

First meeting of the 2008/2009 Bureau
Washington D.C. (United States), 20-21 October 2008

**UNECE TASK-FORCE ON THE ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION
ESTIMATES USING DIFFERENT LENGTH OF STAY DEFINITIONS**

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Note prepared by the UNECE secretariat

I. BACKGROUND

1. Two different but interrelated aspects of international migration estimates have often been discussed by statisticians and researchers over recent years:

(a) Different residency rules adopted by countries and their impact on comparability of international migration estimates;

(b) Definition and availability of data on short-term migration flows.

This project aims to explore the impact of different definitions on actual data on migration flows and explore the availability of data on short-term migration to provide an evidence base for discussing these issues.

2. Long-term international migration should be defined using the United Nations (UN) recommended definition of someone who changes his or her country of usual residence for a period of at least a year. In practice, the duration threshold used to determine who is considered a migrant can vary from country to country making international comparability more challenging. However, the effect of differing residency rules on migration estimates is not fully understood. This project will try to assess the consequences of using different durations on the estimates of inflows and outflows, their composition and net migration. The goal is to measure the impact of different duration thresholds on the estimates of flows and (if possible) to assess their composition by age, sex and origin.

3. In recent years, several countries have seen an increase in so-called 'short-term' moves, those made for more than a few months but less than a year. According to the UN definition, a short-term migrant is an individual who temporarily moves from his/her country of residence for a period of more than three and less than twelve months, for purposes of work or study. Only a few countries are currently able to produce estimates of short-term migration. Moreover, there is a debate about the UN definition, since it is perceived as being too narrow for some uses. For example, the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) is considering the extension of the UN definition by including shorter lengths of stay and/or other reasons for visit such as visiting friends/family and vacations.

4. The issues of assessing the impact of different duration thresholds and availability and definitions of short-term migration were discussed at various UNECE/Eurostat Work Sessions on Migration Statistics. At the meeting in March 2008, papers were presented by representatives from the United Kingdom and Austria. Recognising the growing interest in this topic, the United Kingdom was asked to lead a small research study to consider the above issues. A number of other countries have already expressed an interest in being involved in the project. These include Austria, Germany, Norway, Switzerland and the Netherlands. This proposal will be sent to other participants of CES activities.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE TASK FORCE

5. This project has two main goals, with some specific sub-goals:

(a) Assess the impact on international migration estimates derived from the use of different duration thresholds to define usual residence. Under this goal, the following sub-goals are identified:

- How estimates of migration differ when different length of stay criteria are used;
- Whether using different definitions of migration has implications for the balance between immigration and emigration;
- How well different data sources/systems can be used to measure migration using a range of definitions.

(b) Assess the availability of data on short-term migration, explore their accuracy and consider alternative definitions of short-term migration. Under this goal, the following sub-goals are identified:

- How many countries can produce data on short-term migration;
- Assess data accuracy and relevance according to different definitions of short-term moves;
- Assess the relative importance of short and long-term migration moves and how this has changed in recent years;
- Evaluate the relative importance of different reasons for moving in the balance between long and short-term moves;
- How well different data sources/systems can be used to measure short-term migration.

III. ACTIVITIES OF THE TASK FORCE AND EXPECTED OUTPUTS

6. The Task Force will carry out the following activities:

(a) Design a set of tables to collect detailed and comparable data on international migration. Different data tables should be built for the two components of the project:

- Long-term immigration & emigration estimates should be derived according to:
 - o different lengths of stay (>12months, >6months, >3months, >1month),
 - o calendar years from 2001 to 2007.
- Short-term immigration & emigration estimates should be derived according to:
 - o different lengths of stay (between 1 and 12 months, between 3 and 12 months, between 6 and 12 months, etc.),
 - o reasons for visit (employment, study, other),
 - o calendar year from 2001 to 2007.

It is expected that not all participating countries can provide all of this information. However, some statistical agencies will be able to provide more detail than outlined. In assessing what might be possible, any information on other cross-classifications would be of interest. Examples of potentially useful variables include basic demographic information (age/sex), country of previous/usual residence, and sector of employment;

(b) Collect information on sources and methods of data collection from participating countries, together with some indication of the accuracy of the estimates provided. This might include a brief summary of any known limitations with the data;

(c) Carry out comparative analysis of collected data with the view and prepare a report to be presented at the next UNECE/Eurostat meeting on migration statistics. The document should illustrate the implications of using different duration thresholds on estimates of long-term international migration, the availability of data on short-term migration and the relevance of different definitions of short-term migration.

IV. TIME-TABLE FOR ACTIVITIES AND INTERMEDIATE OUTPUTS

7. Timetable

(a) Data Collection (November-December 2008)

(b) Data Summary (to end March 2009)

- Summarise data into charts, tables etc.;
- Draw out key messages from these tables;
- Identify any key gaps in the data collected and request further information.

Intermediate output: report summarising the data and information collected

(c) Report Writing (to end May 2009)

- Draw conclusions from data and information collected;
- Submit to participating countries for comments.

Final output: paper to be presented at joint Eurostat/UNECE meeting (November 2009).

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