



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/CES/2008/27
26 May 2008

ENGLISH ONLY

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

STATISTICAL COMMISSION

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Fifty-sixth plenary session
Paris, 10-12 June 2008
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**SEMINAR ON MEASURING POPULATION MOVEMENT AND INTEGRATION IN A
GLOBALIZED WORLD**

SESSION IV: EMERGING STATISTICAL NEEDS

**RESPONDING TO THE EMERGING POLICY NEEDS FOR STATISTICAL
INFORMATION ON MIGRANTS**

Note by Eurostat¹

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Migration is a major and growing issue that continues to impact on all areas of social and economic life. This paper highlights the expanding and changing needs for statistical information on migration and migrants. The importance for meeting these needs is discussed, together with potential approaches for undertaking the necessary developments.

2. Over many years, there has been much discussion of the numerous very real technical difficulties associated with the production of reliable statistics on migration. It is though possible to concentrate too closely on resolving the current difficulties and to lose sight of the evolving

¹ This paper has been prepared at the invitation of the secretariat.

needs for statistics. There is a danger though that statisticians working on migration may focus too narrowly on achieving solutions to the range of specific national problems that have been identified – in particular, those challenges related to producing the best possible counts of the numbers of migrants and the various effects of different statistical definitions and procedures. While these are clearly important issues, the need for information on migration extends beyond basic counts of migrant flows and stocks. To ensure the long-term relevance of official statistics on migration, significant changes are required.

3. Although this paper focuses on the situation in the EU, the issues described will also be relevant to many non-EU countries. Some of the proposed measures for improvement are described in terms of actions coordinated through the European Statistical System and its members. However, other countries may also wish to undertake similar coordinated actions.

4. To meet the statistical challenges presented by migration, input from all relevant public bodies will be important. In this paper, references to official statistics and to the statistical services should therefore also be taken to include the statistical functions of policy departments and administrative bodies such as the Ministries of Interior and Immigration Services, as well as the National Statistical Institutes.

II. A PURELY NATIONAL APPROACH TO MIGRATION STATISTICS WILL NO LONGER BE SUFFICIENT

5. Despite the inherently international nature of the subject, migration policy has traditionally been viewed from a relatively narrow national perspective. Migration was seen only as a matter of national policy competence, with little international coordination except in a few areas such as asylum. Migration statistics, due largely to a dependence on national administrative data and because the prime need was to support national policy making, has also tended to adopt this national perspective. Although measures have been undertaken over several decades to encourage the production of internationally comparable migration statistics², the implementation of such measures at national level has frequently been of relatively low priority.

6. However, it is increasingly recognised that international migration cannot be managed simply at the national level, requiring instead truly cooperative and comprehensive actions at the European and wider international levels. In the EU, migration is now a topic of European-level policy competence. The European Commission is already cooperating in close partnership with national authorities to develop and implement a common immigration policy within the European Union. With the gradual removal of EU internal border controls and with the ongoing elimination of barriers to EU citizens and long term residents living and working in other Member States, it is also increasingly apparent that specific national policies on immigration also have European level effects.

7. Similarities have been suggested – both in terms of policy development and statistics - between the situation of migration today and that of international trade in the 1940s and 1950s.

² For example, the series of recommendations and guidelines on international migration statistics produced by the United Nations.

With some limitations, this can be a useful comparison. Over the past 50-60 years, the situation has evolved whereby the European and wider international nature of trade policy and statistics is acknowledged. It is reasonable to suggest that migration policy has now moved to the stage where it is clearly seen as being more than just a national issue. There is a danger that official statistics on migration issues will fall behind and become less relevant by failing to take into account the increasingly international nature of migration policy development.

8. Policy needs for statistical information on migration can only be properly met if migration statistics develop to reflect fully this international perspective. This implies renewed efforts towards the development of reliable and internationally comparable statistics on migration. The implementation of EU Regulation 862/2007 is a useful step towards improving the comparability of migration statistics in Europe. However, as noted below, it must be acknowledged that future needs for migration-related information will include many areas not covered by this Regulation.

III. OFFICIAL STATISTICS MUST DO MORE THAN MEASURE THE NUMBERS OF MIGRANTS

9. At the highest political levels, migration continues to be a major policy issue. Most recently, the Presidency Conclusions³ of the March 2008 European Council restated the role of migration in reducing skill shortages and in meeting the needs of the labour market. The need to address the employment and social impact of migration was noted. A forthcoming Commission Communication on EU immigration policy is likely to signal the growing importance of immigration as an issue that must be taken into account in all areas of economic and social policy. In effect, the intention is that migration should be 'mainstreamed' into all policy areas and should no longer be considered only in relation to a narrow definition of immigration management.

10. Migration can potentially offer benefits to the countries of origin and of destination, as well as to the migrants themselves. It is though clear that successful migration policies cannot be based just on statistics on the numbers of migrants. If official statistics are to retain their policy relevance, this migration mainstreaming approach also needs to be applied to statistics. A mainstreaming of migration in all areas of public policy implies a fundamental change of approach under which migration-related variables are mainstreamed into a wide range of social and economic statistics.

11. These changes do not imply that existing statistics on migration and migrants will diminish in importance; neither will the challenges in meeting these existing needs be reduced. It remains essential to work to implement the common definitions of usual residence and of migration based on the 12 month duration of stay given in Regulation 862/2007 on migration and international protection statistics. It is also legitimate to discuss whether additional definitions of migration also need to be adopted – perhaps relating to shorter durations of stay or to particular reasons for stay. However, it will no longer be sufficient to focus as now on trying just to obtain the best possible statistics on the size of migration flows and of the foreign population stock –

³ Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 13-14 March 2008
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/ec/99410.pdf

whatever definitions are used. Migration has often been treated as only a population statistics issue. Now and in the future, far more socio-economic information is needed about migrants.

IV. RISKS OF NOT MEETING THE EMERGING NEEDS FOR INFORMATION ON MIGRANTS

12. Public policy should be developed, implemented and evaluated with the support of reliable and impartial statistical information. However, the momentum for migration policy development at both European and national levels is such that policies will be developed anyway even in the absence of reliable statistics. In such a sensitive, complex and vital area of policy, it would be extremely damaging if statistical services did not make sufficient efforts to maximise the availability of appropriate statistics to act as a basis for these policy developments. Given the political sensitivity and high level of public interest in migration, it is likely that alternative and potentially less impartial sources of information will grow in prominence and political influence. In addition to the risk that policy errors will be made in the absence of reliable statistical information, there is the concern that official statistics will cease to have relevance in a major policy domain. This would greatly reduce the influence of the statistical services among policy makers, leaving the statistical services less able to ensure the quality and impartiality of information.

13. It is necessary to examine how and to what extent it is appropriate for the statistical services to meet the emerging needs for migration-related statistics. Some of the information required to support migration policy will represent an extension to the areas covered by official statistics. Other types of information are unlikely ever to form part of the official statistical outputs. However, even in these areas, there is a potential role for the statistical services to provide statistical advice and support to policy makers.

14. Several factors can be expected to facilitate the improvement of policy-relevant statistics to meet these needs. At European level and in many EU Member States, the focus of policy interest is on migrants from outside of the EU. As the entry and stay of these third-country citizens is subject to immigration control, there should be potentially good sources of administrative data that can be adapted for statistics.

15. The necessary statistical developments cannot take place without sufficient resources. It is likely though that the level of funding available for migration-related statistics will increase in parallel with the growing policy importance of migration. For example, the European Commission's 'Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows' programme specifically lists the development of migration statistics as an area of work eligible for funding. Such developments are also likely to receive high level political support, particularly if the direct policy relevance of the statistics can be shown.

V. WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MEET THE EMERGING NEEDS FOR MIGRATION-RELATED STATISTICS?

16. The difficulties of meeting both the current and potential future needs for statistical information related to migration must be acknowledged. However, a number of actions can be envisaged that are likely to improve the availability the situation. These include planning,

coordination and communications activities, as well as specific methodological and data source developments. Certain measures could be implemented relatively quickly and could at least provide a basic response to new needs for statistics. Other actions that may be needed to more fully meet statistical demands may take longer – such as making amendments to administrative systems to improve statistical data availability. However, measures to plan and prepare these actions can be undertaken soon. It would, for example, be possible to discuss now the data needs with the owners of administrative systems, with these needs being taken into account in a future redevelopment.

17. Certain of the actions below are proposed in the context of developments within the EU coordinated through Eurostat and the other institutions of the European Statistical System. The approaches proposed will though be applicable more widely.

A. Develop international coordination

18. An appropriate level of coordination is required to ensure the correct response to the needs for statistical information related to migration. This should cover the agreement and implementation of a programme of actions designed to help the ESS better meet these emerging needs. Statistical services from countries not forming part of the ESS could also be involved in this programme as appropriate.

19. It is important that improving the availability of migration-related information should be treated as an issue impacting on a wide range of social and economic statistics, rather than concerning only population statistics. In many cases, it will be appropriate to view this issue in terms of adding migration-related variables to areas of statistics not previously associated with migration - for example, adding citizenship or country of birth information to housing statistics, rather than adding housing variables to statistics on foreign population stock. This implies that international coordination must include actors from a range of social and economic statistics domains.

20. Given the rapid changes in migration-related policy, there is a pressing need to prepare a development programme for statistics on migration. This should identify emerging needs for migration-related information, assess which of these needs can be met by official statistics, (currently or with necessary development to methods and data sources), and prepare a long-term action plan to address these needs.

B. Improve communication and cooperation with policy makers

21. In many countries – both EU Member States and others - the level of communication between the National Statistical Institutes, the wider statistical services and policy makers – Ministries of Justice and the Interior, Immigration Services - is frequently poor. This can result in policy makers not knowing what statistical data are already available or having unrealistic views on what statistics could be developed and to what timetable. Conversely, this poor communication reduces access of the statistical services to potentially valuable administrative data sources on migration, as well as limiting opportunities to influence the development of new data sources. More positively, there are though good examples of how communication has been improved, resulting in better operational and strategic decisions.

22. Statistical services must work closely with policy makers to monitor emerging policy needs for information, responding constructively to these information needs, and considering whether and how these increased statistical information needs can be met. This does not mean that the statistical services must be expected to fulfil all emerging needs for migration information. However, even where data are not available within the national statistical services, it may still be appropriate to provide methodological support and advice.

23. The primary responsibility for implementing actions on this issue should rest at national level. There is though a clear role for international bodies to facilitate measures to improve communication and cooperation. Clear recommendations are required concerning the importance of good communication. Similarly, examples of best practice should be shared widely.

C. Assess the use of the Labour Force Survey (and other major surveys)

24. The LFS is potentially an extremely rich source of socio-economic information on migrants, providing variables on country of birth and on citizenship, as well as detailed information on the social situation and labour market participation. However, there are serious methodological questions about the suitability of sample household surveys such as the LFS generally to provide statistics on migrants (in particular recent migrants). Foreign-born and foreign citizens make up a relatively small – and often quite clustered – proportion of the population of most countries. Migrants are more likely to live in communal accommodation and not to be recorded in the population registers used in some Member States for the LFS sample frame. In addition there can be language problems that result in higher non-response. In the EU Member States and in Eurostat, some work was undertaken on this as part of the preparation for the EU LFS 2008 ad hoc module on migrants and persons of recent migrant descent, too little is currently known about how far the LFS can meet the emerging needs for statistics on migrants.

25. A methodological study should be undertaken to assess the suitability of the LFS as a data source to provide better socio-economic information on migrants. This should also include analysis of the output of the 2008 ad hoc LFS module on migrants. The study may be expanded to consider options for adapting the LFS methodology to improve coverage of migrants – as discussed below.

D. Adapt existing survey data sources

26. A cost effective option to improve the availability and reliability of survey data on migrants may be to make amendments to the methodologies of current and future major surveys such as the LFS or European Household Survey. Depending on need, these amendments may involve, for example, *over-sampling* targeted on areas with higher than average numbers of migrants, the use of *additional/alternative sampling frames* to ensure that migrants are included, or the use of permanent '*migrant modules*' to be asked of migrants identified by specific filter questions. However, although it is likely that the use of household surveys can be extended to increase the range of socio-economic information available about migrant stocks in the population, the usefulness of household surveys to provide further information on the size and characteristics of migrant flows will in many cases be limited.

27. The integration of migrant populations can be a long process, relating also to the national born children of foreign born parents. For this reason, the 2008 LFS ad hoc module also includes questions on the parents' country of birth. To ensure the ongoing study of migrants, it would be valuable to extend this question on parents' country of birth to the LFS core questionnaire to be addressed annually to all sampled respondents.

28. Adapting existing surveys would be quicker and far cheaper in terms of human and financial resources than creating completely separate 'migration' surveys. However, some countries may wish in the longer-term to consider the use of specialised migration surveys.

29. Based on the methodological study into the use of the LFS, a programme of potential improvements to existing surveys should be prepared, balancing the improvement to the data that is expected to result from the action and the potential costs and difficulties involved. As appropriate, the implementation of these improvements may be considered either as harmonised European-level actions or at a national level.

E. Follow-up the 2011 round of population censuses

30. Though only providing decennial data, the census does provide a valuable picture of the socio-economic situation of migrants. The high level of geographical detail available from many census operations means that census data are particularly suited to providing statistics on geographically clustered migrants.

31. A particular use of the census would be in guiding specific survey activities to be undertaken soon after the census. Depending on national practices, it may be possible to use the census as a sampling frame for post-census surveys of migrants. Alternatively, the census results could be used to identify small geographical areas with high proportions for foreign citizens or foreign-born to be used for the oversampling of migrants.

32. Actions associated with the population census may not be appropriate in all countries. However, it would be useful for those countries that do wish to develop census-related actions to coordinate their approaches as far as possible to maximise the comparability of data and to share methodological information.

F. Further develop residence permit statistics

33. Residence permit data offers information on the (recorded) immigration categories of the persons concerned, providing some information on the reasons for migration. A benefit of this data source is that the statistical definitions are closely linked to the key definitions used for policy purposes – the data being based on the issuing of permits for certain immigration groups or categories. For example, in addition to the broad immigration categories (family, education and study, employment), certain highly policy relevant subcategories can be identified and recorded – such as highly qualified workers, seasonal workers, and researchers. However, a difficulty is that the administrative systems are often not organised in such a way as to facilitate the extraction of statistical data. Residence permit data may be particularly useful to provide information on the socio-economic characteristics of recent migrants – those who make up the migrant flows. These are persons who are often less well covered in survey data sources.

34. The ongoing work to implement the residence permit statistics sections of the EU migration statistics legislation must be completed. This is likely to produce methodological information that will be of relevance beyond the EU. It may be the case that residence permits can provide data for a wider range of migration related statistics than those covered in the Regulation. Efforts must be made to identify other statistical information (not covered by the Regulation) that is potentially available from the administrative systems used for residence permits.

35. In the longer term, and as part of the improved communication between statistical services and those responsible for administering migration policy, the owners of administrative systems must be encouraged to take statistical needs into account when redesigning administrative systems. This may include, for example, the recording of additional information and the structuring of database systems to facilitate statistical activities. Ultimately, this will be in the interests of the immigration services that have most to gain from improvements in the statistics.

G. Develop data sharing between national systems

36. Several countries have developed ad hoc or more permanent programmes for the exchange of migration data with origin and destination countries. This can be particularly useful for measuring emigration which is often better recorded by the destination country than by the country of origin. An exercise coordinated by the UN Economic Commission for Europe suggested that, in conjunction with other data sources, these data exchanges do offer useful additional information on migration. A system in the Nordic countries involves the exchange of individual records for migrants moving between the Nordic countries. The act of registering as a resident in one country results in information on this move being reported to the population register in the previous country of residence.

37. Further work on data exchange – of aggregate and individual level data - should be facilitated. Processes involving the exchange of individual data may be sensitive and controversial, and will depend on participating countries having appropriate population registers. However, interested countries could be encouraged to undertake pilot exercises, with the success of such exercises possibly encouraging others to consider participating.

H. Develop and implement appropriate methodologies

38. There is considerable scope for further methodological developments to improve the quality and availability of migration statistics. In targeting methodological developments, it is important that a broad view is taken of the systems for migration statistics in each country and of the specific weaknesses and potential strengths that exist. It may be the case, for example, that the most effective improvements can be made not within the statistical systems of the National Statistical Institutes, but in facilitating the extraction of statistical data from administrative systems in the Immigration Service.

39. Eurostat is financing two externally contracted projects designed in part to assist EU Member States in meeting their obligations under Regulation 862/2007. The first of these – MIMOSA – should result in the development and application of advanced statistical modelling techniques to migration data. Part of this project includes the provision of expert advice and

consultancy to national data suppliers to assist in the selection and application of appropriate modelling techniques to be used with directly observed data are not available or when data must be adapted to apply harmonised statistical definitions. The second project – ILMAS – concerns the provision of assistance to EU Member States in making best use of available data sources. This can include, for example, adapting administrative registers to make them more suitable for statistical uses or adapting survey methodologies to ensure the better coverage of migrants.

40. Measures to improve the availability and quality of statistics on migration are also eligible for financial support under the funds associated with the European Commission's Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows programme. Given the scale of these funds, this is potentially more important financially than the two Eurostat projects listed above.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

41. There is an urgent need to take internationally coordinated measures to ensure the ongoing policy-relevance of official statistics on migration-related issues. It will take time for official statistical systems to be developed to meet as far as possible these emerging statistical needs. However, some shorter-term measures could be identified that would go some way towards meeting these statistical needs. Longer-term actions can also be planned that will, over time, ensure a more comprehensive response to these statistical requirements.

42. The mainstreaming of migration issues into all areas of public policy presents new and challenging demands on official statistics. A similar mainstreaming of migration-related variables to a wide range of social and economic statistics needs to be envisaged. At the same time, the existing needs for migration statistics will also increase in importance.

43. Statistical services must respond constructively to these emerging needs for migration-related statistics. If not, there is a risk that official statistics on migration will become less policy-relevant and that influence will be lost among decision makers in a major policy domain. In the absence of an adequate response from statistical services, policy may be developed without reliable statistics. Policy may instead be based on statistics from alternative sources that may not be quality controlled and that may not be impartial.

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