

Questions for discussion during the seminar on migration statistics

Note prepared by Organizers of the Seminar on Migration Statistics

Introduction

The collection of migration statistics continues to be a challenge for many countries. The seminar on migration statistics at the 2014 plenary session of the Conference of European Statistics looked at changing migration patterns and data sources used to measure these patterns, as well as ways to improve the measurement of migration. A number of common themes and questions emerged from the contributions, including harmonization of data, integration of different data sources used to measure migration, use of alternative means to estimate migration, and how to best measure specific groups of migrants (e.g. temporary, labour, irregular and circular migrants, emigrants).

Based on the seminar papers, the organizers identified sets of key questions for migration statistics, to guide the discussion at the seminar. The Conference is invited to consider the following questions in preparation to the seminar on migration statistics.

Questions for discussion

Harmonization of variables

There is a need for harmonized variables across countries and across data sources, i.e. terminology, definitions and the way we operationalize variables. To what purpose should efforts be put towards harmonization? If data harmonization is a goal, how can this best be achieved? What are the main obstacles to data harmonization across countries? Can advances made in Europe in this regard be brought to other regions of the world without a legislative mandate?

Measuring new migration patterns

To what extent are current systems of migration statistics able to capture changing migration patterns, for instance emigration and circular, return, labour, short-term, temporary, and irregular migration? Measuring these types of migration has been identified as increasingly important but very challenging. How do we move forward on this issue? Are the census, administrative data, and household surveys able to improve our measurement of these types of migration, or are new approaches needed to supplement these traditional data sources (e.g. “big data”).

Data integration

In many of the papers, there is a trend towards integrating multiple data sources or to use innovative approaches in measuring migration. How does this trend contribute to the improvement in migration statistics, in terms of timeliness and accuracy? What challenges have you faced integrating these different data sources? How can the relationship between the owners of administrative data and NSOs be improved? To what extent do countries use models to estimate/project migration? Could these methods be used to measure harder to count migrant populations (e.g. irregular, temporary, emigrants).

Data adjustment

Is it worth adjusting national statistical data on migration when differences are found using mirror statistics between countries? What methods should be used to adjust data? Would it be relevant to use adjusted data only for inter-countries comparisons or can this adjusted data be used for the purposes of official statistics in a given country? Should these adjustments be coordinated by international organizations?

Measuring the social impact of migration

Finally, the connection between statistics and social issues in migrant-sending nations has generally not been included in the papers at this seminar. In addition, one of the more socially significant uses of migration statistics is evaluation of the integration of immigrants in host countries. Data show that migrants' overall access to jobs, income, education, and public services is unequal to that of the native population. The overall challenge is figuring out how to better understand migration dynamics and their important effects on our societies' development. This would include more emphasis on the means to measure the impact of migration, not just on migrants themselves, but also on their countries of origin and destination.
