

Concept note

Revision of the *Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration, Revision 1* (1998)

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Published in 1998, the *Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration, Revision 1* (hereafter called *1998 recommendations*) aims at providing practical guidance on how to collect the statistics on migrant stock and flows relevant to the study of international migration. It reviews the major types of data sources for international migration and suggests various ways in which they can be used to produce statistics, and proposes a way to integrate the different types of information available in countries through the use of a framework for data reporting.

The *1998 recommendations* is the second revision of international standards on statistics on international migration. The first set of standards were published in 1953 and focused on the collection of information on all arrivals to and departures from the country. They proposed an internationally agreed definition of permanent immigrants on the basis of intended duration of stay and served as an organizing framework for much of the subsequent documentation of international migration.

In 1976, the United Nations developed a new set of guidelines on international migration statistics. The salient features of the 1976 recommendations are the conceptual consistency with other components of statistical systems, notably international tourism statistics, and the identification of a number of additional categories of international population movements. The 1976 recommendations also proposed a large set of model tabulations, which were later criticized as “overly complex” (Kraly and Gnanasekaran, 1987; Simmons, 1987).

The three sets of international standards (1953, 1976 and 1998) were developed with the aim to improve international migration statistics. However, their adoption and use by countries has been slow. Questions raised by countries on the practicality of the *1998 recommendations*, as well as changes in migration patterns, border control, as well as methods in data collection in the last 20 years have clearly pointed to the need for undertaking a review and update of the *1998 recommendations*. In addition, the importance of accurate and disaggregated migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies has been further acknowledged by recent global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the final draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Recognizing the importance of having an updated set of recommendations on international migration statistics, the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its 49th session in 2018, requested the UN Expert Group on Migration Statistics to initiate their revision.

Why a revision is needed?

New migration patterns are emerging

More people than ever live in a different country than the one in which they were born. In addition to the increasing number of migrants, there are also new migration patterns: modern communication technologies and the increased convenience of travel have made temporary and circular migration easier than ever; and free movements within a region raise new measurement challenges even for countries with relatively developed statistical systems.

Those new migration patterns were not taken into consideration in the *1998 recommendations*. Grounded on the concept of country of usual residence, the *1998 recommendations* only defined long- and short-term migrants. Free movements among countries and the resulting measurement challenges for statistical systems were not addressed in the recommendations.

A clear linkage to data needs for policymaking is necessary

The formulation of sound policies demands solid data and balanced research using them. To provide guidance on the collection and use of data, it is important to (a) identify migration policies that are relevant to countries and (b) assess data required to inform those policies.

Many countries have migration policy briefs that reflect important policy concerns related to international migration and those concerns should be used to provide insights on which data are needed. At the global level, two major initiatives – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – pointed to policy areas that are important both at the global and national level.

The *1998 recommendations* approach migration data collection from a demographic point of view, focusing on the size and characteristics of different types of migration and non-migration flows across countries. The publication also has a very light coverage of data on migrant stocks. The revision should consider incorporating policy priorities at national and international level and identifying data required to respond to policies and to support policy review and evaluation.

Incorporating new developments in methodologies and international standards

In the past 20 years, great progress has been made on data collection, compilation and dissemination, to produce more accurate, timely and disaggregated data on migration. This includes more and better use of administrative data, integration of multiple data sources and leveraging new data sources such as social media, mobile phone and satellite imagery.

Meanwhile there has been new international standards on areas related to international migration¹, which should be incorporated in the revision.

¹ International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics, approved the UN Statistical Commission in 2017; Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, rev. 3 (2014).

Questions for the experts, please provide your suggestions for the following questions:

1. In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, what would be other reasons for revising the P&R.
2. What new topics/areas should be added. If possible, please provide a brief note for each topic you believe should be included.
3. Do you have any suggestions for the existing document?
 - a. What elements (chapters/sections) need to be revised substantially, please provide also a brief explanation on the reasons behind your proposal?
 - b. Any specific elements (chapters/sections) in the current recommendations are not necessary?
 - c. Any suggestions for the general structure of the current document?

Draft timeline for the revision

- December 2018 – annotated outline for the revision
- June/July 2019 – first Expert Group Meeting on the revision of the *1998 Recommendations*
- June/July 2020 – first draft of the revision and the second Expert Group Meeting on the revision of the *1998 Recommendations*
- Summer 2021 – final draft of the revision