are deemed by Israel more suitable to provide an accurate count of emigrants in the era of globalization where short visits to maintain family ties are much more common and do not imply a change of usual residence. Evaluating the accuracy of the new approach for estimation of the stock of Israelis abroad is challenging however, because many of them have dual citizenships and therefore in the registers or censuses of other countries they are not counted as foreign citizens. In the discussion following the presentation, it was emphasized that any change in the definitions should be undertaken with caution in order to preserve international comparability.

The next presentation of Eurostat was a follow-up on the work of the Task Force on Measuring Circular Migration that proposed a definition of circular migration and was invited by the CES Bureau to further propose a set of recommended tables. The contribution focused mostly on long-term circular migration, which although less common than the short-term one, is conceptually easier and is therefore a suitable starting point. The presenter proposed a set of tables on stocks and flows of circular migrants and outlined the next steps: testing of the tables, development of tables for short-term migration and the final refinement of concepts.

The discussant appreciated the practical approach that can lead to the implementation of concepts developed by the task force. It was also highlighted that as circular migration is intrinsically longitudinal, the countries with good administrative registers will be in a better position to start compiling proposed tables whereas in the case of countries relying on surveys and censuses, it may be more complicated.

H. Labour- and education-related migration

Documentation: Papers submitted by the United States and a presentation of CES Task Force on Measuring Labour Mobility.

Discussant: Nicky Rogers (United Kingdom)

The Chair of the CES Task Force on Measuring Labour Mobility presented the ongoing work of the Task Force, including findings of case studies in Israel, Italy, Mexico and Norway conducted for the final report. Furthermore, a representative from ILO gave an update of the ILO activities on labour migration statistics, covering the importance of sharing of good practices, setting international standards, harmonizing concepts and definitions. He emphasized the complementarity of the ILO Working Group, focusing on the concepts and definitions with the work of UNECE Task Force, focusing on practical examples.

The discussant summarized the presentation noting that labour mobility is a topic of growing policy interest, but it remains challenging to measure, since it cuts across economic and social statistical domains. As different data sources can be used to measure different components of labour mobility, there is an important question about the alignment of definitions used across these data sources. Another challenge is related to collecting data on irregular migrants – Israel shared an example of how they estimate this group through combining the data from border crossings, data from companies on foreign workers and daily workers from Palestine. From the policy perspective, it would be also important to study the differences in occupations of migrants before and after migration as well as what occupations are given up in the country of origin. That could inform about the skill gap in the country of origin and destination. ILO confirmed that they also trying to measure the skill mismatch through labour force surveys.

Finally, the U.S. Census Bureau presented on the impact of education related migration on international migration statistics in the United States. The speakers explored the recent patterns in education-related immigration as captured by different data sources and their implications on national and subnational population estimates. They described the challenges of reconciling different data sources, such as American Community Survey, Department of Homeland Security data and International Institute of Education data in light of differences of used definitions, coverage and the subject of measurement (multiple events for an individual versus individual moves). They also mentioned that in future it would be worth investigating the link between international student migration and labour migration.

The discussant emphasized that United Kingdom has difficulties to measure education-related migration as well, but mostly in terms of emigration, because it would require linkage between administrative data and border survey. Moreover, one of the conditions of counting students as out-migrating is their intention to leave permanently and students are often uncertain about their plans – as discovered in one study, the percentage of students intending to return was much higher than the percentage of those who actually returned.

The United States stated that so far, they are focusing their research on student immigration, so further work would need to be done on outmigration to obtain net migration. The Census Bureau uses the residual method to indirectly measure outmigration, but there are issues related to changes in student status.

Overall, it was concluded that harmonization of concepts and definitions is needed in order to improve comparability of data on migration for work and study. There is still no clarity on how well such migrants are captured by the existing data sources, but it seems that the stock and inflow of migrants is captured relatively well, but the outflow and commuter flows are still a challenge. Linkage of survey and administrative data seems to be a promising avenue for improvement of this type statistics.