

CES 2014 SEMINAR ON MIGRATION STATISTICS
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
Conference of European Statisticians (CES)

Session 1. Measuring recent and changing migration patterns: Challenges and opportunities.
Coordinated by UNECE and Mexico and organized by Norway and UNSD

Summary paper

Elisabeth Nørgaard eno@ssb.no
Director of Department of social statistics
Statistics Norway

The topic of migration statistics is particularly important in light of the recent 2013 High-Level Dialogue (HLD) on International Migration and Development at the United Nations General Assembly. In an increasingly globalized and mobile world, the need for relevant and accurate data that are harmonized across countries and data sources is critical.

We need these data to measure and monitor trends and changes in migration flows and stock, and to explore the characteristics and socio-economic conditions of migrants. It is equally important to measure the impact and social consequences of increased mobility across borders, both at a national and at an international level. Data are also essential for making evidence-based policy decisions and informing the general public.

This seminar deals with the need for improved collection of migration statistics. This first session focuses on changing migration patterns during the economic crisis and the data sources used to measure these patterns. The second session will deal with methods to improve the measurement of migration. But naturally there will be some overlap between the sessions since they are so clearly linked.

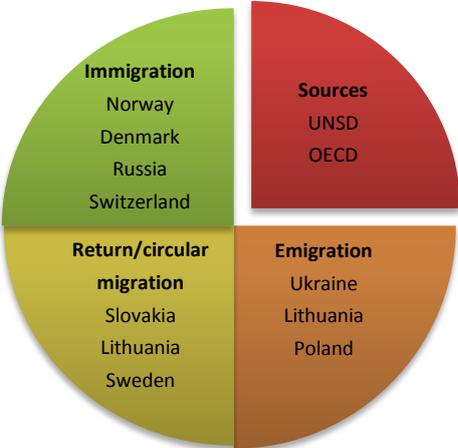
I would like to thank all contributors for excellent papers from Denmark, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, The United Nations Statistical Division and the OECD.

In this summary presentation, I will not go through the findings of each of the 11 papers submitted, although they are all very important, but rather point to some main common themes and challenges that are voiced directly or even indirectly in the papers.

The papers focus on migration trends at a national level, and data sources used to capture these trends. Interestingly, few papers raise the issue of the *economic crisis*. Rather, they deal with migration trends irrespective of the economic crisis, perhaps indicating that increased mobility – often short term labor migration – is here to stay, rather than a response to particular economic events.

Two *main* migration patterns are described in the contributions. Countries in the eastern part of Europe, such as Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, are concerned with measuring the size and scope of emigration, in particular labor emigration - often short-term - to the rest of Europe, and the subsequent return. On the other hand, countries in Northern Europe, Switzerland and Russia that have experienced considerable immigration are more concerned with measuring who arrives and who stays, and subsequent integration issues. Some countries, such as Sweden, Slovakia and Lithuania are also particularly concerned with return migration or circular migration. The papers from the UNSD and the OECD both deal with the latest round of censuses and summarize the available migration data (UNSD: national practices, OECD: update of the Database on Immigrants). This is of course a gross oversimplification as all papers are much more multifaceted – but making generalizations help us maintain focus on the main concerns.

Figure 1. Main migration-topics of the submitted papers.



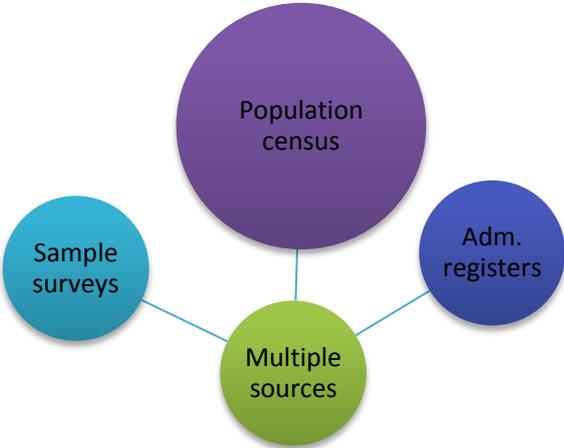
There are common topics and challenges ahead – irrespective of data-source and the main direction and nature of the migration flows. The papers make it clear that monitoring the migration flows, often rapid changes, is a very important issue at the national level.

Most countries represented here use a *combination* of data sources to capture migration changes, such as the census, administrative sources and sample surveys. The census is the most important, and the implementation of both UN and CES Recommendations for the 2010 round of censuses has produced very rich data on migration that must be further explored and analyzed. Nearly all or 96 per cent of the 148 countries and areas reviewed collected information on international migration in the 2010 census round (UNSD).

The papers submitted for the session explored various ways of collecting and compiling international migration statistics through relevant questions asked in the latest censuses. In addition to the traditional questions on “country of birth” or “country of citizenship”, the use of other questions such as “the place of usual residence one or five years before enumeration”, “ever-lived abroad” and “the emigration of household members” were also observed in a number of countries.

One of the great advantages of using censuses, as indicated in many papers, is that they allow the collection of valuable socio-demographic information of individuals and hence has the potential for characterizing international migrants in terms of certain basic demographic and socio-economic characteristics.

Figure 2. Main data sources of the submitted papers.



However, when reading the papers it becomes apparent that even much improved and often innovative use of the census data, do not sufficiently capture what we seem increasingly concerned with, namely the *rapidly* changing and ongoing flows across borders. They are labeled differently in the papers, but seem to focus on emigration, circular and return migration, and labor migration - either temporary or permanent, and both regular and irregular moves.

Overall, there is an increased emphasis on *dynamic structures and processes* as opposed to the traditional focus on stock/static structure often captured in the census. Hence, as observed in the papers, there seems to be a move away from traditional censuses every ten years, towards the use and expansion of available administrative data and registers that are continuously updated, complimented by large scale sample surveys with extensive migration specific variables, and different statistical methods to generalize the survey data to the whole population.

Many papers in the session discussed national practices in exploring multiple data sources to produce better flow data. Some countries compared results from different data sources, which provided a picture of how much a data source could offer. For example, while compiling annual flow statistics, Switzerland analyzed data from population registers and also from the structural survey that collect information on *usual residence 1 year ago*. Lithuania took a very innovative approach in estimating the number of emigrants. It puts together a number of data sources – population census, resident and foreign registers, and the Survey of Undeclared Emigration – to generate a more complete picture of emigration from Lithuania.

Also apparent in the papers is the common challenge for migration statistics that many moves are underreported or not reported at all, and therefore not recorded; neither by the censuses that are far in between, nor by the administrative sources. In the submitted papers, temporary migration is of particular concern, i.e. those that normally do not *need* to register as having formally moved, but nevertheless are significant mobile groups (students, workers etc.), in many societies often linked to short term labour migration back and forth. The Swedish paper states that “In today’s globalized world migration is more and more circulatory. People move between countries, sometimes for longer or shorter periods, sometimes back and forth repeatedly”. Measuring this type of migration is stated in several papers as increasingly important but very difficult, regardless of data-source. How do we move forward on this issue?

More permanent *emigration* is in itself often underreported, also in the Nordic countries which rely heavily on continuously updated administrative sources. Across all countries represented here, emigration data are of lesser quality than immigration data. The main reason behind the underestimation of emigration in registers is that people do not always de-register when they leave the country. Some countries have introduced incentives for registering emigration. A new regulation adopted by Lithuania in 2010, made it obligatory for all residents to contribute to a health care insurance. It is anticipated that emigrants will de-register in order to no longer pay for the health care. The usefulness of incentives may be explored further.

A topic that is hardly mentioned in the papers, but becomes very apparent when reviewing all 11 together, is the issue of harmonization. In order to move forward, we clearly need to improve the harmonization of variables across data-sources and across countries – the terminology, definitions and the way we operationalize the variables. Too often terms are not defined at all, assuming that we have a common understanding of what they mean. This makes reading and comparisons very difficult. The most basic concepts such as “immigrant”, “foreign-born”, “descendant”, if at all defined, are often defined and operationalized differently. In addition, few specifically define “permanent” versus “temporary moves”, and how they may differ from “long-term” and “short-term” migration. In some papers a “foreigner” is automatically assumed not to be a “citizen” – although that is clearly not always the case. What is the difference between return migration and circular migration, and how are we to understand the term re-emigration when it seems to mean return migration?

We need harmonized concepts and data in order to compare developments at a national level, exchange data across countries and learn from each other. Harmonization is difficult but necessary. I know this is true also for the Nordic countries – despite very similar register data, administrative sources and migration regimes – the data are often not comparable. It is a real task for all of us to improve cooperation between statistical agencies.

Finally, to conclude, we find that there are clearly common challenges across papers. Increased mobility is here to stay, regardless of economic downturns. We are increasingly concerned with rapidly changing migration flows and dynamic structures and processes, such as emigration, circular migration, return migration, and labor migration – often temporary, underreported and legal. These flows are very difficult to capture and the data sources that we have today are not sufficient.

Harmonized migration variables across data-sources and countries are key to future cooperation and advancements in this field.

General questions for discussion

1. To what extent do the current systems of migration statistics capture the changing migration patterns, for instance circular migration, temporary migration, unregistered or irregular migration? Measuring this type of migration is stated in several papers as increasingly important but very challenging. How do we move forward on this issue?
Answer to be prepared by OECD, Lithuania, Sweden, and Ukraine

2. There is a need for harmonized variables across countries and across data sources, i.e. terminology, definitions and the way we operationalize the variables.

- To what purpose should efforts be put towards harmonization? Do we have a shared understanding of the need for harmonized data?
- If data harmonization is a goal, how can this best be achieved? Has much progress been made in conceptual harmonization (labor migration, temporary migration, circular migration, emigrant workers, return migration, descendant, ever-international migrants)?
- What are the main obstacles to data harmonization across countries?

Answer to be prepared by Denmark, Slovakia, and Russia

3. From all the papers, there is a tendency to integrate 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?
Answer to be prepared by UNSD, Switzerland, and Poland