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| For discussion and recommendations |
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## MIGRATION STATISTICS – NOTE FOR DISCUSSION

### Prepared by the Secretariat[1]

> *In February and June 2023, the Bureau raised the issue of the relevance of the current definition of international migration. The Bureau expressed a need for a definition that would consider new aspects of migration and mobility. The current definition comes from the 1998 'United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration' and is based on a threshold of twelve months. A global expert group developed a new conceptual framework for measuring migration but did not change the main concepts and definitions.*
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> ***The Bureau is invited to discuss what can be done under CES to bring the concepts and definitions used in migration statistics in line with the needs of users and allow to measure migration in a way that better supports policymaking.***

## I.    BACKGROUND

1.    In February and June 2023, the Bureau raised the issue of the relevance of the current definition of international migration. The Bureau expressed a need for a different definition that would consider new aspects of migration and mobility. The current definition comes from the 1998 *United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* and is based on a threshold of twelve months.

2.    A global expert group developed a new conceptual framework[2] for measuring migration but did not change the main concepts and definitions.

3.    The Bureau is invited to discuss what can be done under CES to bring the concepts and definitions used in migration statistics in line with the needs of users and allow to measure migration in a way that better supports policymaking.

## II.    THE 1998 RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEED FOR REVISION

4.    The *Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration, Revision 1*[3] (hereafter called "the 1998 recommendations") aim at providing practical guidance on how to collect statistics on migrant stock and flows relevant to the study of international migration.

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[1] Steering Group on Migration Statistics provided comments on an earlier version of this note.
[2] United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. 2021. *Final report on conceptual frameworks and concepts and definitions on international migration*.
[3] United Nations publication sales no. E.98.XVII.14
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_58rev1e.pdf

5.     Key elements in the 1998 recommendations were the following definitions (United Nations 1998, para. 32 and Box 1):

      (a)     An **international migrant** *is defined as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence", and a person's country of usual residence is "that in which the person lives, i.e., the country that the person has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest."*

      (b)     A **long-term international migrant** *is defined as a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of* **at least a year (12 months)**, *so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence. From the perspective of the country of departure, the person will be a long-term emigrant and from that of the country of arrival, the person will be a long-term immigrant.*

      (c)     **A short-term international migrant** *is a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least 3 months but less than a year (12 months) except in cases where the movement to that country is for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage.*

6.     The adoption and use by countries of the 1998 recommendations has been slow. Questions raised by countries on the practicality of the recommendations, as well as changes in migration patterns, border control, as well as methods in data collection in the last 25 years have clearly pointed to the need for undertaking a review and update of the 1998 recommendations. In addition, the importance of accurate and disaggregated migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies has been further acknowledged by global initiatives such as the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*.

7.     The stated reasons for a revision of the 1998 recommendations include the following[4]:

      (a)     **New migration patterns are emerging:**  *More people than ever live in a different country than the one in which they were born. In addition to the increasing number of migrants, there are also new migration patterns. Modern communication technologies and the increased convenience of travel have made temporary and circular migration easier than ever; and free movements within a region raise new measurement challenges even for countries with developed statistical systems. Those patterns were not taken into consideration in the 1998 recommendations. Grounded on the concept of country of usual residence, the 1998 recommendations only defined long- and short-term migrants. Free movements among countries and the resulting measurement challenges for statistical systems were not addressed in the recommendations.*

      (b)     **A clear linkage to data needs for policymaking is necessary:** *The formulation of sound policies demands solid data and balanced research using them. To provide guidance on the collection and use of data, it is important to (a) identify migration policies that are relevant to countries and (b) assess data required to inform those policies. Many countries have migration policy briefs that reflect important policy concerns related to international migration and those concerns should be used to provide insights on which data are needed. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration further point at policy areas that are important both at the global and national level. The 1998 recommendations approach migration data collection from a demographic point of*

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[4] Update of recommendations for international migration statistics, Concept note by UN Statistics Division, presented at UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics, Geneva, 24 - 26 October 2018.

*view, focusing on the size and characteristics of different types of migration and non-migration flows across countries. The publication also has a very light coverage of data on migrant stocks.*

*(c)  **Incorporating new developments in methodologies and international standards:** In the past 25 years, great progress has been made on data collection, compilation and dissemination, to produce more accurate, timely and disaggregated data on migration. This includes more and better use of administrative data, integration of multiple data sources and leveraging new data sources such as social media, mobile phone and satellite imagery.*

8.    Discussion on the need to revise the 1998 recommendations has raised critical questions[5], such as:

(a)    Are the concepts "long-term migrant" or "usual resident population" too rigid to explain population changes in a modern world?

(b)    How do the 1998 Recommendations on concepts and definitions meet policy needs and provide relevant data for analysing the impact of international migration and related phenomena on the economic and social situation of a country?

(c)    Are changes to the status of international migrants, such as from foreign citizens to citizens or from visitors to migrants or residents, sufficiently reflected in the 1998 Recommendations?

## III.   WORK CARRIED OUT ON REVISION OF THE 1998 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.    In 2019, the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) requested the finalization of the revision of the 1998 recommendations[6], conducted by the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. The following four task forces were set up:

(a)    TF1 on data and indicators;

(b)    TF2 on key concepts and definitions;

(c)    TF3 on data integration;

(d)    TF4 on data sources and operationalisation of revised conceptual framework.

10.    In 2021, UNSC endorsed the ***Conceptual frameworks and related statistical concepts and definitions on international migration***[7], proposed by the Statistics Division and the Expert Group on Migration Statistics, as the core elements for the revision of the 1998 recommendations. The report includes separate conceptual frameworks for international migration (referring to all movements resulting in a change in the country of residence) and international temporary mobility (referring to all movements across international borders that do not result in a change in the country of residence). The frameworks proposed are aimed at aligning the measurement of resident populations with the measurement of international migration flows within a country's statistical system. This implies that the same criteria should be used for measuring resident populations and international migration flows. By doing so,

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[5] United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. 2021 (para. 8). *Final report on conceptual frameworks and concepts and definitions on international migration*.
[6] Report of the 2019 Statistical Commission – (E/2019/24, E/CN.3/2019/34) Chap. I, sect. B, decision 50/117 (d)(i), page 23
[7] The final version, incorporating the feedback received from the 2021 Statistical Commission, is available at: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/migration-expert-group/task-forces/TF2-ConceptualFramework-Final.pdf

consistency in the production of national statistics should be ensured, which should also translate into improved accuracy and comparability at the international level.

11.     The main contribution of the new document in relation to the 1998 recommendations is the emphasis on consistency between international migration flows and immigrant populations (stocks) and **international temporary mobility and temporary populations**. Aligning the measurement of flows and stocks should improve accuracy and accountability in international migration data[8].

12.     The document includes the following definitions of international migration and mobility (among others):

        (a)     **International mobility** includes all movements that cross international borders within a given year;

        (b)     **International migration** includes all movements resulting in a change in the country of residence (a subset of international mobility) within a given year;

        (c)     **International migrant** is defined as "a person who has changed his or her country of residence and established new residence in the country within a given year (see definition of resident population). International migrant can be either 'immigrant' or 'emigrant' and include those with national or foreign citizenships or stateless persons;

        (d)     **Resident population** consists of individuals who either (a) have lived most of the last 12 months within a given year or have intentions to stay (or granted to stay) for at least 6 months; or (b) have lived at least 12 months within a given year or intentions to stay (or granted to stay) for at least 12 months, not including temporary absence for holidays or work assignments (UN, *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*, 2017).

## IV.     POSSIBLE FURTHER WORK ON CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

13.     The work of the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics, and in particular the report ***Conceptual frameworks and related statistical concepts and definitions on international migration***, contributes to clarify the distinction between international migration and mobility, and to improve the consistency between migration and population statistics.

14.     Additional work could be promoted to facilitate the implementation by countries of the new frameworks, considering that they were designed as starting points for more detailed and policy relevant information on international migration and mobility. The discussion could include, for instance, the challenges around defining whether or not someone has changed their country of residence. The rules/definition may need to be expanded and agreed in order to ensure consistency between migration and population statistics. In the framework, the definitions of "Temporary population mobility" and "International temporary mobility" were developed and include various populations, such as cross-border workers, other types of temporary workers, training-related mobility, health-related mobility, asylum seekers and circular movement.

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[8] United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. 2021 (para. 22). *Final report on conceptual frameworks and concepts and definitions on international migration*.

15.     Additionally, the *Technical Report on Monitoring Migration-related SDG Indicators*[9] includes the definition of **migratory status**:

*"a person's migratory status would be classified, per national practices and regardless of legal status, as:*

      *(a)    Native-born or foreign-born;*

      *(b)    Citizen or non-citizen (including stateless persons)"*

16.     These concepts were defined in the conceptual framework as:

      (a)    Native-born population (stock) includes all persons who reside in the country at a particular time who were born in the same country;

      (b)    Foreign-born population (stock) includes all persons who reside in the country at a particular time who were born in another country;

      (c)    Foreign citizen population (stock) includes all persons who reside in the country at a particular time who do not hold national citizenship;

      (d)    National citizen population (stock) includes all persons who reside in the country at a particular time who have national citizenship.

17.     The measurement of the above-mentioned groups could be object of discussions.

18.     The Bureau is invited to discuss if further work could be done under the CES, building on the work done under the UNSC, to bring the concepts and definitions used in migration statistics in line with the needs of users and measure migration in a way that better supports policymaking.

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[9] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/migration-expert-group/methodology/TR_on_migration_SDG_indicators_rev1-Feb2021-4.pdf