Economic Commission for Europe

Conference of European Statisticians

Group of Experts on Migration Statistics

Geneva, Switzerland, 26−28 October 2022

Report of the 2022 Meeting of the UNECE Group of Experts on Migration Statistics

Note by the Secretariat

I. Attendance

1.   The Meeting of the UNECE Group of Experts on Migration Statistics was held on 26–28 October 2022 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Canada, Georgia, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Office of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in North Macedonia, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Interstate Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS-STAT) were also represented. Experts from the Tallinn University participated at the invitation of the UNECE secretariat.

2.   A number of participants could attend the meeting thanks to the financial support from the World Bank ECASTAT project.

II. Organization of the meeting

3.   Mr. Enrico Tucci from Italy was elected as Chair of the meeting.

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

(a)   Improvements in use of administrative data for migration statistics;

(b)   Results on migration from the 2020 population census round;

(c)   Use of new data sources for measuring migration;

(d)   Post pandemic migration flows;

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(e)   Measuring large flows of refugees;

(f)   Measuring undocumented migration;

(g)   Measuring emigration.

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 recommended that the next meeting of the Group of Experts on Migration Statistics should take place in autumn 2023. Participants took note that a meeting room and interpretation for this are reserved at the Palais des Nations in Geneva from 1 to 3 November 2023.

7.   Participants committed to the regular updating of the Database on Innovations in Migration Statistics (DIMiS).

8.   Participants considered the following topics in which they see a need for further international work that could be carried out by a task force under the Conference of European Statisticians:

(a)   Measuring emigration;

(b)   Measuring undocumented migration;

(c)   Improving the timeliness of migration statistics and their communication.

9.   The Secretariat will consult with member countries to establish potential contributors to one or more of these topics. Based on the outcomes of this consultation, the Steering Group will identify the topic(s), prepare a concrete proposal for new work, and present it to the February 2023 meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians Bureau for approval.

IV.   Adoption of the report of the meeting

10.   The present report was adopted during the closing session.

11.   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.

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[1] https://unece.org/statistics/events/migration2022

Annex

Summary of substantive sessions

I. Improvements in use of administrative data for migration statistics

1.	The session spanned over two days, from Wednesday, 26 October to Thursday, 27 October. On <u>26 October,</u> the session included presentations from Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States. Discussant was Nicky Rogers from the United Kingdom.

2.	The presentations showed how the use of administrative data for statistical purposes is evolving in the region. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in the region have heightened user demand for timely statistics, prompting innovation and acceleration in the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. New methods and models based on administrative and register data have been developed to meet user demands and improve the quality, timeliness, and granularity of migration estimates.

3.	The presentations highlighted common approaches, challenges, and emerging best practices. Access to administrative data requires legal frameworks and strong collaboration between national statistical offices (NSOs) and the agencies collecting and holding the administrative data. The harmonization of definitions and concepts across data sources presents a challenge. The integration of data sources can provide new statistics but also requires flexibility and adaptation when new data sources become available. Surveys and censuses continue to be important sources for quality assessment of administrative data.

4.	Presentations in the session provoked a technical discussion. Questions to presenters concerned software use, data sources for specific variables and characteristics, approaches to and success of data linking, and the quality assessment of new methods and models, particularly in comparison to traditional methods. Questions on how to deal with multiple, contradictory records for the same individuals, how to avoid duplicate records, how to distinguish between short- and long-term migrants, and communicating new and advanced methods to data users highlighted the complex and dynamic process of integrating administrative data into the production of official statistics on migration.

5.	On <u>27 October,</u> the session focussed on the use of administrative data for migration statistics in countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA). Presentations were given by experts from Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Moldova. UNECE consultants presented recent work on improving migration statistics in Armenia and provided an overview of the situation in the EECCA region. Discussant was Mr. Paata Shavishvili from Georgia.

6.	The presentations on Armenia and Kyrgyzstan showed that surveys (labour force and household incomes and expenditures surveys) can be used to estimate migration. However, these surveys are directed mainly to the study of the labour force and social statistics, and the sampling design and size need further discussion. A key challenge in collecting data on labour migration in surveys is when the migrant is absent, there is no one to answer questions if all members of the household have left, or remaining household members may provide inaccurate information.

7.	Armenia is using a population register and a mixed mode for the census. It is important to assess the quality of the population register and to have direct access to all administrative data for quality assurance of the census, particularly with regard to data for international migration. Using personal identification number is a step forward for quality assurance of the data.

8.   In EECCA countries, administrative data, namely border crossing data could be considered a solid source for international migration as shown in the examples of Armenia and Republic of Moldova. However, countries should ensure that the personal identification numbers are used to link the data between the different data sources.

9.   Some countries have agreements between the NSO and data provider agencies to develop standards related to migration data, but in most countries further discussion with data providers is still needed.

10.   The 1998 Recommendations on international migration statistics were seen as being too complex to implement, for instance regarding the definitions of international long-term migrants and place of usual residence. It is expected that a new framework for measuring international migration will be presented in 2024.

11.   Coverage of administrative data sources was mentioned as a main challenge, especially with regard to hard to count or hard to reach population groups. These groups comprise mainly registered persons who are not part of the legal population, because the asylum process has not been finalized or for other reasons; and undocumented immigrants who are not registered except if they go to a hospital, prison or other institution.

12.   Limitations on data exchanges between countries for data validation were also mentioned by several speakers. An evaluation done in Tajikistan on administrative sources on labour emigration to Russian Federation showed that double or triple recording of the same migrants have increased almost three times the number of migrants.

A.   Results on migration from the 2020 population census round

13.   This session included presentations from Belarus and CIS-STAT, reporting on the collection of data on migration in the population censuses of the 2020 round in CIS countries.

14.   There is support for inclusion of questions about migration in the questionnaires of the 2020 round of censuses, such as questions on the country of birth of parents, country of residence five years before the census, last date of arrival, and reasons for migration. This is consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the objectives of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The main limitations to the use of census data for migration estimates are related to the long interval of ten years between the censuses and the fact that entire families absent from the country are not reflected in census data.

15.   The question whether the same respondents (migrants) participated in the last and the current censuses was considered interesting. The statistical offices in general have not conducted such analysis however that could be of interest from a researcher's point of view.

16.   Countries indicated that the data on the migration characteristics of the population based on the results of the population census were in general published.

B.   Use of new data sources for measuring migration

17.   This session included the presentation of the report of the UNECE Task force on the use of new data sources for measuring international migration, which was endorsed by the Conference of European Statisticians in June 2022 and is in the process of publication. Participants welcomed the report and committed to the regular updating of the Database on Innovations in Migration Statistics (DIMiS).

C. Post pandemic migration flows

18.   This session included presentations from Canada, Sweden, Luxembourg and the IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Discussant was Mr. Ahmad Hleihel from Israel.

19.   Mixed migration flows by land and by sea to Europe have registered a yearly record low in 2020, as a consequence of restrictions to movements related to the Covid pandemic. After mid-2020, movements have resumed and in most countries arrivals progressively returned to pre-pandemic levels, if not higher.

20.   Efforts have been made by IOM and other UN agencies to make aggregations and analysis with a route-based approach (across countries and regions). These account for arrivals, returns and fatalities at sea by route.

21.   Factors at play include several important developments such as the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, the war in Ukraine since February 2022, protracted instability, displacement and recent cholera outbreak in the Syria, changes in visa policies in some transit countries, major political changes and the economic and food crisis registered in many countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

22.   In Luxembourg the borders remained open during the lockdown. From March to June 2020, immigration was 11 per cent lower and then returned to a pre-Covid level. During the pandemic, the migrants predominantly came from Europe, with highest numbers coming from Portugal, France and Italy. The demographic characteristics of migrants did not change significantly.

23.   In Sweden, the decline of migrants in 2020 due to the pandemic was analysed by country of birth, professional background, age and sex. The migrants coming from different countries showed different patterns. For example, the number of migrants from Poland and Romania (mainly workers in construction) as well as asylum seekers declined during the pandemic as expected. By contrast, migrant flows from Germany significantly increased in the post-pandemic year of 2021, which may be explained with the different pandemic measures in force in the two countries.

24.   Forecasts in Sweden are published in April. With the outbreak of Ukraine in February 2020 estimates had to be adjusted quickly. The Ukrainian asylum seekers are not included in the official population statistics because their permits are shorter than 12 months. Six different scenarios were developed (with high/low immigration, short/long conflict, etc.). At the end, the numbers of immigrants from Ukraine were lower than projected, which was due to the high numbers in the beginning of the conflict.

25.   International travel restrictions around the world following the Covid pandemic substantially altered migration trends in Canada, including a marked decrease in emigration from Canada. Statistics Canada decided to adjust its usual emigration models for 2020 and 2021 by using United States visa data. Despite the differences found between the adjusted estimates and other sources, the development of the adjustment generated many benefits for the measurement of Canadian emigration. New data sources were acquired and are still used as part of the certification process of the estimates.

26.   There is room for improvement to make administrative data more open (excluding personal or sensitive data), more accessible and retrievable (machine readable format, stability of sources), reusable, more complete and disaggregated (by age, gender, nationality, origin/departure, educational background). Other challenges include the increased demand by stakeholders to count the short-term immigrants that are not included in the population, and persons leaving the country that do not report their departure.

D.   Measuring large flows of refugees

27.   This session included presentations from United Kingdom, Republic of Moldova, UNHCR, EGRISS (Expert Group on Refugee, Internally Displaced Persons, and Statelessness Statistics) and Italy. Discussant was Ms. Laura Bartolini from the IOM Regional Office for South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

28.   Given the magnitude and continuous flow of population movements, data collection and analysis of refugee flows faces important challenges, leading to the need to adapt approaches, explore new sources and use innovative methodologies as the situation evolves. Non-response rate adjustments and population-based weights are essential to avoid biasing aggregate results given large differences in refugees' distribution among European countries.

29.   The response to the conflict in Ukraine resulted in several important changes with regard to the capacity of national authorities to collect new information to meet increasing data needs, make use of administrative data, develop the production of statistics, and share data with other countries. Some countries for example have set-up new systems or revamped old ones, to cope with the unprecedented size of displacement from Ukraine.

30.   The openness of Europe to persons coming from Ukraine is generating data of different quality, availability, granularity, and timeliness. Some countries are producing dashboards, others have CVS files on their websites, or issue pdf bulletins. Also, some are working on data integration between border police data on entries with registrations for asylum or temporary protection, or to social services of various types, while some others are not yet there.

31.   High degree of digital connectivity and response rates among refugees facilitated remote data collection methods. The Republic of Moldova provided a good working example of registration procedures to relocation programs that were established for resettling citizens of Ukraine (mostly women with children) in the countries of the European Union, Norway and Switzerland.

32.   From the onset, UNHCR has been working together with national authorities to provide timely and reliable information on the magnitude, profile, needs and intentions of refugees. Often those who left the country have different demographic characteristics than those who stayed. The migration profile can further change with the duration of the conflict. This information has been crucial to inform the inter-agency humanitarian response in support of host Governments.

33.   Survey data can complement the information derived from administrative data. They have the power to potentially grasp more detailed insights on several aspects of the sampled population, intentions, reasons and socio-demographic profiles, needs in terms of protection, social services, education, health, labour market outcomes etc.

E.   Measuring undocumented migration

34.   In this session Mexico presented its experience in developing a proxy of SDG 10.7.3 "Number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination". A two stage approach was adopted: (1) identifying migrant-relevant geographic areas (municipalities) where accidents and death of migrants are most likely to happen, and (2) processing vital statistics – deaths recorded by nationality. The work involved good cooperation with administrative data providers, including the ministries of health, education, and interior.

35.   The geographic division of INEGI share data produced by their geo systems such as geocoding statistics of persons under irregular conditions and geocoding administrative records of detentions and railway tracks geospatial data. This helped identifying municipalities with high, low and medium presence of migrants.

36. The work led to developing a database comprising 70 variables. Other potential uses of the database include international mobility analysis, defining geographic areas that provide services for temporary populations (accommodation, health), and defining criteria to use non-traditional data source (web scraping, big data).

F. Measuring emigration

37. The session included presentations from Italy and Sweden.

38. The presentations shared responses to the challenges around the measurement of emigration, a phenomenon that is difficult to capture accurately because in most countries there is not a strong incentive for emigrants to register their departure. In Italy, the integration of several data sources has improved the measurement of emigration, allowing an individual's migration trajectory to be followed over time so that new aspects and types of migration such as return and circular migration can be captured. In Sweden, several statistical registers are used to produce statistics on migration and integration, and a new register that captures non-registered residents is being developed in response to increased demand for migration information in the country. In both countries, the foreign-born population is increasing and becoming more likely to emigrate, making it important to address limitations in the registers so that accurate statistics can be produced.

39. The discussion considered the trade-off between timeliness and accuracy, the use of statistical models, communicating with data providers across the statistical system, and the fundamental role of censuses for migration statistics. As timeliness becomes increasingly important, and in some cases comes at the expense of accuracy, there is a need to quantify the uncertainty of estimates for data users. The use of models can be one way to reconcile the competing demands of timeliness and accuracy, but it is important to remember the need for statistics that are easily interpretable. Clear and constant communication with all actors involved in collecting and producing data is crucial for the measurement of emigration.

40. Censuses continue to be a central part of official statistics, and many countries are moving towards administrative or register-based censuses. As migration becomes increasingly complex, it is important for countries to consider how new census methods can accurately capture migration.

41. Questions to presenters concerned the use of international sources or other country's data for quality assessment and comparisons, the difficulty of distinguishing internal migration from emigration when data are collected at the local or municipal level, contradictions between data on migration and mortality, the treatment in statistics of special groups such as asylum-seekers, and the production of statistics on migrant characteristics.

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