

UNECE Online Meetings on Migration Statistics, 26–28 October 2021

ABSTRACT

Title	Adjusting Canada's estimates of returning emigration in the context of COVID-19 by integrating flight and Registration of Canadians Abroad (ROCA) data
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Session	Timeliness of migration data for policy-making, and use of estimates (27-28 October)

"International travel restrictions around the world following the pandemic substantially altered Canadian's migration trends. It is assumed that this situation notably led to a surge in the number of emigrants returning to Canada followed by a strong decline. Returning emigrants are citizens and immigrants who previously emigrated from Canada and subsequently returned to re-establish a permanent residence.

Statistics Canada relies on demographic models based on administrative data from previous years (Canada Child Benefit data) to estimate preliminary numbers of returning emigrants. These models rely on the assumption that recent trends are continuing. They are less appropriate given the abrupt changes in trends stemming from the COVID-19 situation. Consequently, Statistics Canada decided to adjust its usual returning emigration models for 2020 and 2021.

This presentation will discuss how two administrative datasets, flight data and the Registration of Canadians Abroad (ROCA), were used to adjust Canada's monthly estimates of returning emigration in the context of the pandemic. Flight data are collected electronically in most major Canadian airports while the ROCA is a service that allows Canadian citizens to be notified in case of an emergency when abroad.

These data were integrated because 1) they are very timely, 2) they show patterns that are consistent with travel restrictions and 3) they complement each other well. The adjustments resulted in a marked increase in the number of returning emigrants in March and April 2020 followed by a decline.

These adjustments showed the potential and the challenges of integrating new sources. These include insuring internal consistency, correcting key data flaws and using these sources in the future to deepen our understanding of returning emigration. They also fostered collaboration between Statistics Canada and other departments. Finally, they reaffirmed the need for very current demographic data and the relevance of being transparent with key stakeholders and users."