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**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

Fifty-third plenary session  
Geneva, 13-16 June 2005

**REPORT OF THE MARCH 2005 JOINT UNECE/EUROSTAT SEMINAR  
ON MIGRATION STATISTICS**

**Prepared by the UNECE Secretariat**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. The UNECE/Eurostat Seminar on Migration Statistics was held on 21-23 March 2005 in Geneva. It was attended by participants from Albania, Austria, Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan. The European Commission was represented by Eurostat. United Nations Statistics Division, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Office (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) were also represented. Experts from the Moscow State University (MSU, Russian Federation), the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI, Netherlands) and the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL, Belgium) participated at the invitation of the secretariat.

2. The Work Session was organized in collaboration with UNFPA. A certain number of participants could attend the Work Session thanks to the financial support provided by UNFPA.
3. Mr. Kevin Deardorff (USA) was elected as a Chairperson of the meeting.
4. The following substantive topics were discussed in the session of the meeting on the basis of 16 invited and 6 supporting papers:

**Topic 1: Migration stocks: information needs, definitions and sources**

Session 1: Information needs on stocks of migrants: various perspectives  
Presentations given by A. Kraler (ICMPD), E. Galanxhi (Albania), D. Ionescu (IOM), J. Schoorl (NIDI).  
Supporting papers by European Commission and GCIM.  
Discussant: Mr. Werner Haug (Switzerland)

Session 2: Concepts used to identify the stock of immigrants and related statistical sources  
Presentations given by M. Poulain (UCL), J.C. Dumont (OECD), O. Chudinovskikh (MSU), G. Bode (Australia), M. Michalowski (Canada), C. Giovannelli (Italy), E. Wright (United Kingdom)  
Supporting papers by Italy, Uzbekistan and UN Population Division.  
Discussant: Ms. Catherine Borrel (France)

**Topic 2: International migration and ethno-cultural characteristics in the UNECE Recommendations for the 2010 Census round**

Session 3: International migration  
Presentations given by E. Bisogno (UNECE), D. Thorogood (Eurostat) and B. Hovy (UNHCR)

Session 4: Ethnicity, religion and language  
Presentation given by W. Haug (Switzerland)

**Information Session**

Presentation given by H. Chen (UN Statistics Division)

5. All papers for the work session are available on the UNECE website:  
<http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2005.03.migration.htm>

## **SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS AND OF THE MAIN CONCLUSIONS REACHED AT THE WORK SESSION**

### **Topic 1: Migration stocks: information needs, definitions and sources**

#### **Session I: Information needs on stocks of migrants: various perspectives**

6. During the discussion, it was highlighted that there are numerous challenges involved in identifying migrants in the population. Among some of the most challenging issues are identifying differences between foreign-born persons and persons with foreign-citizenship, the descendants of migrants (2<sup>nd</sup> generation), migrants according to duration of stay, and minority groups within the citizenship/migratory status.
7. Several countries reported the difficulties related to the collection of data on emigrants. The usefulness of having a common set of concepts and indicators that can be used for both host (receiving) and sending countries was highlighted. The Albanian experience in deriving migration data both from internal national data sources and through the census of host countries illustrated the usefulness of increasing the cooperation between sending and receiving countries in estimating the emigrated population through data exchange. Recognizing the positive experience of ongoing cooperation between countries in exchanging migration data, the need was expressed to carefully consider issues related to the use of different definitions between host and sending countries.
8. Information needs related to the people who left their own countries were reported. This is important also in the context of studying the “diaspora” phenomena. It was emphasized that characteristics such as age, sex, qualifications and country of destination are relevant information to be collected. It was also recognized that knowledge of how diaspora are organized abroad, their impact on the facilitation of trade and foreign direct investment in their host countries and their remittances toward the sending countries should also be studied.
9. Participants recognized that the need for migration statistics is increasing at national and international levels. At the EU level, the use of statistics to allocate funds has focused attention on the comparability of migration statistics. However, policymakers appeared satisfied with general migration indicators such as stock numbers and, judging by the types of data they request, they often show a limited understanding of the broader migration processes.
10. Participants highlighted the importance of clarifying migration definitions and concepts. This includes the clarification of usual residence, illegal migrants, internal migration and international migration.
11. Integration is a complex process that has many dimensions and can be difficult to measure. There is no widely agreed upon theory-based set of indicators to measure integration, but it was recognized that important data to be collected to study integration are: country of birth; parents’ country of birth; and age at immigration. Although citizenship can identify some populations of interest, it was recognized that it is not the best variable to measure integration.

**Session II: Concepts used to identify the stock of immigrants and related statistical sources**

12. Accurate and detailed information on the stock of immigrants in a country is very important, not only to quantify the presence of immigrants, but also to assess their contribution to the society (for instance, their impact on fertility levels or their role in the economy) and to evaluate their integration. Moreover, data on changes in migrant stocks by year of entry can be used to estimate migration flows.

13. Various concepts can be used to define the stocks of immigrants. The two most commonly adopted concepts are: the *foreign-born population* (persons usually resident in the country who were born outside the country); and the *foreign population* (persons usually resident in the country who are not citizens of the country).

14. The impact of the concept used for usual residence in measuring migrants was widely discussed. The length of residence used to define the usual resident population affects the coverage of migrants. The threshold of 12 months seemed to be the most widely used and accepted in the majority of countries, but some countries expressed the need to revisit this definition to consider shorter duration of stay and allow the coverage of more migrants, in particular short-term migrants. This is often made possible due to administrative rules stipulating that stays of three months or more have to be registered. However, the majority of participants pointed out the difficulties of measuring short-term migrants. In relation to the definition of usual residence, participants discussed in detail the pros and cons of explicitly referring to the concept of “expected” duration of stay in the definition of place of usual residence and the consequences on the definition of migrant and the identification of migrant stocks. Several countries were concerned by the difficult implementation of the concept of “expected stay”. It was also noted that it could be problematic to change concepts and definitions with regard to administrative sources like registers or data on stay permits.

15. Alternative concepts used in some UNECE countries to define the stocks of immigrants such as ethnicity were also discussed. It was apparent that a common concept of migrant stocks is not used in CIS countries.

16. With regard to the sources, in the majority of countries information on migrant stocks is obtained from population censuses, population registers, stay permits, administrative data, sample surveys and border cards. The selection of the source depends on various factors, including the type of information needed (which in turn depends on the concept adopted), data quality, coverage and frequency of updating.

17. The participants agreed that it would not be possible to select a unique concept of stock of immigrants acceptable to all countries. Different countries may adopt different concepts depending on the purposes for which the information is to be used (usually related to the priority policy areas) or, in some cases, on the characteristics of the available data sources. However, there was general agreement on the need to define a common concept to be adopted for the purposes of international comparability of data on migrant stocks and to exchange data between sending and host countries. This common concept should be included in the recommendations on population censuses.

18. It was also emphasized that the population should be counted according to the concept of usual residence, regardless of their legal status. Recognizing the difficulties of identifying illegal immigrants, the need to include illegal immigrants in the count of the total population was nevertheless highlighted.

## **Topic 2: International Migration and ethno-cultural characteristics in the UNECE/Eurostat Recommendations for the 2010 Census round**

### **Session III: international migration**

19. A classification according to migrant background was proposed in order to take into account different needs and approaches and with the aim of producing comparable outputs. In this classification, the joint use of country of birth, country of birth of parents and citizenship would identify different population groups of interest: native-born, foreign-born with foreign (or migrant) background and native-born with foreign (or migrant) background. Citizenship would permit the identification of different categories within these groups.

20. A specific issue is represented by the measurement of the stock of international migrants in countries that emerged from the break-up of former countries. It was mentioned at the meeting that migrations that occurred within the former country before its collapse should not be considered as international movements. However, the country of birth should always be established on the basis of the current borders. Discussion followed as to whether foreign-born persons coming from countries that were part of the former country should be considered or not as international migrants, if they migrated before the break-up of the former country.

21. The following topics (or changes to existing topics) were discussed:

- a. Place of birth: delete reference to mother's residence
- b. Country of birth of parents is proposed as a core topic
- c. Citizenship at birth is included as a new non-core topic.

22. It was proposed that the treatment of *population groups relevant to migration* be addressed by the recommendations on short-term migrants, resident foreigners without legal status, asylum seekers, refugees and temporarily absent people. The 2010 Recommendations should give detailed indications on how to treat these categories. In principle the rules on the determination of the place of usual residence should be applied, irrespective of the legal status. The treatment of foreigners without legal status and their inclusion in the usual residence population can be a problem in a number of countries. People who are abroad for more than 12 months should not be included in the population of their country of origin.

23. There are two aspects of migration flows that census questions can address: internal and international migration. The place of usual residence one year prior to the census (Core topic) is well suited for internal migration.

24. In order to address the information needs on international migration, the following topics were discussed as possible new core topics: change of country of usual residence; year of arrival in country; and country of previous usual residence.

25. A suggested non-core topic to be included in the recommendations is the reason for international migration. It was advised that this be based on the stated reason for migration, without reference to formal immigration status.

26. Participants suggested that *definitions* need to be included in the recommendations and that they be consistent with the definitions in UN Recommendations on International Migration Statistics. It was also emphasized that NSOs are limited in the number of questions they can add to a census and the 2010 Recommendations should find a fair balance between information needs and the push to maximize the response by minimizing the burden on the respondents.

#### **Session IV: ethnicity, religion, and language**

27. Ethnic group affiliation, language and religion were already included in the 2000 Recommendations as non-core and it was proposed to incorporate them into the 2010 Recommendations as non-core topics. More precise definitions and more concrete indications on how to treat controversial cases were suggested.

28. The sensitivity and political nature of ethnic group affiliation, language and religion must be taken into consideration in any recommendations made. A number of countries expressed the concern that the collection of data on these topics cannot be imposed on the population but must be freely volunteered. The issue can be particularly sensitive with regard to refugees and forced migrants, many of whom have fled their home countries for reasons related to ethnicity, language and/or religion.

29. It was stressed that the questions on ethnicity in particular must be based on free declaration. In order to ensure that this principle is always followed, full documentation has to be given on the statistical treatment of answers, with particular reference to ex-post classifications. This would ensure that respondents' declarations are fully respected. The possibility to indicate multiple ethnic affiliations was suggested as a way to identify small or 'hidden' ethnic groups. It was emphasized that clearer definitions are needed in order to clearly distinguish between ethnicity, nationality and race. Indications on the treatment of children of mixed couples should also be given.

30. As to language, most countries expressed interest in the measurement of mother tongue. Some countries were also interested in how to measure the knowledge of the language.

31. The complexity of religion is whether it is based on formal affiliation, current belief or social identification based on religious culture.

#### **FUTURE WORK**

##### **Background**

32. Despite the increased attention that migration movements and migrant stocks have in national and international agendas, the quality of migration statistics and its comparability at regional and international

levels is still an issue. Major challenges are related to:

- the use of different definitions regarding international migrants (the majority of countries in the UNECE region collect information on stock of international migrants through the two topics of *place of birth* and *citizenship*; however, not all countries use the same criteria to define migration stocks);
- the lack of data on out-flows (emigrants);
- the lack of data on in-flows (particularly illegal immigrants);
- the lack of consistency of data on flows and stock of migrants;
- the lack of data on short-term migrants.

33. As was recognized at the recent meeting of the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians, “the problems of flow and stock data must be addressed using different tools” and, since “harmonising flow data is more difficult”, the Bureau recommended that future work be focused on “improving tools for estimating the stock of migration”. The Bureau also suggested using the joint UNECE/Eurostat regular meeting on migration statistics to establish “a single clearing-house that would provide a list of international agencies, NSOs and projects that address the improvement of data quality in migration statistics”. The following proposal aims at addressing the two requests made by the Bureau by encouraging an understanding of differences to the definition and identification of stocks of migrants and creating a clearing-house for projects related to migration statistics. The outputs achieved by ongoing activities, such as the OECD project in counting immigrants and expatriates, will be considered as the starting point.

34. The work towards the harmonization of definitions of migrant stocks would also help to address the challenge of many countries to collect data related to the emigrated population. People who move outside their country are difficult to count in their country of origin because of their absence, and can be more easily counted in their receiving (host) country. The understanding of approaches in defining migrant stocks (on the basis of country of birth, citizenship and eventually other characteristics such as year of entry) would improve a coordinated exchange of data between host countries and countries of origin. This would allow a better estimation of stock of emigrants and their characteristics and, at the same time, it would improve the harmonization of approaches to identify stock of immigrants in host countries.

## **PROPOSAL**

### **Expected outputs**

35. Within the overall objective of improving the use of harmonized concepts and definition of stock of migrants and within the framework of the UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, the expected outputs are the following:

- the development of guidelines on how to measure emigrants through data on stocks and supplemented by information on flows of immigrants collected in host countries. The guidelines will be based on pilot projects carried out by groups of 3-4 countries that will exchange data, taking into account issues of data suitability, timeliness, and availability;
- the designation of a group responsible for the establishment of a process (clearing house) to review and update a list of projects active in the countries of the UNECE to improve the availability of data

on migration.

### **Proposed activities**

36. The meeting recommended the creation of a Steering Group consisting of members of the UNECE/Eurostat seminar on migration statistics (or others nominated by these countries) to carry out the following activities:

- i) to prepare a work plan for delivering the outputs outlined above;
- ii) to coordinate the inputs of its members and other experts in the production of an agreed framework for estimating emigrants and prepare a draft to be presented at the next UNECE/Eurostat meeting on migration statistics. The draft document should illustrate the different characteristics used in countries to collect information on immigrants that could be useful to estimate emigrants from other countries. The document will also define a list of priority characteristics that countries could collect and tabulate in order to facilitate the exchange of data on stock of migrants by country of origin in the region;
- iii) to design a set of tables to carry out pilot projects to exchange data and methodological information among countries on the stock of migrants by country of origin in host countries, with a view to providing relevant data from the perspective of countries of origin;
- iv) to coordinate the work of the countries for the pilot projects, assure the smooth exchange of data and metadata and finalize a paper to be submitted at the next UNECE/Eurostat meeting on the feasibility of estimating relevant stock of emigrants based on available data on stock of immigrants in host countries;
- v) to coordinate the collection of information on existing projects towards the improvement of data quality in migration statistics. The Group would not oversee projects but would simply serve as a single location from which progress towards improved data availability could be assessed. It would house information on the key organizations, contact persons, projects, project progress reports and any relevant legislative actions that impact on the progress made towards improved and consistent migration data.

### **Countries that proposed to participate in the project**

37. The following groups of countries proposed to participate in the exchange of data: the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Switzerland; Italy - Albania; Estonia - Finland - Russian Federation; USA - Canada - UK - Poland; the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Canada.

38. Georgia and Kazakhstan also expressed their availability to participate in the project and Australia and France indicated their availability to provide data as needed.

39. The meeting recommended that the next UNECE/Eurostat meeting on migration statistics be held in the year 2006.

### **ADOPTION OF THE REPORT**

40. The participants adopted the report of the meeting at its closing session.