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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Migration Statistics

Work Session on Migration Statistics

Geneva, 29–31 October 2019

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 29–31 October 2019 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Colombia, Estonia, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. The International Labour Organization (ILO), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT), Eurasian Economic Commission, the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for ECA, International Organization for Migration (IOM) Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) were also represented. Experts from the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and the Lomonosov 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. Ms. Rebecca Briggs from the United Kingdom was elected as Chair of the meeting.

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

- a. Definitions of population and migration;
 - b. Data integration for measuring migration;
 - c. Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics;
 - d. Communication and use of migration statistics;
 - e. Measuring emigrants and hard-to-reach groups of migrants.
5. The discussion at the meeting was based on papers that are available on the UNECE website.¹

III. Recommendations for future work

6. Participants supported the plan for completing the work of the Task Force on the Use of Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics.
7. Participants recognised the need to work towards using new types of data sources, such as mobile devices, social media networks, satellite images and Internet platforms. This should lead to a review of examples of use of new data sources for the benefit of producing official migration statistics.
8. The Steering Group will prepare a concrete proposal for this work, and present it to the February 2020 meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau for approval. Canada, Georgia, Spain, United Kingdom and United States expressed readiness to contribute to this activity.
9. Participants recommended that the next Work Session on Migration Statistics should take place in autumn 2020. Participants took note that a meeting room and interpretation for this are reserved at the Palais des Nations in Geneva for 28-30 October 2020.
10. The following topics were suggested for discussion in the 2020 Work Session:
- a) Definitions of population and migration;
 - b) Data integration for measuring migration;
 - c) Measuring integration of migrants
 - d) Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics;
 - e) New data sources for measuring migration;
 - f) Communication and use of migration statistics;
 - g) Measuring emigrants and hard-to-reach groups of migrants;
 - h) Methods to estimate and project migration;
 - i) Migration in Sustainable Development Goals.

IV. Adoption of the report of the meeting

11. The present report was adopted during the closing session.
12. A summary of the discussion in the substantive sessions of the meeting will be presented in an annex to this report, to be prepared by the secretariat after the meeting.

¹ <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50804>

Summary of the main issues discussed at the substantive sessions

A. Definitions of population and migration

1. The session was based on papers and presentations by United Kingdom, Eurostat, UNSD, UNECE and ILO.
2. The discussion brought up the need for a better statistical definition of non-resident foreign workers. ILO is working on this with selected countries and will make a proposal for discussion at the 2023 International Conference of Labour Statisticians.
3. Integration of data from different sources would allow to measure circular migration and the purpose of move of immigrants. The methods looking at “presence signs” across different registers are helpful in establishing the country of residence. Communicating the uncertainty related to such estimates is another challenge.
4. Different thresholds for length of stay have been tested in experiments of estimating migration flows from border and flight data. In the United Kingdom, the immigration estimates obtained from administrative travel data are close to those obtained from the International Passenger Survey whereas emigration estimates obtained from those two sources differ largely.
5. The main difference of the new concept of “main residence” put forward by Eurostat and the currently used “usual residence” is that the main residence does not depend on length of stay. The concept of “main residence” is considered to be close to what is generally understood by the public and policymakers. It was generally supported in a worldwide survey among statistical offices. The practical importance of the concept of fiscal residence was also highlighted.
6. Agreeing on the definition in the United Nations Recommendations for statistics on international migration, which are currently being developed, can lead to better international comparability of the data. The “main residence” is the first proposal currently considered in the development of the Recommendations.

B. Data integration for measuring migration

7. The session was based on papers and presentations by Colombia, Turkey and United States, and on a panel discussion carried out in groups.
8. It was clarified that the United States measurement of net migration to Puerto Rico was purely based on the events of moving, and examining the pattern against those observed regularly. Much of that is tourism. Canada expressed the view that there would be a possibility to use similar methods relying on flight data by estimating net migration to its remote areas that cannot be easily accessed by other means of transport.
9. Turkey explained that since 2015 its citizens living abroad are obliged to register with the Turkish consular representation in their country of residence, which improves the coverage of statistics on this population group. Refugees are not covered in the count of registered population. The forthcoming census is expected to provide information on them.

10. For Colombia, it was clarified that the population register cannot be used for estimating migration flows as it does not record a person's previous place of residence. Border control data has to be used in combination with the population register to measure the flows.

Panel discussion

11. The first group led by Ms. Louisa Blackwell (United Kingdom) focused on how to have a system of migration statistics that can produce reconciled estimates of stocks and flows of migrants. Countries with registers have an overall advantage in this regard, but still have the challenges of measuring emigration. A model could allow estimating the population at any given point of time without the granularity that would be possible with direct measurement from an administrative source. The group considered that a combination of incentives and sanctions could improve the registration of emigration.

12. The second group led by Mr. Marcel Heiniger (Switzerland) discussed the role of the statistical offices in data integration and the perspectives of integrating data for obtaining socio-demographic variables to follow up on how immigrants fare in society and of integrating data to obtain better measurement of stocks and flows. They reached three main conclusions. First, countries with a population register need to receive information from other administrative sources to keep the register up to date. Second, integrating census data with data from administrative sources has the potential of providing more precise information of migration flows. Third, the countries that still rely on paper documents would gain a lot of opportunities from the transition to electronic processing of initial registration documents.

13. The third group led by Mr. Ahmad Hleihel (Israel) discussed the administrative sources that statisticians would want to use for improving migration statistics and the possibilities of applying the "signs of life" approach. The group tried to look at the accessibility of all the different administrative sources in the countries as well as from countries of destination of their emigrants. In the case of emigrant citizens, information could be obtained through consulates in other countries. Social media data could be used for estimating some parameters on emigrant population or diaspora. Yet the countries present in the group indicated that they had a long way to go to overcome the legal and technical hurdles for using social media, cell phone and other new types of sources.

14. The fourth group led by Ms. Mélanie Meunier (Canada) discussed data confidentiality, guidelines and tools for data integration, and exchange of experience. Data confidentiality issues may significantly restrict statistical office's possibilities to access different data sources in countries that do not have registers. Cooperation among agencies who possess relevant data varies largely between countries, from situations where all of them act in coordination in one national integrated system, to a situation where everyone acts separately. Sometimes, secondment of statistical office's staff to other agencies can pave way towards better cooperation. Statistical office's expertise to clean and process the data could also help other agencies improve the quality of their data.

15. The fifth group led by Mr. Jorge Vega (Spain) included countries where the national statistical office cannot access other agencies' microdata, countries where there is an integrated national system of registered based on personal identification numbers (PIN), and countries in between those situations who can progress with data integration. The group believed in statistical offices' proactive role in initiating negotiations with the agencies possessing the data about data access and integration. Confidentiality

requirements may include encryption of PIN, which would lead to the use of probabilistic linkage methods that are less accurate than direct use of PIN.

16. In her concluding remarks on the group discussions, the Chair highlighted the common themes in all of them:

- a. The country context greatly determines data integration as the sources and access to them vary greatly among countries
- b. All participants recognised the value of data integration for improving migration statistics
- c. Statistical offices need to endeavour to understand the functioning and coverage of the administrative data sources
- d. Statistical offices have to engage with data suppliers to gain access to their data, to resolve the challenges arising from data confidentiality requirements, and to communicate the benefits of the collaboration to the society.

C. Use of longitudinal data for migration statistics

17. The session was based on papers and presentations by Canada, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, United Kingdom and the UNECE Task Force on Longitudinal data for Migration Statistics.

18. During the discussion, it was noted that any database with longitudinal data would contain some incoherence between cross sectional and longitudinal data and in such cases, it is good to understand why this difference exists, e.g. a small population could be missing from the longitudinal data. Efforts however to clean every possible incoherence would take years of work and would not be cost-effective.

19. In some cases, longitudinal databases could be developed by research institutes as in the case of Switzerland. The question in this case on the role of statistical office could be important in for example preserving the data for longer use rather than being discarded after the completion of the research project.

20. A UNECE Task Force on Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics was established in February 2018 to address increased use of data integration in the creation of new longitudinal data sources, integration and settlement processes, and specific topics like circular migration and family reunification, which could benefit from longitudinal data. Data integration provides more opportunities for improving longitudinal data.

21. Limitations of administratively collected data exists, e.g. lack of control over measurement, periodicity and coverage. It is essential to make users aware of limitations and to employ novel dissemination techniques.

22. The report of the Task Force identifies key challenges and presents best practices. It will be circulated among CES countries for comments in the beginning of 2020.

D. Communication and use of migration statistics

23. The session was based on the keynote speech by Mr. Frans Willekens (Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute), a paper from the United Kingdom and presentations from IOM and Lomonosov Moscow State University.

24. Although statistical agencies use their own procedures to measure migration, the harmonization of concepts and definitions and the harmonization of migration data ex-post is essential to have comparable data across countries. In addition, efforts to improve statistics are successful only if data collection methods and definitions are properly described.

25. The data on emigration is less available than data on immigration, which causes to report higher number of persons in the country than they actually are. A statistical model that captures the stochastic reallocation processes could help tackle this challenge. It also helps to harmonize migration data across countries and provide estimates quickly.

26. Many of the users are less familiar with the data sources used to measure migration, which risks misinterpretation around why the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in the United Kingdom is moving from a largely survey-based system to a more administrative data-based system. Using systematically collected feedback from users, ONS is developing a strategy for communicating this transition to their non-expert users, including options for developing new infographics or explainers.

27. Migration is an important determinant of population change in countries of Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia with more than 5 million migrants crossing borders every year in this region. The remittances in these countries are often substantial, reaching the level of around 30 per cent of GDP in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Yet, the development of administrative data sources sometimes takes the direction that is not conducive for consistent migration statistics. The importance of cooperation with academia to improve methodologies and data quality was highlighted.

28. In December 2017, IOM launched its Global Migration Data portal was developed in partnership with UN agencies to provide timely, comprehensive migration statistics and reliable information about migration data globally. A user testing exercise is planned to evaluate the demand for a knowledge platform to complement it.

29. Countries mentioned that requests from international organizations for filling questionnaires has been cumbersome and time-consuming for the statistical offices. Although harmonised data collection is not an easy task, Eurostat and UNSD are currently making efforts to optimise their data collection on migration and avoid duplicate requests. UNECE is also deploying efforts to minimize the pressure on statistical offices and facilitate countries in their compliance with reporting requirements in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

E. Measuring emigrants and hard-to-reach groups of migrants

30. Presentations were given by the United States of America and Poland

31. In discussion it was noted that the presentations had focused on identifying and counting migrants, but not on obtaining information concerning their characteristics, such as their socioeconomic status. The available data sources do not offer much scope for such insights, given small sample sizes and the already great demands placed on the data to derive numbers of migrants. In the United States example, information is gathered on single year of age, sex, race and ethnicity, but no other characteristics of the migrants.

32. The quality of data sources was discussed. The American Community Survey used in the United states example is a large sample survey using person weights, household weights and other adjustments. Nevertheless quality assessments do show that some hard-to-count groups are underrepresented in the survey. Similarly, there are quality constraints with mortality rates which are estimated from those of the Hispanic

population since the national mortality statistics by single year of age do not disaggregate by country of birth for the foreign-born population.

33. With respect to the example from Poland, discussion touched on the assumption of independence between data sources –such as police records and population registers – used to produce migration estimates using a 'catch-recatch' approach. Discussion also covered the procedures used to determine the best-fitting models.

34. Discussion also emphasized the importance of transparent communication about the origin and methodology of estimates. It is essential that users are made aware that estimates are computed on the basis of residuals. The United States finds that users tend to interpret adjustments as an indication that data quality is questionable, so adjustments are avoided.
