

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Third Meeting of the 2012/2013 Bureau  
Luxembourg, 5-6 February 2013

Approved

Item 4(f) of the Provisional  
Agenda

**TERMS OF REFERENCE  
FOR THE TASK FORCE ON MEASURING CIRCULAR MIGRATION**

**Prepared by the secretariat**

**I. BACKGROUND**

1. Circular migration is a topic of growing importance, for which information is needed for policy development at both the European and global level. Defined by the European Migration Network as “a repetition of legal migrations by the same person between two or more countries,” circular migration is badly captured by official statistics and often ignored – therefore the scale of circular migration is difficult to estimate. By its nature, circular migration is particularly difficult to measure as short-term residence may be subject to little or no administrative recording, particularly if permission to reside has already been granted in the context of a previous stay. Innovative methodologies need to be examined and applied in order to better capture circular migration in official statistics.

2. The Global Forum on Migration and Development sees the promotion of circular migration as one of the keys to international migration’s contribution to development. It has also become a priority for many origin countries, thereby ensuring the temporary nature of their citizen’s outmigration. It is often seen as a win-win-win proposition, providing gains to both host and origin countries, as well as to the migrants themselves. Circular migration can alleviate host countries’ labour needs and increase their economic production. In countries of origin, it can provide unemployment relief and both financial and human capital (in terms of skills and resources brought back to the country), as well as mitigate population loss due to outmigration. Individual migrants also benefit via increased income, greater work experience, and the development of their human capital.

3. However, migrants who move back and forth between origin and destination countries are very difficult to measure using current statistical definitions. In fact, basic definitions for circular migrants vary widely. For example, some say circular migrants are limited to irregular migrants, others to regular labour-based legal migration. Operationalization of this concept would include purpose of migration, duration of stay in destination country, and frequency of movements at a minimum. For producing quality statistics on circular migration, the definition, time period, standards, and sources for its measurement need to be established.

4. In 2008, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) established the Task Force on the analysis of international migration estimates using different length of stay definitions. In February 2012, the CES Bureau welcomed the Task Force’s final report and requested it to prepare terms of reference for continuation of the work. At the November

2012 meeting, the Bureau requested further information to clarify the concepts of short-term, return and circular migration. Based on the conclusions of the Task Force's report and the arguments provided in the document ECE/CES/BUR/2013/FEB/14 "Considerations for further work on migration statistics", the proposed future work focuses on the measurement of circular migration.

**5. The Bureau approved the present terms of reference for the Task Force on Measuring Circular Migration.**

**II. MANDATE**

6. The Task Force on Measuring Circular Migration reports to the CES through its Bureau. It will provide a final report at the end of its mandate of two years.

**III. OBJECTIVE**

7. The objective of this Task Force is to prepare a proposal for a common international statistical definition of circular migration. This objective should be achieved by:

- (a) Assessing current user needs, methodology, and data sources available to measure circular migration;
- (b) Examining the impact of using different definitions for circular migration;
- (c) Proposing a common international statistical definition of circular migration.

**IV. PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS**

8. The Task Force will carry out the following activities:

- (a) Review of literature, ad hoc studies, and needs expressed by statistical users for information on circular migration;
- (b) Assess the dimensions which need to be taken into account for the operationalization of an international standard definition of circular migration;
- (c) Assess current definitions used to measure circular migration and identify possible variations of these definitions;
- (d) Assess data needed to implement various definitions, current data sources available, data limitations, and other data needs;
- (e) Produce and evaluate estimates created using various definitions and their potential impact on other population statistics;
- (f) Propose a common international statistical definition of circular migration.

## **V. TIMETABLE**

9. The following timetable is proposed for the Task Force:

- (a) Formation of Task Force, by April 2013;
- (b) Literature review, by August 2013;
- (c) Documentation of possible definitions and data sources available, by March 2014;
- (d) Empirical testing of alternative definitions based on data available from member countries, by August 2014;
- (e) Report including the proposed common international statistical definition of circular migration, by February 2015.

## **VI. METHODS OF WORK**

10. The Task Force is expected to work mainly through e-mail and telephone conferences. A face-to-face meeting of the Task Force could be planned to discuss final results. In addition, informal meetings could be organized on the occasion of events attended by the majority of the Task Force members.

## **VII. MEMBERSHIP**

11. Australia, Sweden, the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have expressed their intention to participate in the work of the Task Force. The membership is open to additional countries or organizations. The secretariat will be provided by UNECE.

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