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THE NEW EC REGULATION ON MIGRATION STATISTICS

Main challenges to implement EC regulation on migration statistics:
a country perspective *

Submitted by Statistics Austria (Directorate of Population)

INTRODUCTION

1. As immigrant populations are becoming increasingly significant and permanent also in the new member states of the European Union, migration statistics gain additional political relevance in the European context. In general this raises the question of data availability as well as the comparability and reliability of the characteristics recorded at different data sources (official and non-official), whose integration seems to be essential to get a complete picture of international migration flows. Harmonization and integration of migration data thus become a key issue to gain accurate information as a basis for policy decisions. To ensure comparability and to enable coordinated policy action these need to be based on consistent methodologies.
2. Where migration data is available, comparisons of figures from different countries have to be undertaken with care to avoid potentially misleading results because only very few

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countries so far have implemented the UN recommendations in their national statistics. In fact, the official migration statistics are usually closely linked to concepts and definitions of migration used in the national administrative systems. Hence, international efforts to harmonise measurement concepts on international migration have as yet achieved only little progress. Thus the lack of standardisation in measuring migration flows still remains a key source of inconsistency in international migration statistics.

3. Harmonisation and integration of migration data remain major tasks on both national and EU-level. There is a clear need to review and clarify the distinct concepts currently used for international migration statistics. Different data sources on international migration inevitably imply varying data quality which often results in questionable reliability of the characteristics recorded. The European Commission conformingly has proposed legislation to improve the availability and harmonisation of migration statistics within the EU. Given existent differences in data sources and administrative systems for migration between the Member States, the regulation on migration statistics in a first step accordingly focuses on the adoption of harmonised definitions rather than on defining specific methods and data sources.

CHALLENGE 1: DEFINITIONS OF DURATION FOR RESIDENTS AND MIGRATION

4. In principle, population statistics refer to the concept of residential population ("permanent residents") which identifies the number of inhabitants at a certain time-point (e.g. 1st January of each year) vicariously for a time-period (annual average). However, this poses problems for the adequate recording of population groups who don't have a principal domicile in the country (or in the municipality) during the complete reference period. As a consequence statistical implications on the population stock at a specific time-point as well as on the classification of migration within the reference period are necessary.

5. A possibility for a more precise definition of migration - and thus also of the residential population ("permanent residents") – can be found in classification by the intended or actual duration of stay. In their "Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration" the UN offer a distinction of migration depending on the duration of stay¹: a) Temporary stay: 0 to 90 days; b) Short term migration: 91 to 365 days and c) Long term migration: 366 days and longer.

6. Article 2 of the proposed regulation of the European Union on "Community statistics on migration and international protection", intends to put the focus of the migration statistics on long-term migration and to register only persons who actually have a principal domicile in the country of destiny longer than a year or declared a stay at the place of residence registration of more than twelve months.

7. An important disadvantage of the concept of long-term migration lies in the time-lag of one year after the end of the reference year before their final number can be calculated. The issue

¹ United Nations (1998b): Recommendations on Statistics of international Migration, Revision 1, Statistical Series M, No. 58, Rev.1, New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division.

has so far not been addressed in detail, because many countries make use of data sources that either record persons who intend or who are permitted or who are expected to stay for 12 months or more in the entity of analysis, rather than recording their actual length of stay. There is often no easy way to overcome the problem of measuring the actual vs. the intended stay, mainly because these are based on sample surveys or on counting the issue of usually time-limited residence permits.

8. Even the use of population registers may not allow gathering information on the actual length of stay, unless these include a personal identification number, by which the movements of registered persons can be tracked and frequent and comprehensive follow-up checks are undertaken. Nevertheless, it is possible in many cases to conclude with some degree of accuracy which groups of migrants are likely to stay for at least 12 months - such as persons admitted as students for university courses of several years duration or partners of already registered long-term residents.

9. Comparing migration statistics in countries of origin and destination often shows significant discrepancies in the measuring of the same migration flows, because a common approach on the measurement of stocks and flows is still missing. At present international recommendations and regulations for the statistical recording of international migration flows focus on a 12 months concept. However, this is afflicted with the problem of selectivity as short-term migrations are not at all reflected. With Statistics Austria's demographic system (POPREG), Austria is the first European country where stock and flow statistics can be displayed under harmonised time criteria.

10. The analyses verify that about 90 per cent of the long-term migration impact can already be evaluated after a registration period of three months. However the size of flows of short-term migration is quite considerable, representing in 2003 24% of all immigrations and 31% of all emigrations in Austria. Thus their inclusion in migration statistics does seem reasonable. A classification of migration based on a 90 days-criterion requires an observation period of one and a half years for each reporting year, since also all registrations and de-registrations of the last quarter of the previous year as well as the first quarter of the subsequent year have to be taken into account.

Austria in 2003	immigraton	emigration	net-migration
MIGSTAT (> 90 d of stay)	113.554	77.257	36.297
long-term migration (>365 d)	86.276	53.522	32.754
<i>in % of total</i>	<i>76,0</i>	<i>69,3</i>	<i>90,2</i>
short-term migration (91-365 d)	27.278	23.735	3.543
<i>in % of total</i>	<i>24,0</i>	<i>30,7</i>	<i>9,8</i>

CHALLENGE 2: HARMONISATION OF MEASUREMENT PREFERENCES IN THE EU-COUNTRIES

11. In the 25 states of the European Union data on migration statistics is either available on surveys (e.g. Labour Force Survey; National Household Survey) or based on administrative registration systems. 18 Member States have already implemented such registration systems, but these are not always used and/or adopted for statistical purposes. Consequently, migration statistics are based either a) on the registration concept of intended duration, b) on registration data without any statistical adoption or c) on registration data in combination with statistical procedures.

12. We conducted a questionnaire concerning the measurement preferences of the Member States of the European Union. In regard to migration flows a majority of 14 countries preferred a minimum duration of stay of at least 12 month, while 6 countries voted for a minimum duration of 3 month. Only two countries used no explicit time limit. In this context it is worth noting that with two exceptions (Hungary and Slovenia) measurement preferences for population stocks (annual and census data) are in line with the time limits applied to migration flows. Yet, interestingly, no country of the European Union has currently implemented exactly the UN recommendations on both migration statistics and population/ho using censuses.

13. Current statistical concepts and measurement of international migration in the European countries thus vary significantly. Hence, a comparability of in- and outflows between the European countries is not possible.

CHALLENGE 3: HARMONISATION OF DATA PRODUCTION

14. To improve the comparability of migration statistics on international level, a uniform time-scale would be desirable to measure migration flows and their impact. The current proposal for the EU regulation on migration statistics accordingly defines harmonised criteria based on the 12-months concept. Given the fact that data sources and administrative systems in the Member States of the EU are very diverse, this represents an important step towards the international harmonisation of the measurement of migration flows (and also population stocks).

15. Though harmonisation has its merits in a methodological sight, additional burdens for data producers remain. Member States with limited information on migration will have to find new ways how to estimate migratory flows (esp. out-migration). The need to present figures on international migration well in advance of the availability of any final figures opens again a wide range of speculation, which stands in contradiction to harmonised statistical and methodological standards. Guidelines are required to assist Member States in correctly interpreting the requirements of the Regulation and to establish standards for dealing with differences between national statistical and administrative processes and common statistical definitions. Guidelines will be required on the use of estimations as well.

16. Difficulties related to particular data sources may not be underestimated. It is therefore important to highlight the common problems in the field of data productions. Dependent on the data availability the measurement on immigration will encounter in most of the Member States

minor problems, while data on emigration simply are not available in some countries. Different levels concerning standards of data collection should therefore explicitly be defined. Statistics requested under the Regulation needs well defined adaptations of tables and disaggregations to follow the requirements of the legislation.

17. Thus with the current regulation two different data sets of preliminary and final results for migration flows and population stock will remain necessary. In addition, through the exclusion of short-term migration it might seriously underestimate migration flows and thus provide just partial information of the foreign-born population stock at any given time.

CONCLUSION

18. In order to build a concise system of demographic monitoring, harmonised criteria should apply to both migration flows and population stocks. In this context it is important to underline that the 12-months concept would have a significant impact on the size of migration flows, while the impact on the population stock (through the migration balance) would be less noticeable.

19. In the long-term the legislation should thus aim at allowing shorter time-criteria for the classification of migration and the resident population. A minimum length of stay of three months would, besides providing more up-to-date information on migration, also comply with current legislation of the European Union, which allows for a stay in a member state without registration of three months at most. It would thus also correspond to the necessary adjustments of administrative procedures for implementing legal requirements.

20. The experience of methodological harmonisation and statistical procedure concerning estimations could help to define the frame for the basic requirements in population statistics for the next census round.
