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English only

Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Online Meetings on Migration Statistics

27-29 October 2020

Report of the 2020 Online Meetings on Migration Statistics:

- **Measuring migration and remittances in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (27 October)**
- **Measuring migration at times of the pandemic (28-29 October)**

Note by the Secretariat

I. Attendance

1. The online event was attended by representatives of the following countries: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, and Uzbekistan. Eurasian Economic Commission, European Commission - Eurostat, CIS-Stat, Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) were also represented.

II. Organization of the meetings

2. The event included two meetings. The first meeting, on 27 November, focused on countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA), and included substantive sessions on the following topics:

- a. Migration and remittances in the pandemic: overview of the situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia;

- b. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the measurement of migration and of remittances;
 - c. Use of administrative data in producing migration statistics.
- 3. The second meeting, on 28-29 November, focused mainly on the measurement of migration and remittances at the times of the Covid-19 pandemic in the whole UNECE region. The following substantive topics were discussed:
 - a. Survey on measuring migration and remittances in the pandemic;
 - b. Measuring migration at times of the pandemic;
 - c. Impact of the pandemic on foreign population, refugees, and internal migration;
 - d. Use of new sources for measuring migration and mobility;
 - e. Updated on United Nations activities in the field of migration statistics.
- 4. Ms. Rebecca Briggs from the United Kingdom was elected as Chair of the meeting.
- 5. The following participants acted as discussants: for item (d) Olivia Blum (Israel); for item (e) Julien Bérard-Chagnon (Canada).
- 6. Documents and slides presented at the meetings are available at [the UNECE web site](#).
- 7. The meetings were supported financially from the project “Enhancing coherence and integration of economic and social statistics in support of the implementation of 2008 SNA” (grant TF0A4764) of the World Bank’s ECASTAT programme.

III. Summary of proceedings

- 8. This section presents a summary of the key observations and conclusions of the online meetings.

A. Migration and remittances in the pandemic: overview of the situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

- 9. The representative of CIS-Stat gave a presentation on the current situation regarding data on migration and remittances in countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The national statistical offices of CIS countries have been adapting to the pandemic circumstances employing online methods to collect the data and continue the work. The results show that the pandemic has affected significantly the size of migration and the migration flows. In April 2020 the immigrants from CIS countries to Russia were reduced by half compared to April 2019. Similarly, the number of work permits for non-Russian residents dropped by half in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the first quarter, and more than 4 times compared to the same quarter last year. The average amount of remittances that were sent back home from the CIS countries with the largest number of immigrants (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) also decreased.
- 10. A UNECE consultant presented the main results of a survey on migration and remittances measurement in the pandemic, carried out in October 2020. Twenty five countries took part in the survey through an online platform. The key research areas covered in the survey included data sources used, methods of data collection, demand and supply of data on the COVID-19 impact, difficulties faced and solutions applied.
- 11. The data was collected mostly without significant delays and on schedule – both through administrative sources and surveys, but the quality of data raised concerns. The

quality of administrative data was affected mainly by the measures related to mobility and by the limited access to the public buildings.

12. As with regard to survey data collection, 17 out of 25 countries undertook surveys during the pandemic period, albeit almost half of them remotely. Not all countries were ready to collect data remotely. The most popular remote method was telephone interviews. The challenge was not related to connection problems but rather to adjustment of the survey questionnaires to telephone interviews. Countries did not mention Zoom and Skype under remote methods, although these social media were available among the response options on remote methods. Five EECCA countries conducted surveys during this period. Kazakhstan used Government online platform for the electronic data collection.

13. Adjustments in the data collection procedure – remote survey taking – appeared not always successful and require further consideration. Among the highlighted challenges were equipment, software, respondent skills, connectivity, and staff/interviewers skills. Collection of survey data was associated with higher non-response rates and limited skills of respondents to work with online questionnaires. Expertise on methodology and new data sources was pointed out as the most acute challenge.

14. In general, the impact of COVID-19 on migration/migrants was not yet addressed by most UNECE countries' statistical offices with few exceptions. Hungary and Republic of Moldova developed new COVID-19 impact questionnaires. Luxembourg and Republic of Moldova added COVID-19 related questions to the standard questionnaire, e.g. on changes in income level, living conditions and employment status. Hungary, Republic of Moldova and United States reported changing the data collection mode.

15. More than half of the countries (57%) do not plan special surveys for future data collection on COVID-19 impact on migration. The remaining countries plan using either remote methods (mostly telephone and online surveys) or administrative data sources.

16. The use of the harmonised module on migration and remittances developed for EECCA countries was recommended in the context of the pandemic. Russian Federation has partly integrated the module in their LFS and Kazakhstan plans to use it after their survey adaptation to COVID-19.

B. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the measurement of migration and of remittances

17. Sources of migration statistics in Ukraine include administrative data (e.g. place of residence registration and withdrawal of residency), population census, and sample household surveys and special surveys. In 2008, 2012 and 2017, a sample survey of population on labour migration was conducted (as a module to the labour force survey). Among the challenges mentioned were the lack of data consistency from different sources and limited access to data from other countries. There is a need for further work on criteria for a clear statistical classification of participants in migration processes. Ukraine plans to conduct a labour force survey module on labour migration in 2022. Migration issues will be also part of the next census.

C. Use of administrative data in producing migration statistics

18. Discussion covered the importance of carrying out consistency checks on data coming from different sources: for example to check whether individuals recorded in a border management information system can also be located in the State Population Register or in the data set of the Migration Service. Even if aggregate numbers are similar, there may be discrepancies in the actual individuals recorded in the different sources. Methods should be

applied to determine the size and nature of such discrepancies. In Armenia the ability to conduct such checks is still being developed. An initial attempt has looked at the population register and stocks and flows of migrants as identified by the border information system, attempting to identify individuals in both sources. So far 96% of these checks have been successful. A sample survey is also used to find out if people are missing from registers.

19. It was noted that the possibilities for linkage between big data sources could offer the opportunity to discern the educational level of migrants, for example by combining administrative and survey data with population register data through matching.

20. Big data may also provide means of showing age-sex structure at sub-national level, as well as estimating internal migration and immigration by region. Border crossing data lets them know number but not distribution within country. Big Data also expected to make these estimates much more timely, not a full year after.

21. In Armenia, there is a long-term project to improve population and migration statistics through the population register; while the projects with big data are expected to yield results in the short term.

22. In Belarus, the state bodies that provide information (on education, marital status, citizenship) guarantee the quality of the data. Belstat is not authorised to check the individual level records.

23. With regard to the Russian Federation, it was noted that immigration data are very important for other countries in the region to understand their emigration. Recently there was a situation in which prolongation of residency permits would be recorded administratively as 'immigration' but this was artificial, not a true increase because the people were already there. Some difficulties remain in how this information is received. They get it on paper and can't yet 'stabilise the system', but are hoping that digital transformation will speed up the changes to improve it. The Russian Ministry of interior has issued a call to speed up the move to modern methods. In 2021-2022 there will be a project, as part of an attempt to implement full transformation by 2023.

24. In Tajikistan, administrative data were used to initially fill-in census on tablets and online, in collaboration with other administrative agencies. With regard to the internet census, preliminary results suggest that this covered 15-16% of households.

D. Survey on measuring migration and remittances in the pandemic

25. No countries reported either gathering data or recruiting respondents via social media. Neither did any country in the survey report that they are conducting survey interviews by Skype, Zoom or similar online platforms.

26. The discussion included the topic of connectivity, which was reported by many countries as one of the greatest barriers to gathering information. This could relate to either or both of the unreachability of respondents and limitations in the technological resources available to NSOs.

E. Measuring migration at times of the pandemic

27. Presentations in the session showcased the innovative approaches countries are taking to respond to the demand for nearly real-time data on migration and mobility in the context of rapidly changing migration policies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The countries represented in the session shared experiences using new up-to-date administrative data sources and statistical modelling techniques to overcome time lags in traditional administrative and survey data sources.

28. Discussion during the session highlighted the common challenges countries are facing. Use of new and non-traditional data sources relies on strong partnerships across government agencies and, in the case of Canada and United States, international cooperation. In the rapidly changing context of COVID-19, frequent communication with data suppliers is necessary to ensure ongoing access to and appropriate use of data, as well as accurate interpretation of estimates. As COVID travel and immigration restrictions blur the lines between mobility and migration, countries have also had to reconsider traditional assumptions that inform the production and interpretation of migration statistics and adapt measures to accurately capture and classify new types of migrants. Discussion suggested that the gap between migrant intentions and outcomes may be wider during the pandemic and that data sources that measure potential migration such as border crossings and visas should be interpreted through this lens. Questions around how to treat tourists and seasonal workers who have remained in countries due to the pandemic and the associated policy implications were also raised. Presenters and discussant emphasized the importance of clearly communicating limitations and revising estimates in the future when additional data become available.

29. Despite the challenges, the pandemic has also driven innovation that will benefit the production of migration statistics in the long run. The countries represented have seized opportunities to use non-traditional data sources, establish partnerships with new data suppliers, implement technological advancements, and improve estimation models to produce timely and accurate migration statistics.

30. The discussant Olivia Blum (Israel) noted that the pandemic brought some challenges, including: ad-hoc migration regulations and policies; economic decline for unknown period of time; expected social change that will influence migration and production of migration statistics. However, there are also a number of opportunities, including: using non-traditional data sources; establishing new relationships with new data suppliers; adopting technological developments; improving and changing models to estimate migration; providing flash estimates and “now-casting” on the day after.

F. Impact of the pandemic on foreign population, refugees, and internal migration statistics

31. The countries shared experience on how their national agencies are adapting to the pandemic by producing and releasing improved data and new analyses. The user needs for migration statistics is increasing. Main emerging needs are for new content (registration or residence data) and very timely data.

32. In order to address these emerging needs, Slovenia looked at a direct measure of permanent versus temporary residence that suggested a marked increase in temporary residence registrations. This experience highlighted the importance of the way the residence data is collected and its quality. The imposed restrictions led to more registrations of residency, including temporary residency which increased the quality of this data. An interesting observation was made on return migration during the pandemic and the need to study it further.

33. Poland and the United Kingdom showed examples of strengthening their relationships with key national partners from data collection to data release. The advantage of using admin sources, i.e. the increased timeliness was visible in the both countries. In the case of Poland, the availability of common identifiers helped with integrating the information across the nine registers. They assessed the quality of the registers, e.g. by measuring inconsistency for same variable information between registers and against the most reliable register. The United Kingdom integrated sources with potentially different concepts. Although the lack of a

common identifier made the linking challenging, they were still able to produce relevant and useful data.

34. The pandemic has triggered more pressing demands for quick and more disaggregated data. To address them statisticians are faced with trade-offs between timeliness and accuracy, and data and confidentiality/privacy. The presenters used words such as provisional, pilot or experimental approach to describe the quick statistics produced in relation to the COVID-19 crisis. This careful communication to the users was noted as a good practice and additional studies on how to inform users on data quality were recommended.

35. Analysis by age groups and gender in Poland and Canada allowed to see how the structure of the foreign population changes. In Poland, for example, the number of employed females increased in the share of employed foreign population. Poland also was able to disaggregate the data on employment status of foreign population by economic sectors and Canada looked at regional breakdown for major provinces.

36. Canada found that immigrants are more likely to be affected by the pandemic in several ways. Recent immigrants were more likely than Canadian-born workers to move out of employment during contraction, mainly because of their shorter job tenure and over-representation in lower-wage jobs. More broadly, recent immigrants often have difficulty transferring their educational and job qualifications to the labour market and finding steady, good paying jobs. In the initial months of recovery, recent immigrants, particularly women, had lower rates of transition from non-employment into employment than their Canadian-born counterparts.

37. Canada mentioned the huge impact of COVID-19 on the conduct of the LFS, and in particular on sample weight for immigrants received because of change of sample size.

38. The United Kingdom foresees an examination of the COVID-19 impact on vulnerable persons using a longitudinal perspective. As a result of the COVID-19 measures, the country saw a reduction in the asylums applications and no resettlement activities. This will be critical in the development on the study of the cohorts as it will have impact of the linkage, e.g. delays in registration of some groups by the administrative system. In assessing linkage biases (e.g. coming from different naming conventions), United Kingdom is looking at linkage quality, the representativeness of the linked data and at the establishment of threshold at which linked data to be considered acceptable. The viability of each cohort is very much relying on the linkage quality. They seek to minimise linkage failure for example through using family members to identify the individuals in the data sources.

G. Use of new sources for measuring migration and mobility

39. The UNECE Task Force on the use of new data sources for measuring international migration and cross-border mobility presented its work. A small survey was carried out to better define the field of study, collect information on existing experience and plans in NSOs, and on relevant examples from outside official statistics. The work of the task force will continue and it is expected to result in a new guidance for countries, to be finalized in 2022.

H. Updated on United Nations activities in the field of migration statistics

40. The ECLAC's Statistical Conference of the Americas Working Group on Migration presented its activities, looking to have a common framework to address net global migration flows. Venezuela, Central America, United States, all also have strong links also with European countries. The initiative is neutral to either the origin or destination of migration flows. The main idea is to address the capabilities to better tackle those global flows under a regionally standardized framework.

41. Colombia has a very inclusive political position as regards international migration. A large proportion of the population is involved in migration. Public policy package is being developed in Colombia to address how they could incorporate migrant population into social security system & how to include migrant children into educational system. Important to avoid migration taking back the advances they had made in multidimensional poverty in their countries. Therefore main objective of the working group is exploring how Latin American countries can become data stewards for migrant policies.

42. UNSD presented the work on the development of a new conceptual framework on international migration, to guide countries to produce their own statistics according to their own circumstances. The framework should take into account different levels of statistical development so that all countries can make use of the recommendations. One comment on previous version of recommendations was that they felt like a very theoretical exercise and were hard to implement in practice. In this version therefore they are trying to be mindful of that and make them practically useful.

43. UNSD and UNECE task forces cooperate by exchanging information and contributing to each other's activities. Both at secretariat level and through overlaps at member level, to ensure consistency

I. Future work

44. UNECE provided an overview of ongoing and future work on migration statistics under the Conference of European Statisticians. The work for the coming year will include: the continuation of the work by the Task Force on new sources for measuring migration and mobility, the collection and sharing of information on statistical response to Covid-19 with regard to data on migration, and the preparation of the 2021 Work Session. Meeting participants expressed support for the work plan.
