The Impact of COVID-19 on Net International Migration Estimates in the United States

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US Migration Policy Changes Resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic (March 2020-Onwards)

• Border closures
  • Closure of US land borders with Mexico and Canada, except for commerce and essential travel (initially implemented March 21, extended in July)
  • Flight restrictions from China (February) and European Union (March), for example
    • 98% reduction in international flight traffic in April

• Visa restrictions
  • Visa issuing offices closed outside the United States, greatly reducing number of approved visas (March 20, 2020)

• Executive Orders
  • Ban travel of non-residents from certain countries
  • “Pausing” legal immigration (issuance of green cards, family based visas) (April 22, 2020, extended to the end of year)
    • Expanded to include most forms of legal migration, especially employment-based (H1B)

• Other
  • US citizens/legal residents living abroad encouraged to return for fear of border closures (March 2020)
Measurement

• The Population Estimates Program uses American Community Survey (ACS) data on residence one year ago to produce net international migration (NIM) estimates
  • The Vintage 2020 estimates will use 2019 ACS data, which would not measure the impact of COVID-19

• Two tasks to measure impact of COVID-19 on NIM
  • Develop method to make adjustment to NIM
    • Run normal production to develop NIM estimates, and then:
      A. Do nothing
      B. Set total monthly NIM to 1/2 for March, "0" for April-June using basic assumption of zero net migration gain/loss
      C. Adjust total NIM based on other data sources
      D. Adjust individual NIM sub-components based on other data sources
      E. Combination of B-D
  • Utilize more up-to-date data sources (March-June 2020)
    • Limited availability at this time
Adjustment Methods/Data Sources

• Total NIM
  • Flight data adjustment based on past historical relationship of net passenger movement and NIM
    (unsuccessful)

• Foreign-Born Immigration
  • Visas issued abroad; I-94 arrival data
    • Immigration decreased significantly

• Foreign-Born Emigration
  • Canadian flight data and Mexican border data
    • Emigration decreased significantly

• Net Native Migration
  • Administrative data on permanent and temporary migrants to Canada from the US; US flight data
    • Suggest there was not a net loss (large return in March, some net outflow from April-June)

• Puerto Rico
  • Flight data to/from Puerto Rico and mainland US (March-June “observed” vs “expected”)
    • Reduced net outmigration from Puerto Rico
NIM Adjustment Scenarios

• Data were limited for making adjustments
  • Special tabulations from US Bureau of Transportation Statistics, US Office of Immigration Statistics, Statistics Canada

• Tried multiple methods/scenarios
  • Flight data could not be used to adjust total NIM

• General assumptions
  • Very likely that migration declined in March 2020 and remained low during the last quarter (April-June) of “Estimates Year” 2020 (near net “0”)

• Averaged estimates derived from eight different 2020 NIM series based on varying assumptions applied to March-June 2020.
  • First four scenarios assume “0” net migration for total NIM, or part of NIM, while last four adjust individual subcomponents of NIM
    • “0” net for April-June
    • ½ NIM for March
    • 10% monthly levels for sub-components (April-June)
    • Different estimates for Puerto Rico (based on ratio of observed-to-expected net passenger flights)
    • Adjustment for net native return in March
Results/Questions

• Range of 87,000 between high and low estimates
• Changing adjustment factors (.05 or .15) for scenarios had little impact on NIM estimates (+/- 5,000)
• COVID-19 adjustments decreased EY2020 NIM by 24%
  • Essentially the same as setting NIM to “0” for 3 months
• Net native migration a big mystery
  • Return of US Citizens in March, potential departures in April-June?
• Seasonality of migration is not taken into account in NIM estimates
• We will potentially find out the answers once more data become available in coming months/years (OIS/2020 and 2021 ACS/Puerto Rico Community Survey, Internal Revenue Service tax returns, etc.)
Appendix: Figures
Flight Data: Inbound and Outbound Passengers

In 2020, inbound and outbound passenger totals fall well below 2019 levels:

- Higher-than-expected net inflow for Feb and Mar (previous slide), but both inbound and outbound passengers declined for those months
- Outbound passengers declining faster than inbound passengers

![Graph showing the number of inbound and outbound passengers from January to December 2020, with data sources cited.](chart.png)

Data Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers
BTS Net Air Passenger Travel

Data Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers; US Census Bureau, Population Division, V2019 Population Estimates

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Visas Issued Overseas and Foreign-Born Immigration

- Bureau of Consular Affairs began reporting monthly numbers in March 2017
- Seasonal patterns consistent before March 2020

Data Source: Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs Visa Statistics
Adjust Foreign-Born Emigration: Country Data

Travelers to Mexico by Land

- Travelers in Apr 2020 fell to 41% of Apr 2019 levels.

Canadian Citizens Returning to Canada from US by Air

- Jun 2020 fell to 9% of the average of Jun 2018 and Jun 2019 levels.

Data Source: Mexican Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), Border Traveler Survey (EVF); Statistics Canada, Border Enumeration from Primary Information Kiosks

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Adjust Net US-Born Migration: Country Data

**Permanent Immigration to Canada by Country of Birth**

- 2019 US Born
- 2019 Other Foreign Born
- 2020 US Born
- 2020 Other Foreign Born

**Net Temporary Migration to Canada (US Born Only)**

- 2018
- 2019
- 2020

More US-born temporary migrants were leaving Canada than entering.

Data Source: Statistics Canada; Immigration, Refugees & Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Airline Passenger Data