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

**SESSION IV: EMERGING STATISTICAL NEEDS**

IMPROVING STATISTICS ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: SOME PRIORITIES

Note by the secretariat

**I. INTRODUCTION**

1. International migration is an issue of growing interest and concern in many countries in North America and Europe, including the CIS region. There is an increasing number of countries where international migration represents one of the topics that constantly draw the attention of policy makers, the media, the research community, the general public. Topics like management of migration flows and integration of migrants represent one of the big challenges that many governments of receiving countries are trying to address. On the other hand, many sending countries are also concerned about the impact of international emigration on their societies and economies. These issues are highly sensitive in all countries and solid 'evidence' brought by good quality statistical data should assist all interested stakeholders in getting a good understanding of the situation and identifying effective policies.

2. However, notwithstanding the efforts of many interested parties, namely national statistical authorities and international organizations active in this field, it appears that migration data

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available at national and international level are not of sufficient quality to monitor migration trends and patterns in a reliable manner. A 2005 report on Migration Statistics prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau, in collaboration with the IMF and the World Bank, stated that “*..Estimates of international migration flows and stocks remain very low in quality, and in order to improve them it is important that NSOs work in close cooperation with the other government agencies and administrations concerned. Overall, countries should be urged to work towards achieving a greater degree of harmonisation in national definitions of immigration and emigration, and to complying more fully with UN recommendations*” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

3. In the present paper, a number of issues are discussed related to international migration statistics. The first part is dedicated to the production of statistics on international migration flows while the second section is devoted to challenges posed on the definition and measurement of population stocks relevant to international migration. Some major challenges to improve migration statistics are identified and possible options to address them are illustrated.

## **II. THE PRODUCTION OF STATISTICS ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FLOWS**

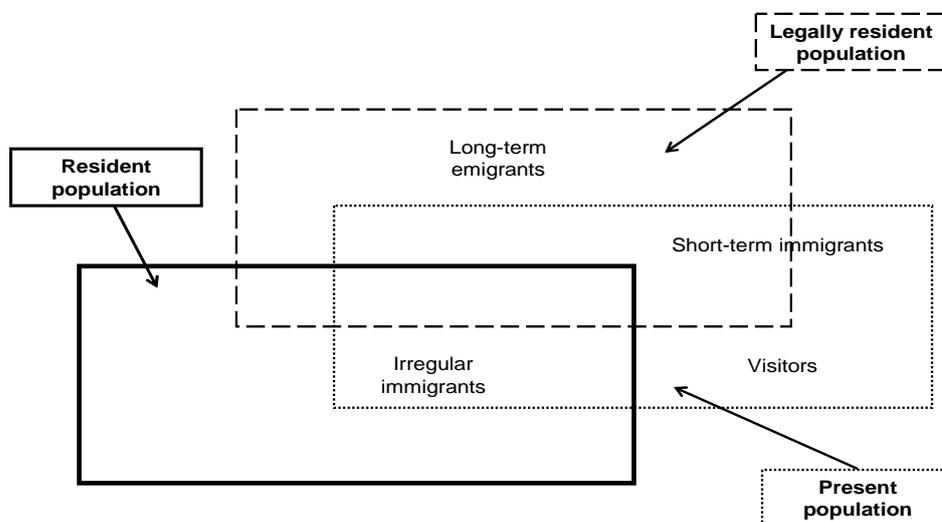
### **A. Definition of international migration flows and some related issues**

4. According to the definition recommended by the UN Recommendations on Statistics on International Migration (UN, 1998), an international migration takes place when a person changes his/her country of usual residence for 12 months or more, i.e. when a person moves to another country and spends there at least 12 months. Consistently with this definition, the international recommendations on Population Census (UNECE, 2006 and UN, 2008) further specify that the place of residence of an individual is the place where he/she resides for 12 months or more. From this, it derives that international migration represents the process bringing a person from the population of one country to the resident population of another country. This definition attempts to make a clear distinction between the short-term forms of geographical mobility of individuals and international migration, which is considered as being of a certain long-lasting nature.

5. However, not always the definitions adopted by countries in the UNECE region comply with the standards recommended at international level and this is mainly due to two different aspects:

- (a) Legal status with respect to right of staying in a given country;
- (b) Different durations used to determine place of residence of individuals.

**Chart 1. Present, resident and legally resident population**



6. To illustrate how these two aspects impact on definitions used by countries, it can be useful to show three different concepts of population that can be identified in a country at a specific instant (see chart 1). The present population corresponds to the concept of the ‘*de facto*’ population and is formed by all individuals present in the country at a specified moment. A second population is represented by the legal resident population, which is formed by those individuals legally entitled to reside in the country; the third population - the resident population - is composed by those persons having the place of usual residence in the country: this corresponds to the statistical concept of the ‘*de jure*’ population. The statistical concepts of resident population and, consequently, of international migration do not make reference to legal status of persons, while they are based on the place of residence of persons, i.e. the place where individuals conduct their life, irrespective of their juridical entitlements<sup>1</sup>.

7. As shown by the chart, the main differences between the three populations are represented by:

- (a) Immigrants without the legal status to reside in the country (irregular migrants), who are included in both the resident and the present population, while being excluded from the legal population;

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<sup>1</sup> This is clearly stated in international statistical standards on Population Census: the CES recommendations (UNECE, 2006) and the UN Principles and Recommendations (UN, 2008) make explicit reference to it.

- (b) Long-term emigrants who should not be included in the resident population but are not always excluded from the legal resident population, often because of national regulation or practice;
- (c) Short-term immigrants (less than 12 months) who should not be considered as part of the resident population but, depending on national regulations, may either be considered as part of the legal resident population or the present population;
- (d) Finally, the group of visitors (less than three months) should be included only in the present population.

8. In order to produce migration flow data consistent with international standards, the focus should be on the resident population. However, from practices adopted in many countries of UNECE region, it appears that the concept of legal resident population is more often utilized, usually because of constraints posed by administrative rules but also because administrative sources are in most cases the only sources available.

9. Moreover, another definitional issue concerns the duration threshold: for how long should a person live in one country to be considered as a resident? As already mentioned, the international recommendations suggest to adopt the 12-month rule but the definitions used in countries across Europe and North America diverge: in some instances shorter thresholds are used, such as three or six months, while in other cases there is no explicit duration fixed. This means that in several cases data on migration flows cover moves that should not be considered as international migration under internationally agreed definitions.

## **B. Main statistical sources on migration flows**

10. Countries use different sources to produce statistics on international migration flows, which could be summarized into two groups:

(a) Use of *administrative registers*: most European countries rely on registers to produce data on migration flows. The same sources are in many cases also used to update the annual population balance;

(b) Use of *sample surveys*: some countries use sample surveys to produce annual migration statistics, by making use of specific questions on migration included in surveys carried out for other main purposes.

11. The use of administrative sources<sup>2</sup> to derive data on international migration flows has many advantages, such as the provision of information on persons migrating and the availability of detailed information on places of origin and destination. On the other hand, accuracy of such data depends on the overall efficiency of administrative structures and processes, which is

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<sup>2</sup> Examples of these sources are represented by population registers, foreigners' registers, permits of stay or other police registrations, asylum applications, etc. According to preliminary results of a recent survey carried out by UNECE on sources used by countries of the region (40 replies out of 56), 48% of the countries use population register to derive data on international migration flows and 25% use permits of stay or other police registration.

usually beyond control of statistical authorities. Moreover, administrative sources as a rule refer to the legal resident population, thus excluding from the observation those moves that are not recorded under existing legislation, i.e. irregular migration.

12. The use of surveys to measure migration flows is not widespread in countries of UNECE region: according to a recent survey carried out by UNECE only a small number of countries reported sample surveys as the main sources to estimate international migration flows<sup>3</sup>. The main problem when using sample surveys to derive data on international migration flows is that migration is a rare and not evenly distributed event, thus requiring a large and well designed sample. Sample surveys normally can provide quite detailed information on individuals while, due to sampling limitations, cannot provide much disaggregated information on places of origin and destination. However, sample surveys usually target the resident population<sup>4</sup>, without reference to formal situation of respondents *vis à vis* their right to stay in (or leave) the country: from this point of view sample surveys ensure consistency with international recommendations on place of usual residence and international migration.

### **C. Challenges to improve data on international migration flows at national level**

13. Data on flows of international migrants are needed for at least two important reasons:

(a) From a policy perspective, data on migration flows are primarily needed to monitor the implementation of migration management policies, therefore the emphasis is often posed on monitoring inflows of foreigners. Governments need to know whether migration trends are in line with policy objectives, mainly in terms of size, origin and composition of migration flows. From this perspective, information on all kinds of migration flows, regular and irregular, would be needed;

(b) Another important use of international migration flows data is to update population annual estimates. In most European countries the contribution of net migration to population change is much bigger than the natural balance (births – deaths); therefore the accuracy of migration estimates is crucial to have good quality population data. The discrepancy that many countries find between census results and annual population estimates, as carried over from the previous census, is largely to be attributed to under- or over-count of migration balance.

14. From these needs, it derives that the following issues should be addressed by NSO's in order to improve accuracy and relevance of migration flows estimates:

#### Adjust coverage of migration flows data to take account of irregular migration

15. This is probably one of the most difficult challenges. In most countries this would require reviewing the statistical methods for population accounting, with important definitional and

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<sup>3</sup> According to preliminary results of a recent survey carried out by UNECE 10% of countries make use of sample survey as the main source for migration flows estimates.

<sup>4</sup> However, the actual coverage of sample surveys ultimately depends on the sample frame: for example if the sample frame is strictly based on registers covering the legal resident population it will be difficult to ensure full coverage of the resident population.

operational challenges. The difficulty of such exercise should not be underestimated and, in those countries where administrative sources represent the basis of migration flows data, various options could be explored:

(a) Assess whether administrative rules can allow for the inclusion of 'irregular' migrants in administrative registers, at least for statistical purposes (for example, in Spain, irregular migrants can register with the population register);

(b) Assess whether complementary sources can be developed to cover the part of migration flows not included in administrative data;

(c) Assess if modelling methods can be developed in order to account for irregular migration.

16. In those countries where migration flows data are derived from sample surveys, the coverage of persons without legal status poses specific challenges of operational nature, such as the adequacy of the sample frame (irregular migrants tend to cluster) or the reluctance of these persons to disclose information that could reveal their status. These difficulties could pose serious threats to collection of data through sample surveys and they should be handled in specific manner.<sup>5</sup>

#### Improve coverage of data on emigration flows.

17. Even in countries with well-established statistical systems on international migration, emigration data often represent the weakest component. This occurs mainly for the following reasons:

(a) In administrative data systems, departures tend to be less well recorded than arrivals as most governments are reluctant or unable to closely monitor the exit of persons from their territory, especially if the emigrants are national rather than foreign citizens. Moreover, people do not have much incentive to notify the authorities of their departure as there are no or little benefits to be gained;

(b) Persons leaving the country are difficult to be counted from a statistical point of view because of their absence. Sample surveys, as well as population censuses, collect information on resident population while they have obvious difficulties in counting absent persons, especially when no member of the household is living in the country of origin anymore.

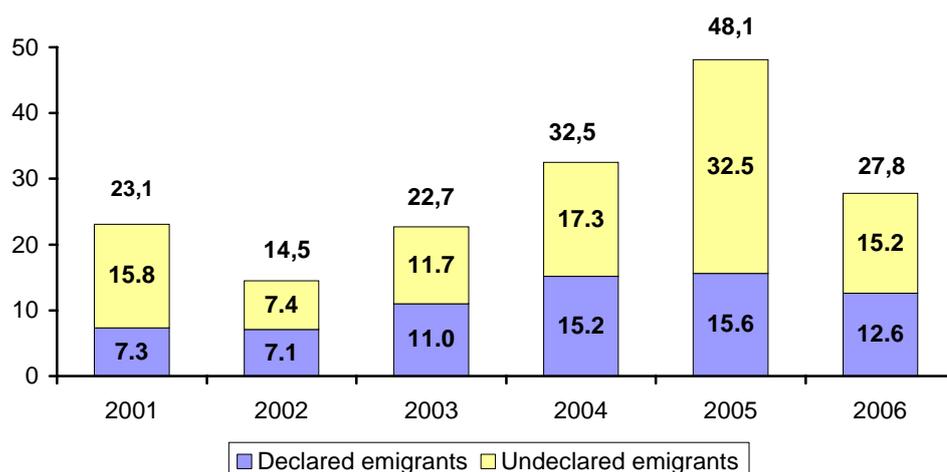
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<sup>5</sup> At the joint UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on migration statistics (Geneva, 3-5 March 2008), a session was devoted to the measurement of difficult-to-count population groups, such as irregular migrants. The meeting recognized that some promising methods to measure irregular migration exist while their applicability often depends on national contexts, also because of the high sensitivity of this issue. The meeting also agreed to continue working on methods and practices to measure difficult-to-count migration groups. Papers and report of the work session are available at: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2008.03.migration.htm>

18. For data based on administrative systems, regulations and administrative processes should be analysed and all possible options to improve accuracy of emigration flows should be explored: close collaboration with registration authorities should be pursued and, where possible, some administrative rules may be adopted to improve coverage of emigration, for example through the adoption of incentives and/or disincentives to maintain the administrative position up-to-date.

19. Moreover, other solutions can be explored to address the problem of insufficient coverage of emigration data as derived from administrative sources: an interesting example is represented by the experience of Lithuania, which has tried to improve emigration data through the combined use of administrative data and household sample surveys. Lithuania experienced large emigration over the last few years, especially after joining the EU, and it became clear that emigration estimates based on Population Register notifications did not reflect the real situation, since an important share of persons did not declare their emigration. Statistics Lithuania decided to start a Survey on Undeclared Emigration in 2005 and an emigration module was attached to the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

**Chart 2. Emigration flows from Lithuania, 2001–2006 (thousands)**



Source: Statistics Lithuania

20. Chart 2 shows that, according to estimates based on the LFS module, the number of undeclared emigrants were significantly higher than that of persons who notified authorities about their departure: more precisely, during the period covered by the surveys, only about 40% of total number of emigrants officially declared their migration abroad.

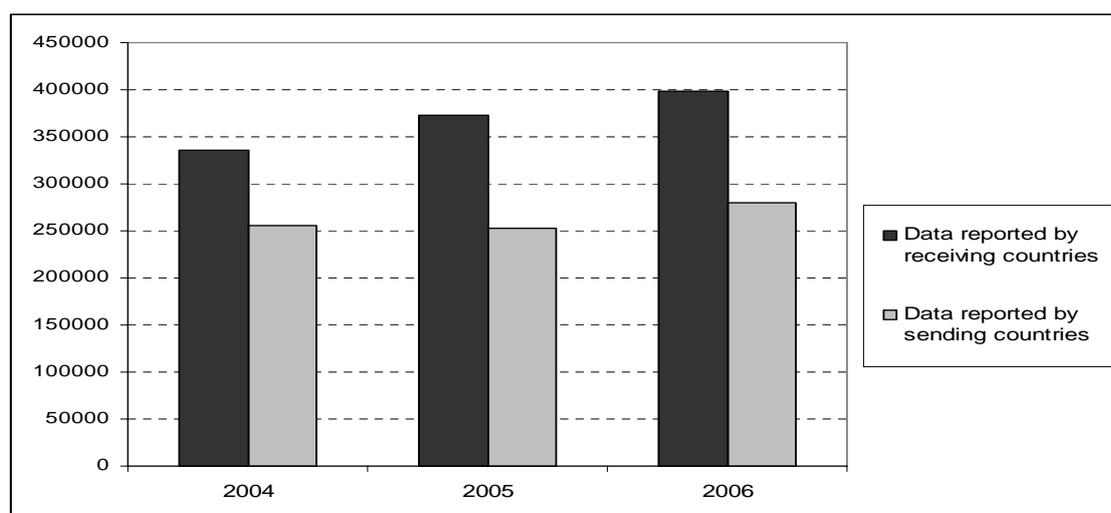
21. This example shows the importance of addressing undercount of emigration estimates and it appears that various statistical offices are considering possible options to deal with this issue, including the use of immigration data of receiving countries to improve emigration estimates<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> At the joint UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on migration statistics (Geneva, 3-5 March 2008), a session was devoted to the improvement of emigration estimates. Various experiences were presented and discussed (Lithuania, Italy, United States) and the possibility to use immigration data of receiving countries to improve emigration

#### D. Challenges to improve data on international migration flows at international level

22. A distinctive feature of international migration is that an international immigration for the receiving country should also be identified and counted as an international emigration by the sending country. In theory, the same event should be counted twice, respectively in the country of origin and in that of destination. However, when analysing migration flow data at international level, one of the most striking features is represented by the discrepancy usually existing between data reported by country of origin and that of destination.

**Chart 3. Intra-EU migration flows as recorded by countries of origin and countries of destination. Selected EU countries, 2004-2006**



Source: Eurostat on-line database

23. For example, results of the analysis carried out on intra-EU migration flows for the countries for which data on origin-destination flows are available<sup>7</sup>, shows that discrepancies between data recorded by receiving countries and those reported by sending country are still very large. As chart 3 shows, international migrations between the countries of the selected group steadily increased between 2004 and 2006, according to data reported by receiving countries (from 336,000 to almost 400,000, + 18%); however, in the same period, data reported by sending countries do not show the same rate of increase (from 256,000 to 280,000, + 9%). In two years the gap between data reported by receiving countries and those reported by sending countries passed from 24% to 30%. Moreover, if the aggregate values already show important discrepancies, much bigger differences can be found when analysing individual migration flows.

24. The reasons for such discrepancies are mainly due to different registration rules adopted by countries, mainly in terms of duration of stay required in order to be registered by population

estimates was also explored in depth. Papers and report of the work session are available at: <http://www.unecce.org/stats/documents/2008.03.migration.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Based on data available on Eurostat on-line database, thirteen countries were included in this exercise (Denmark, Germany, Spain, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Austria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden), for years 2004-2006.

register, as well as by the different degree of operational efficiency of countries' registration systems.

25. Such situation undermines the credibility of national data on international migration flows. To address this issue and improve data comparability, the harmonization process taking place within EU could also have a positive impact on statistical data, which are a by-product of administrative procedures. However, this could be a lengthy process and only covering EU countries. In the Nordic countries, the degree of harmonization and collaboration between administrative systems of the countries is so high that individual records of persons moving between these countries are communicated by country of destination to the country of origin, thus ensuring a virtually perfect match between data of receiving and those of sending countries. However, the exportability of such model can be difficult given the issues of confidentiality it would raise and the degree of synchronization between administrative systems it requires.

26. In the mid-term, other solutions may be explored in order to increase comparability of figures on migration flows. For example an international clearing-system could be developed in order to produce internationally comparable estimates that could be used for international comparisons<sup>8</sup>. The development of such estimates should be based on methods agreed upon by participating countries and the consistency between national and international estimates, while highly desirable, should not represent a requirement.

## **E. Conclusions**

27. A few challenges were identified to make data on international migration flows more accurate and more 'fit-for-use':

- (a) Adjust coverage of migration flows data to take account of irregular migration;
- (b) Improve coverage of data on emigration flows;
- (c) Improve international comparability of migration flows estimates.

28. Such challenges can be very demanding for some statistical offices, since they require a careful assessment of the statistical production and of the existing administrative framework. The practical solutions to gaps will typically depend on national circumstances, in terms of administrative regulations, existing data sources, available expertise and financial resources.

29. When looking at long-term development of data on international migration, it can be observed that, at the beginning, the focus was on moves affecting the 'present population', such as passport stamps, border crossings and visas. Eventually, there was a gradual shift towards the 'legal resident population' and the reference sources became population registers, foreigners' registers and permits of stay. The next step will require a further switch towards moves affecting

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<sup>8</sup> In this sense, the MiMoSA model, a Eurostat project currently under development, could represent an interesting experience. This project aims at applying statistical modelling techniques to estimate missing data on migration flows and foreign population stocks.

the 'resident population': this does not necessarily imply that new sources have to be developed since existing sources can sometimes provide data to be used in modelling techniques or they can be combined with complementary sources. In any case, the final goal should be to produce estimates that, on the basis of empirical and tested assumptions, will reflect as closely as possible the international moves affecting the resident population.

### **III. THE PRODUCTION OF STATISTICS ON STOCKS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS AND RELATED POPULATION GROUPS**

#### **A. The definition of stock of international migrants and some related issues**

30. At the international level, no agreed definition of the stock of international migrants is yet available and national definitions and practices co-exist, depending on specific traditions and data sources. The 1998 UN Recommendations (UN, 1998) precisely define when a move has to be considered as an international migration and therefore specify what has to be counted in the flows of international migrants. Regarding stocks of international migrants, the 1998 UN Recommendations acknowledge the importance of foreign-born and foreigners as population groups relevant for migration policy, but they do not provide a definition of the stock of international migrants, i.e. the group that, in a specific country at a certain point in time, has to be considered as having a 'migrant background'.<sup>9</sup>

31. From the perspective of a receiving country, the immigrant population is in many cases identified as either the foreign or the foreign-born resident population<sup>10</sup>.

32. The main advantage when using the citizenship criterion to identify the stock of immigrants is its policy relevance: citizenship is fundamental to determining the right of entry and stay in a country and there is a strong interest of policy makers about having detailed statistical information on foreigners, a population group with similar entitlements from a legal point of view. On the other hand, the population group of foreigners is unstable in statistical terms because citizenship can change or persons may have more than one citizenship; moreover, regulations on citizenship transmission and acquisition (i.e. naturalizations) can change in time and they are also very different between countries, thus making comparisons across years and countries difficult.

33. The second criterion, i.e. the place of birth, better identifies the so-called "first generation" migrants since they can be unequivocally traced (country of birth does not change, except for modifications in the borders). Nonetheless, the immigrant population identified on the basis of such a concept is too broad in one aspect (a portion of foreign-born people is composed of

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<sup>9</sup> From the definition of an international migrant (persons changing the country of usual residence) it derives that the stock of international migrants should be composed of all the persons living in the country who, in the past, lived (= resided) in a different country for one year or more, irrespective of their citizenship and/or place of birth. This definition of stock of international migrants would be consistent with the definition used to measure flows of international migrants. Nevertheless, it would not provide relevant data for policy makers, whose main request is often focussed on persons with foreign origin.

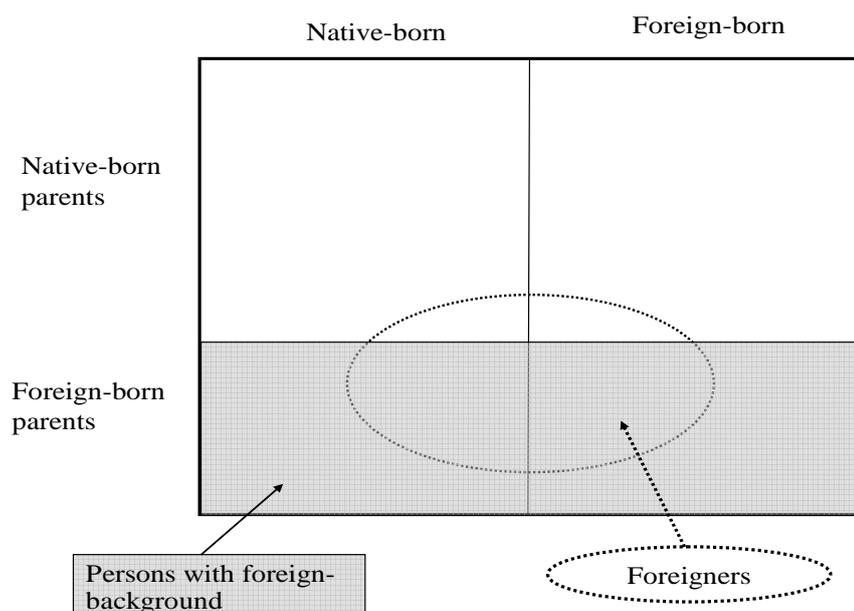
<sup>10</sup> The UNECE Secretariat is conducting a survey on countries' definitions and practices regarding the measurement of international migration: based on replies received so far (39 countries out of 56), data on foreigners and foreign-born are routinely produced by respectively 72% and 44% of countries.

persons who were nationals at birth) while it appears to be too restrictive since it excludes children born to immigrants.

34. For these reasons, the population groups of foreigners and foreign-born, while maintaining their importance, are insufficient to fully represent the population groups relevant to the study of international migration. Taking into account that data on stocks of migrants are often used to monitor the long-term development of migrant communities and their integration in the fabric of the host country, a broader framework to identify the immigrant population should be defined. More precisely, it should be taken into account that the adaptation process of immigrants is rather slow and it does not end when they acquire the citizenship of the host country; in most cases, it will also extend to offspring of the first-wave immigrants.

35. It is for these reasons that the CES Recommendations for 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing (UNECE, 2006) proposed a broad and comprehensive framework to identify and describe various population groups that, according to experiences of several immigration countries, are relevant to study migrant communities and their integration in the host country.

**Chart 4. Population groups relevant to international migration**



36. Chart 4 graphically represents how the various population groups are defined, making clear differences as well as overlaps. In this context the main two variables to classify the population of one country are represented by country of birth, which identifies native-born and foreign-born, and country of birth of parents (native-born parents/foreign-born parents). In addition to foreigners and foreign-born, it is proposed to identify the group of persons with 'foreign background': all those persons whose parents were born outside the country can be defined as

being *persons with foreign background*<sup>11</sup>. The complement of this group is represented by persons with national background, i.e. persons living in the country whose parents were also born in the country<sup>12</sup>.

37. More precisely, from all possible combinations of country of birth with country of birth of parents, the following classification of the population can be derived:

(a) *Foreign-born with foreign background*: person born abroad whose parents were also born abroad; this group is composed of persons who migrated and then settled in the host country (the so-called “first generation”);

(b) *Native-born with foreign background*: person born in the country whose parents were born abroad: this group is composed of the children of the foreign-born<sup>13</sup>;

(c) *Foreign-born with national background*: person born abroad whose parents were born in the country;

(d) *Native-born with national background*: person born in the country whose parents were also born in the country.

38. In this context, citizenship should be utilized as a classifying variable and separate groups would be formed by distinguishing those who have obtained the citizenship of the host country from those who are still foreigners.

**Table 1. Foreigners, foreign-born and persons with foreign background in selected countries (2000 Census Round)**

Country	Foreigners		Foreign-born		Persons with foreign background	
	Abs.value	% of population	Abs.value	% of population	Abs.value	% of population
Canada <sup>(1)</sup>	1'358'870	5.7	5'302'710	22.2	7'321'790	30.6
France	3'258'539	5.6	4'306'094	7.4	5'615'020	9.6
Italy	1'334'889	2.3	2'240'045	3.9	1'620'671	2.8
Netherlands	661'391	4.1	1'488'697	9.3	2'869'820	18.0
Sweden	477'169	5.4	889'401	10.0	1'162'084	13.1
Switzerland	1'495'549	20.5	1'636'398	22.5	2'135'451	29.3
United States	18'917'920	6.8	29'984'675	10.8	45'377'35	16.4

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Note: (1) data for Canada refer to 15 year and older population

<sup>11</sup> In some countries, depending on existing regulations, the group of persons with foreign background can be approximated by using the information on citizenship acquisition, under the assumption that citizenship at birth is a proxy of parents' country of birth.

<sup>12</sup> In some countries it could be relevant to define an additional group, the persons with a mixed background, which would be formed by those persons having a parent born in the country and a parent born abroad.

<sup>13</sup> In the CES Recommendations for 2010 Censuses on Population and Housing (UNECE, 2006) this group is defined as 'Descendants of foreign-born'; in the literature and in public debate the term 'second-generation' is also used.

39. Data shown in table 1 exemplify the differences existing between three population groups, in a selected number of countries, on the basis of data collected at the 2000 Census Round<sup>14</sup>. The group of persons with foreign background identifies the group of persons of ‘foreign origin’ (i.e. with parents born abroad) who migrated to the country, and their children: these two generations often represent the target of migration policies and having information on their size and composition is crucial to assess the magnitude and performance of migrant communities. The difference in size between foreigners and persons with foreign background is mainly due to the impact of the different naturalization approaches adopted by countries: in countries with stricter legal requirements to access the national citizenship there will be a higher number of foreigners.

40. The proposed unifying framework allows to take into account national traditions, which often focus on groups such as foreigners or foreign-born, while at the same time building a broader perspective that can better capture the complexity of migration communities and their evolution. In particular, the availability of statistical information on the groups with foreign background has the benefit that the size and composition of migrant communities can be properly measured, allowing for appropriate comparisons across time and between countries:

- (a) Integration of migrants can be more easily addressed, considering differential patterns of social and economic integration of the various sub-groups (first-generation vs. second-generation, naturalized vs. not naturalized, etc.);
- (b) Naturalization process is given the proper context to be measured and analyzed;
- (c) Comparisons of data across countries are not perturbed by different regulations on transmission and access to national citizenship.

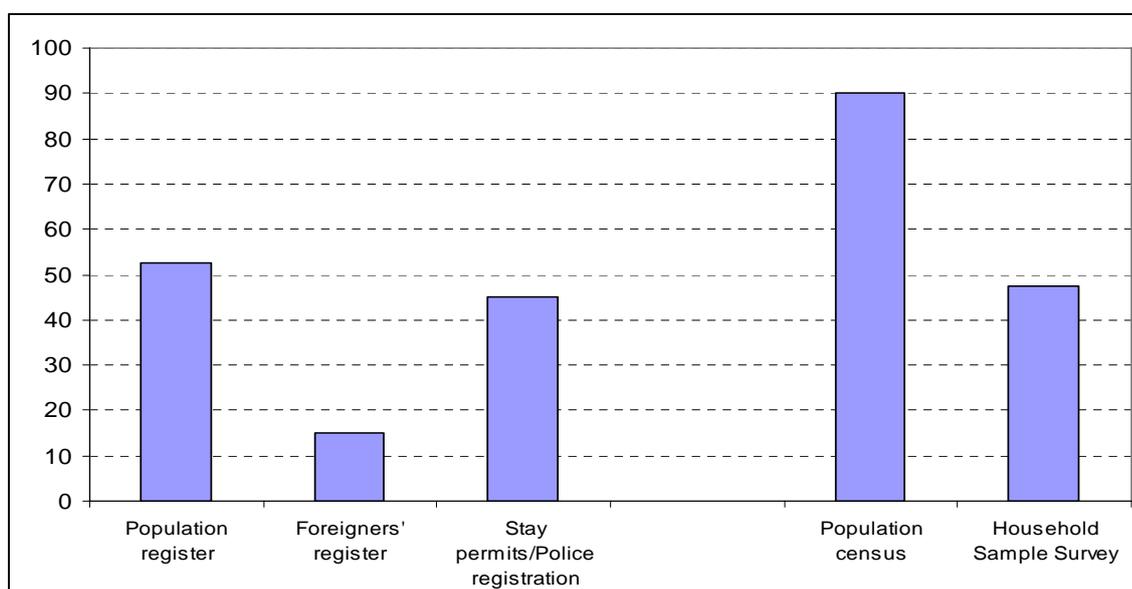
## **B. Main statistical sources on stocks of migrants**

42. The statistical sources used to measure the stocks of migrants are in many cases the same that are used to measure international migratory flows even if some important differences emerge from the analysis of sources used in UNECE countries. If administrative sources play a predominant role in the measurement of migration flows, the situation appears more balanced when the objective is to measure stocks of migrants. As Chart 5 shows, the main source on stocks is constituted by the Census, which plays a marginal role in the measurement of international migration flows, while it is extremely popular for the purpose of counting stocks of international migrants. Moreover, the role of household sample surveys – still limited in the measurement of flows – is significantly higher for the profiling of immigrants living in the country.

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<sup>14</sup> Comparability between countries is not absolute, since different sources and operational definitions were used, especially for the group with foreign background. The sources used in the 7 countries are as follows: population census in Canada, France, Italy and Switzerland; household survey in United States; population register in the Netherlands and Sweden. Also the operational definitions used to identify the group of persons with foreign background were different: it is based on parents’ country of birth in Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden and United States; on citizenship at birth in France, Italy and Switzerland.

**Chart 5. Percentage of countries of UNECE region by type of source used to measure stocks of immigrants**



Source: UNECE survey on practices to measure international migration (preliminary results)

43. In summary, for the measurement of stocks there is a substantial balance between administrative data sources (population register, foreigners' register, permits of stay or other police registrations) and population-based sources, such as census and sample surveys. The wider use of census and household sample surveys, sources that should in principle target the resident population, should ensure a better coverage of those migrants, such as irregular migrants, that are usually excluded from administrative sources.

### C. Possible ways to improve data on stocks of international immigrants

44. In a context of increasing mobility it is very important to have good quality data on stocks of migrants: this is fundamental to monitor the progressive adaptation of immigrant communities to the host society and economy. It is believed that the framework proposed in part III.A can represent a good basis for a comprehensive measurement of the various population groups relevant to international migration.

45. For this framework to be implemented, the main challenge is to collect the pieces of information, such as country of birth, country of birth of parents and citizenship, that allow to identify the various population groups amongst the total population. Thus, especially for sources covering the total population (population census, population register and household sample surveys), the challenge is represented by collecting additional information, which is not a simple undertaking because of the many constraints posed on existing data collections. For example, including a question on the country of birth of parents in a census form or in the questionnaire of a Labour Force Survey may be a difficult endeavor. Moreover, specific problems of statistical significance can exist in sample surveys, especially in countries with a small portion of population with foreign background. Some positive signs emerge from the plans of statistical offices of UNECE region regarding the topics to be included in the next census: from the

preliminary results of the UNECE survey, information on citizenship will be collected by 95% of countries (92% in previous census round), country of birth by 90% of countries (83% in previous census) and country of birth of parents will be included by 24% of countries (they were only 8% in previous census round).

46. National statistical offices may also consider the inclusion of the additional variables specified above in all data collections on the resident population, such as on-going and ad-hoc sample surveys, wherever there are the conditions to derive significant statistical estimates. If these pieces of information were 'mainstreamed' in the production of official statistics, it could be possible to derive a wide range of statistical data also on 'qualitative' aspects such as income, poverty, crime or education. All such aspects can assist in depicting the 'performance' of migrant communities and assess their integration.

#### **D. Conclusions**

47. To summarize, countries should consider the importance of having a broad approach to identify all the various population groups relevant to international migration. The adoption of a single criterion to identify 'the immigrants', often rooted in well-established traditions and regulations, does not allow to analysing the development of migrant communities in a complete and comparable manner.

48. Some countries, also concerned about having a broad perspective on migrant stocks, have used a different approach to identify the persons with a migrant background and make reference to the concept of ethnicity. The issue of collecting information on the ethnic affiliation of individuals, while being very interesting and relevant, is however very sensitive and it appears that several countries do not yet have the conditions for such data to be collected in the framework of official statistics.

49. As already underlined, statistics on migrant stocks should cover all resident population groups, irrespective of their legal status. In many countries, this would require some re-thinking of existing practices: however, it should also be clear that it is not necessary that the same detail of information should be provided for all groups forming the resident population. For obvious reasons, there will be a larger amount of statistical data on the groups included in the legal resident population, while less detailed data could be made available for groups such as irregular migrants.

#### **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

50. Probably the main factor that has constantly undermined the quality of data on international migration is that, contrary to what usually happens in other statistical areas, sources have come before concepts and definitions. Because of the heavy regulatory framework governing international migration and related aspects such as naturalization policies, administrative data have long been available in many countries, providing statistical information for a broad range of users. In most countries, this has created a consolidated tradition of definitions and sources. The increasing complexity of geographical mobility, the development of means of transport and communication, the push for reducing administrative and regulatory barriers to free movement and the increase of irregular migration are putting pressure on

traditional data sources on migration. Moreover, there is a strong awareness that international comparability of data can no longer be eluded since it is a strategic component of data quality.

51. All these factors have contributed to re-focus on definitions and concepts relevant to international migration: this means that existing sources should be assessed as to their capacity to comply with recommended definitions. When available sources are not able to meet desired standards, different options can be explored by official statistics, such as improving existing data collections, developing alternative or complementary sources, also in collaboration with other countries or international organizations, or developing modelling methods to estimate what cannot be enumerated by existing sources. The final decisions will depend on many factors, including financial resources, regulatory constraints and available expertise.

52. Whatever the difference is between international standards of official statistics and national legal and administrative concepts, a certain number of users will continue to request migration flows and stocks, as well as population stocks, according to certain national definitions enshrined in legislation. National statistical systems should be organized in such a way that results can be produced and disseminated according to both legal and statistical concepts, with clearly explaining the relationship between them. However, in some countries, national statistical offices limit their production to the legally defined concepts, even if the differences to the statistical standards are likely to matter, because of pressure from those agencies that are in charge of the administrative data sources. These agencies would like to prevent any release of results that deviate from the legal concept. If this is the case, it would be a clear violation of one of the fundamental principles of official statistics, the principle of professional independence. This principle implies that nobody from outside the national statistical system can prevent a producer of official statistics to compile and release results according to international standards, if the quality criteria of official statistics are met. If different producers within the same system were to disagree, it is up to the chief statistician to decide.

53. National statistical offices should be encouraged to insist on their authority to decide, free of interference and pressure, on the concepts and methods to be used for the main aggregates of official statistics in such a way that they come as close as possible to international statistical standards, and to use the same data for compiling other aggregates according to the specification of one particular user or use on an ad hoc or regular basis. This policy, widely followed in areas such as national accounts and consumer price indices, is also applicable to migration and population statistics.

54. It is too common to read newspaper articles or to listen to broadcasted news mentioning 'official' and 'unofficial' data on international migration, hinting to the latter as being the best estimate of reality. Official statistics should take up this challenge.

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