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CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Joint ECE-EUROSTAT work session  
on Migration Statistics\*  
(Geneva, 8-10 May 2000)

Topic 4

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN DEFINING AND COUNTING  
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATIONS IN POPULATION REGISTERS.

Summary

Invited paper by Statistics Norway<sup>1/</sup>

1. The aim of the paper is to describe the possibilities, limitations and challenges that producers of statistics are faced with in a country where the production of migration statistics is based on a central population register. New developments and tendencies seen in the last 10 years will be in focus. The paper will concentrate on the situation in Norway, with a few references to some other register countries.

Overview of the total process leading to migration statistics

2. In the system for producing migration statistics the national statistical institute (NSI) is only one element. The other elements are the immigration authorities and the population registration system.

3. The main role of the Norwegian immigration authorities in connection with official migration statistics is to grant residence permits to non-

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1/ Prepared by Kåre Vassenden and Aslaug Hurlen Foss.

\* The documentation for this work session will be processed as for seminars.

Nordic citizens who qualify and do not have any from before. Another role of the immigration authorities is to collect information about migrants. Some of this information will finally end up in the official statistics.

4. The population registration system consists of local population registries and the Office of the National Registrar in the Directorate of Taxes. The role of the population registration system is to register persons as immigrants according to the Population Registration Act. New immigrants are assigned a National Personal Identification Number (PIN). The Office of the National Registrar runs the Central Population Register (CPR). It comprises everyone who was resident of Norway in the 1960 Census and from 1 October 1964. Statistics Norway receives updates from the CPR every night.

5. The role of Statistics Norway is to process and count migration transactions and produce statistics with the relevant variables.

#### **Increased efforts to register emigrants**

6. During the 1990s the population registration system adopted a new policy towards persons who do not report their change of address. It was decided that the local population registries should spend 25 per cent of their time actively looking for cases of incorrect residence registration. This work included signing agreements with other public institutions to obtain information, and to write letters to the persons involved. The local registries were given authority to correct the address if it was not correct. Persons who had left the country are registered as emigrants. This kind of work is called "value-oriented population registration" in Norway and "residence control" in Sweden.

7. One important contribution to this development came from Statistics Norway. In 1993 Statistics Norway sent to the Office of the National Registrar 8,300 PINs belonging to foreigners who were not found at their current address in an education survey conducted in 1991. The result was that around 3,000 were registered as emigrated. In the statistics the result of this work is seen as unusually high figures for emigration in 1993. In reality these emigrations had taken place during the previous years.

8. In the autumn of 1999 Statistics Norway conducted a new survey of education among immigrants. More than 92,000 questionnaires were sent out, and about 8,500 were returned because the person was not found at the current address, and out of them at least 2,300 have probably emigrated without giving notice. The percentage of returned questionnaires went down from 18 per cent in 1991 to nine in 1999, so in that way we can see progress. Statistics Norway is going to hand over the PINs of these persons to the Office of the National Registrar during the spring of 2000.

**The new CPR**

9. In 1995 the local population registries were connected on-line to a new CPR. Statistics Norway is one of the few direct receivers of data from the new CPR. The change was definitely a major step forward. Timeliness improved, and Statistics Norway received more and better variables. First of all the transactions were improved, with more differentiated categories of change, and generally the chronology of the transactions became very good.

**A new population statistics system**

10. As a consequence of the new CPR, Statistics Norway started to establish a new population statistics system. This coincided with the decision to change Statistics Norway's hardware and software from mainframe to Unix and client/server. The new population statistics system has been operational since 1999.

11. The new principles of data supply from the CPR to Statistics Norway can be described in this way: A load register (a complete copy of the CPR on a certain date) should be supplied only once. This register (called the Population Table) should be updated by the transactions. Existing information relevant for the production of statistics must be taken from the updated stock. Statistics Norway generally gets all the data contained and created in the population registration system. Statistics Norway must process the raw data itself, and does not receive processed data.

12. The reports on migration are electronically transferred each night from the CPR to Statistics Norway, where they are stored. The Population Table is updated once a month with the stored transactions (in the future it will be every week). Migration statistics are produced from a file extracted from the transaction table, which in advance is supplied with some stock data from the Population Table.

**Handling delays**

13. A period of waiting is needed after the reference date or period, during which the events can be registered. Statistics Norway waits two months for late transactions before producing the final statistics about migration. Nevertheless, we still receive transactions which concern migrations that occurred many years earlier. In recent years Statistics Norway has observed an increase in transactions with an old date of event. Until 1997 the official migration figures were the migrations which were recorded during the actual year and occurred that year or the year before. In 1998 we changed migration statistics to consist of all reports of migrations reported during a given year regardless of when the event occurred. This means we now include all the migrations, but some in the wrong period. Statistics Denmark handles late reports on migration in the same way.

## Conclusions

14. One important feature of a register system as described here is that a lot of persons are involved in the work of identifying migrations, collecting information about the migrants and increasing the quality. These resources are extremely valuable for the NSI. In such a system migration statistics reflect the Norwegian authorities' view of who the migrants are.

15. The NSI has a limited influence over all the elements of this system, but it has never been discussed in Statistics Norway to renounce all these external resources and establish a separate tailor-made system for migration statistics.

16. Another feature is the degree of integration between migration statistics and other population statistics (and other statistics on individuals, too). Decisions about migration statistics must always take account of the whole population statistics system.

17. One conclusion from the paper is that the dates of migration that are used to compile statistics have a lot of influence on the final statistics. Such factors are difficult to harmonise on an international level.

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