Distr.: General
09 November 2018

Original: English

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Migration Statistics

Work Session on Migration Statistics
Geneva, 24-26 October 2018
Item 9 of the provisional agenda
Adoption of the meeting report

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 24–26 October 2018 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Egypt, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Luxembourg, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, State of Palestine, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat and the Joint Research Centre (JRC). The International Labour Organization (ILO), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), Eurasian Economic Commission, the MEDSTAT IV Consortium, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNICEF Regional Office for ECA, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) and GIZ: German Development Organization were also represented. Experts from the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and 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. Mrs. Nicola Rogers from the United Kingdom was elected as Chair of the meeting.

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

a. Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics
b. Integration of data from censuses, administrative sources and surveys for measuring migration
c. Big data and migration
d. Labour migration
e. Asylum seekers and refugees
f. Global recommendations on migration statistics

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 emphasised the need for national statistical offices to follow up on the recently adopted methodological guidance and reports in migration statistics, such as those on data integration and on measuring international labour mobility.

7. The meeting confirmed that the next Work Session on Migration Statistics is scheduled to take place on 29-31 October 2019. The following topics were suggested for discussion in the 2019 Work Session:

a) Definitions of population and migration
b) Data integration for measuring migration
c) Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics
d) Use of administrative data for migration statistics
e) New methodologies and tools for measuring migration
f) Communication and use of migration statistics
g) Data exchange and mirror statistics
h) Measuring emigrants and hard-to-reach groups of migrants

IV. Adoption of the report of the meeting

7. A short report was adopted during the closing session.

8. A summary of the discussion in the substantive sessions of the meeting was prepared by the secretariat, and is attached below in an annex to this report.

[1] https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47809

Annex

English

Summary of the main issues discussed at the substantive sessions

A. Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics

1. The session was based on presentations by Germany, Spain, Eurostat and the UNECE Task Force on Longitudinal data for Migration Statistics.

2. Germany outlined the longitudinal data applications of the Central Register of Foreigners, tracking the movement and retention of migrants since 2007. It was observed that after being granted a permit people tended to move to more urban areas, and there was a general movement of foreigners from east to west. Results from the study are very promising, however analysis is hindered by a lack of available variables – a common issue with databases developed for administrative rather than statistical purposes.

3. The expert from Spain described the process of measuring the duration of stay for migratory episodes using the population register, Padron. Discussion drew attention to the fact that registers, while extremely valuable, present challenges for the production of migration statistics, for example, the measurement of emigration. Techniques to manage this include the approach taken in Spain where foreigners in the register are considered to have an 'expiry date': if they neither voluntarily deregister nor show any 'signs of life' within a defined period, they are removed from the register. Other steps include removal of records when new residents are identified in a dwelling that was formerly occupied, on the assumption that the previous residents have departed. It was also noted during discussion, however, that approaches based on 'signs of life' depend upon the ability to access and link administrative data sources, which is forbidden in some countries.

4. Eurostat presented proposed tables for measuring circular migration, using the recently established definitions, and test data from three countries. While the stocks of circular migrants were very low, it was stressed that because of the nature of this type of migration, circular migrants are expected to make up a greater proportion of the flows of migrants. Conversation concerned the benefits of macrodata exchange using established Eurostat and UNECE platforms, while noting that the exchange of microdata would be much more complex to engineer due to legal constraints.

5. The chair of the UNECE Task Force on the Use of Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics presented the proposed outline of the work that is to be undertaken by the group, and solicited the views of participants on some key points. These included the challenges countries have faced in attempting to use longitudinal data; indicators of interest for policy purposes; and how statistical offices could communicate results to a variety of stakeholders, not only those in the statistical or research communities. A question was asked about longitudinal panel surveys, and the expert responded that while there were definite advantages, the high cost and potential for panel attrition has meant that most countries prefer to base longitudinal studies on registers or administrative data.

B. Integration of data from censuses, administrative sources and surveys for measuring migration

6. Discussion was based on papers submitted by Canada, Latvia, UK, USA, Eurostat and Moscow State University.

7. Canada presented a feasibility study to examine replacing the Census questions on immigrant status and year of immigration with linked administrative records. This is being considered for the 2021 Census, with the aim of reducing respondent burden and improving data quality. The comparison between 2016 census data and administrative data on the single year of immigration showed some differences for selected years. Census responses are subject to recall errors, particularly for long-term immigrants, while the administrative records are of weaker quality for immigrants arriving before 1980, and are not available from before 1952. This project could serve to improve data quality overall, but could also result in a break in series, as the administrative data responses would reflect recorded rather than perceived values.

8. Latvia presented research aimed at estimating the number and characteristics of young emigrants using the population register, administrative data, and surveys. There are many more young emigrants than immigrants in Latvia. While some emigrants are identified in the population register, much of the data are modelled based on the calculated probability that the person remains in Latvia. A large scale external migration survey was launched in 2017, and is expected to provide improved statistics on emigration in the future.

9. The UK described the collection of migration data, which in the past was largely based on surveys, making it difficult to measure emigration and formulate small area statistics. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is now working more closely with other agencies, facilitated in part by the passing of the *Digital Economy Act* (2017), which allows for greater data sharing between departments. The ONS is now integrating more data from new and existing administrative sources, using unique ID numbers where possible. However, challenges remain with the measurement of emigration, particularly for UK citizens and nationals of EU/EEA countries.

10. The United States presented the work done to estimate the stock of refugees and asylum seekers using a logistic regression model. The model uses administrative data from the Legal Permanent Resident file, which can identify refugees and asylees, integrated with data from the American Community Survey. The model predicts the odds of whether a given individual is a refugee / asylee, dependent on their sex, marital status, clustered country of birth, age and year of entry. While the model estimated a stock of refugees / asylees in line with expectations, there were some problems caused by inconsistent application of refugee status on the LPR for some years and/or countries of birth.

11. Eurostat presented the results of an analysis of the differences between residence permits and immigration data for measuring stocks and flows of migrants in EU statistics. In most countries, the estimates are higher when using immigration statistics. Eurostat will work with providers of both immigration and residence permits data to determine the reasons for difference. Discussion concerned the need to carefully communicate the results where there are multiple sources showing discrepancies when measuring similar concepts.

12. The expert from Moscow State University reviewed existing and potential sources of data on international migration in Russia, in relation to migrant flows and stocks, as well as issues such as health of migrants, crime, economic activity and impact on demographic processes. The available statistics do not support the negative public perception / media depiction of migrants. For the Labour Force Survey, Rosstat is working on expanding the form and tailoring sample selection processes to better collect information on migrants. The comparability of statistics in Russia has been impacted by administrative changes affecting the residence registration system, and the increased cost of work permits which has led to more foreigners failing to formally register.

13. In the discussion following this session, countries were asked how they explain quality and coverage differences to users, including adjustments to final results. Canada noted that it was important to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of different sources, and that after data integration data quality must be assessed. Communicating with the media is particularly challenging, because often complex concepts must be explained in simple terms in a limited time. Some users will accept any statistics on face value, while others require detailed explanatory notes and metadata. The challenge is to strike the balance between providing the necessary caveats, while still ensuring that statistics are accessible and easy to understand for the public.

C. Big data and migration

14. Discussion was based on the invited talk from Emilio Zagheni, Director of the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, and papers submitted by Italy, and the European Commission Joint Research Centre.

15. Mr Zagheni described the work of the Max Planck Institute in using big data sources such as Facebook and Twitter to measure migration. Stocks of ex-pats in the USA were estimated using Facebook advertising data, and compared with the American Community Survey (ACS) to account for biases in the Facebook data. Social media data sources were also used to estimate cultural assimilation of migrants, by comparing a migrant's stated interests to typical interests of the country's citizens.

16. Italy described the estimation of international migration at a subnational scale using residence permit data, facilitated by the standardization of foreign birthplace names.

17. Two presentations were delivered by the European Commission Joint Research Centre (ECJRC) regarding the challenges and possibilities of big data for migration statistics. For example, they used aggregated data from Facebook to measure the number of Venezuelan ex-pats in Spain, to measure the recent surge in migration faster than official statistics. Other examples included measuring skilled migrants in Germany using LinkedIn data, and using Sabre data on airline passenger trips to estimate trends in migration flows.

18. The meeting agreed that these data sources could not replace official statistics. However, there was discussion on big data as a source of validation, its potential use in improving timeliness of statistics, and its use in measuring concepts or geographic areas that are not covered by official statistics. This was balanced by the risks of lack of control of data sources, and lack of control or even knowledge of the underlying concepts, definitions and methods. For example, Facebook would not disclose their

definition of an ‘ex-pat’ to the ECJRC. Additionally, participants were concerned about the possibility of fake social media accounts or other data manipulation; users’ disregard for data quality; and the associated potential for decision makers to divert funding from official statistics into big data.

D. Labour migration

19. Discussion was based on papers submitted by the USA, ILO, and the UNECE Task Force on Measuring International Labour Mobility.

20. USA described the measurement of labour migration to the United States, from a variety of survey and administrative sources. While stock measures of the foreign-born and naturalized populations derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS) were comparable, flow measures varied greatly depending on the source, and understanding the underlying concepts is critical to interpreting the results.

21. The UNECE Task Force on Measuring Labour Mobility was established in October 2015. The Task Force worked in conjunction with the ILO’s Working Group on Labour Migration Statistics: while the ILO Working Group focused on the concepts and definitions, the UNECE Task Force focused on countries’ practices in the compilation of international labour mobility statistics. The Task Force objectives were to improve data comparability and coordination of work, enhance accessibility of existing information and fill in the data gaps. UNECE gave an update on the current status of the report, which is almost finalized and is expected to be published in late 2018. The full draft of the Task Force report is available at the website of the meeting.

22. The ILO Working Group developed Guidelines concerning statistics of international labour migration, which were adopted at the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS, October 2018). ILO gave a presentation on the new guidelines, which aim to improve the measurement and subsequent protection of international migrant workers. Discussion concerned the need to harmonize the definitions and classifications used across the international system, in order to avoid confusion between concepts.

E. Asylum Seekers and Refugees

23. Discussion was based on papers submitted by Germany and the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS).

24. Germany gave a presentation on measuring the stocks of foreigners seeking humanitarian protection, using the Central Register of Foreigners. The expert noted that much of the public debate concerns the inflow of asylum seekers while ignoring the outflows (through emigration or naturalization), and that for this reason they preferred to highlight the stock figures. There was substantial discussion on issues such as:

a. Quality of data collected during the influx of asylum seekers in 2015: the system was overburdened and registrations were delayed, or in some cases duplicates were introduced

b. The process of fingerprint scanning, which now occurs upon registration and can be cross-referenced to avoid duplication

c. People with a status of 'protection denied': while these people are obliged to leave, many remain on the register and are still residing in Germany with a legal status of 'deportation suspended'

25. The expert from EGRIS informed the meeting on the status of the Group with representatives from more than 45 countries, which is producing international recommendations on refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) statistics. Against a backdrop of rapid increases in the numbers of refugees and IDPs, there remain many challenges in data collection, including limited integration into statistical systems, inconsistent terminology, lack of coordination and lack of technical capacity. Discussion concerned the implementation of the recommendations by countries, and mechanisms for follow-up to ensure that action is taken.

F. Global recommendations on migration statistics

26. Discussion was based on the paper submitted by the UN Statistics Division regarding the update to the 1998 UN Recommendations on Migration Statistics.

27. UNSD outlined the reasons to review the 1998 Recommendations, including the changes in migration patterns over the past 20 years, greater availability of alternative data sources and methods, and the need for definitions covering both stock and flow measures of migration. The 1998 recommendations were sometimes viewed as impractical and too conceptual, and were not used in many countries.

28. Participants agreed that there was a need to review the Recommendations, and specifically noted the need for greater flexibility around the definition of usual residence and how it applies to migration statistics.