

**Draft Report of the  
Joint UNECE-UNFPA Regional Workshop  
on Migration Statistics**

**Istanbul, Turkey, 6-8 December 2010**

## **Introduction**

The regional workshop on migration statistics was organized by the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Division (UN/DESA) and was supported by the UNDP Office in Ankara.

The workshop was carried out within the framework of the United Nations Development Account Project “Strengthening national capacities to deal with international migration: Maximizing development benefits and minimizing negative impacts”.<sup>1</sup> The workshop was the second event organized within the framework of the above-mentioned project. It was based on the results and developed the basic ideas of the first regional meeting which took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, in February 2010.

## **Main objectives**

The workshop provided an opportunity to develop the activities and review the outputs of the project, based on the work conducted during and after the February 2010 workshop in Bishkek. In particular, the following activities and topics were discussed at the workshop:

- Collection of migration data from CIS countries based on ad-hoc set of tables;
- Discussion of the plans by UNECE to establish a clearing house for collection and dissemination of migration data from member countries;
- Finalization of the inventory of information sources on migration in the UNECE region;
- Finalization of a toolkit, provisionally titled “Statistics on international migration – a practical guide for the CIS region”, offering practical steps to improve the production, quality and comparability of migration statistics in the region;
- Exchange of information about various initiatives on migration data collection and sharing currently ongoing in the region
- Promotion of the dialogue between producers and users of data on international migration, with a particular focus on the use of statistics for evidence-based policy making.

## **Participation in the workshop**

Participants in the workshops included representatives of National statistical institutes, ministries of labour, foreign affairs and migration services of 11 countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Specialists of international organizations which were involved in projects dealing with statistics of migration in the region also took part in the workshop; they represented UNECE, UNFPA, UN DESA Population Division, IOM, OSCE, World Bank and DFID.

Mr. Paolo Valente (UNECE) was the Chairperson of the workshop.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/devaccount/projects/2008/0809A.html>

The workshop was organized in a form of seven substantive sessions, besides an opening and a wrap-up session. The topics of the sessions were as follows:

**Day 1 (6 December)**

- SESSION I International migration statistics: The user perspective**
- SESSION II Regional initiatives to improve migration data for policy-making**
- SESSION III Using available data sources to analyze international migration**
- SESSION IV Streamlining regional data collection activities**

**Day 2 (7 December)**

- SESSION V Availability, needs and quality of administrative data: The NSO perspective**
- SESSION VI Migration data collected at borders**
- SESSION VII Availability, needs and quality of administrative data: The producer perspective**

**Day 3 (8 December)**

- SESSION VIII Tools to improve migration data .**

**Summary of the sessions**

**SESSION I “International migration statistics: The user perspective”**

This session was dedicated to the perspective of national agencies that do not produce migration data themselves but need them to monitor migration trends and design migration policies. The presentations by these agencies, based on their practical experience, provided an opportunity to better understand the gaps in availability of statistics or insufficient quality of data.

A “Data users’ questionnaire” jointly developed by OSCE/IOM, UNECE and ILO was presented. The questionnaire was prepared to collect information and opinions of practitioners in some countries of the region, as part of the forthcoming OSCE/IOM project. The results of the questionnaire are expected to provide a better knowledge of needs and problems that migration data users meet for analysis or description of migration and policy-making. Better understanding of data users’ needs is essential to develop relevant statistics on migration, improve their quality, broaden the list of variables and provide better access to the data.

The report provided by the representative of the Ministry of Labour of Moldova focused on target groups of migrants that were a subject of regulation and therefore should be counted accurately. Only accurate data helps to establish a system of indicators for estimation of effectiveness of migration policy and provide quantitative “reference points” in the future. The speaker highlighted some negative aspects: lack of data or overly aggregated statistics does not make it possible to analyze the situation about migration in a proper way and work out more precise decisions on migration policy.

The representative from the Ministry of Labour of Kyrgyz Republic emphasized the necessity to have statistics covering the key migration variables and up-to date information that is not always available in the NSI. When data are lacking the users must use fragmentary statistics and try to obtain data from different agencies. The speaker pointed out that gaps on legal base make difficult collecting new statistics on migration in spite of an obvious demand from the side of the users, reflecting changing conditions of migration situation.

## **SESSION II “Regional initiatives to improve migration data for policy-making”**

In this session, information was shared with the participants about programs and projects executed by international organizations and directly or indirectly dealing with issues of quality and availability of migration data in the countries of the CIS region. The objective was to foster cooperation and possibly establish synergies between different capacity-building initiatives on migration statistics in the region, by and avoid the risk of duplication in particular with regard to data collection activities.

IOM (Astana) presented the Central Asian regional Migration program (CARM), supported by UNIFEM and UKAID. There is a widely spread deficit of adequate statistics needed for migration policies, poor comprehension of data (from the side of policy makers and other users), restricted access to statistics and absence of political will to change the situation. Besides, there are considerable limitations in technical and other resources, that hamper capacity building and development of statistics on migration.

Some recommendations were formulated to improve the situation in the countries involved into the project: in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan it is worth to create and maintain databases of vacancies (job offers), where the data would be disaggregated by gender, age and other variables; to organize training courses for specialists responsible for migration management, to develop cooperation between different agencies. In Kazakhstan particular attention should be paid to methodologies of estimation of the demand in the foreign labour force. Russian Federation should focus on better implementation of migration legislation, that could help to make data on migration more accurate.

The World bank presentation demonstrated the advantages of sample surveys – both special (migration focused) and general (having a special ‘migration module’). Some examples were provided to illustrate activities of the WB in this area. It was recommended to conduct sample surveys both in sending and receiving countries to better estimate the scale of migration and remittances in the region.

The representative of OSCE introduced the project (organized in collaboration with IOM) “Harmonized Data Collection as a Sound Basis for Policy-Making” in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The project is focused on collection of detailed and complete information on availability of data on migration of different types produced by different agencies in each of the countries. The planned ‘inventory’ of all sources and produced statistics could help to see the main bottlenecks in data (availability, quality, diversity, dissemination etc.) from the viewpoint of policy needs. Two special questionnaires (for data producers and data users) would be implemented to interview specialists in agencies producing or using data. It is expected that the information collected would demonstrate a) if available sources have been used effectively, b) what are the terms of access to data, c) what data needed for evidence based policy making are not produced.

## **SESSION III “Using available data sources to analyze international migration”**

This session was devoted to reports from international agencies that collect, analyse and disseminate statistics on migration. These resources are used by many specialists and some of the participants in the workshop (mainly from NSIs) have been involved in the process of data collection. Thus, the presentations were met with lot of interest.

The representative of the UN DESA Population Division explained to the participants how the data are collected, stored and how they can be used and interpreted. The well known international migration database run by UN DESA is a very useful resource, and the participants had an opportunity to see the importance of disseminating in an efficient way migration data at a national level.

The presentation from UNHCR dealt with the main difficulties met by statisticians of this UN agency while trying to collect data from the countries. Very often data coming from the countries are incomplete and the

UNHCR statisticians have to use indirect methods to estimate more accurately stocks of forced migrants and stateless persons in a country.

#### **SESSION IV “Streamlining regional data collection activities”**

The UNECE provided information on the results of the data collection initiative approved at the workshop in Bishkek. Templates of nine tables have been distributed among the NSIs of the participating countries, eight of them returned the tables partly or totally filled. Some of the countries have just finished collecting the data for the population censuses and could not provide up-to-date information on stocks of foreign and foreign-born population. However, it was noted that the specialists of the national statistical institutes did their best to provide as much data as possible, even if additional efforts were sometimes required: some data for the templates could be obtained only from administrative agencies at a request.

The UNECE suggested to discuss the prospect of regular collection of statistics on migration within the framework of the mandate of this agency. The first data exchange initiative took place in 2006; it consisted in a comparative analysis of statistics of unidirectional migrants flows (counted in the country of origin and destination) in 19 countries. This project was followed in 2008-2009 by a comparative research based on data collected in 11 CIS states. All these initiatives showed the advantages of using data on immigration collected in the country of destination to better measure emigration from the country of previous residence.

The UNECE projects proved that both bilateral and multilateral data exchange could be very useful from the practical point of view. It was suggested to establish a clearing house to collect and disseminate migration statistics on the website of the UNECE. It could be a kind of a database filled with statistics on migration stocks and flows to and from the countries of the region. The requirements for technical aspects of data sharing are very simple: statistics should be sent in an Excel file by e-mail. Data should be collected, formatted and sent by a representative of the NSI acting as “focal point”. The “focal point” should be associated with a job position rather than an individual person, because the turnover of the staff in the NSIs is almost inevitable.

#### **SESSION V “Availability, needs and quality of administrative data: The NSO perspective”**

In this session, the National statistical institutes presented their viewpoint on the availability and use of administrative data to produce official statistics on migration. The first presentation, by the representative of the Turkish NSI, dealt with the main sources of data on stocks and flows of international migrants in Turkey. The main patterns and historical trends in international migration for Turkey were presented. Information was also provided on the recent population census and the migration related questions in the census. Some details of the registration system were provided to explain methods of collection data on migration flows.

The Central Statistical Bureau of Moldova discusses about issues of quality of data provided by the administrative agencies to the national statistical institute. Moldova is currently the only country in the region that has been receiving population statistics, including data on migration, from the central population register for several years. There is a problem of underestimation of migration flows, that seems to be considerable when statistics of Moldova are compared with data of sending and receiving countries. It was emphasized that some territories of Moldova are not under the jurisdiction of the central Government, and the NSI does not receive any information on migration to and from this region (the Left bank of the river Dniester). However, when migrants coming from this region (or leaving for it) are registered in the other countries, Moldova is mentioned as the previous or the next country of residence.

The Statistical institute of Belarus made a presentation on the system of migration data collection in the country, with a focus on data exchange with administrative agency. Data on flows are collected in a traditional (for

most post-soviet countries) way: paper forms are filled in when a person is registered in or deregistered from the new / previous place of residence. The legal basis for registration in the country was changed in 2008, and new rules made it possible to count foreigners with a residence permit that intended to stay in Belarus for 12 months and longer. The presentation also provided detailed information on variables in the statistics on migrants' flows. Special attention was paid to the questions on migration in the program of the recent census (2009), and plans for tabulation of the information collected (that is expected to be completed in 2011).

The Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan reported that the basic need for migration data in the country refers to the count of labour out-migrants. The NSI conducts national sample surveys, although they are not very effective in terms of completeness of information. It advocated for better use of administrative data collected by the State Registration Service, Border Service etc. It was also noted that there is no unified definition of labour migrant and labour migration in data collected by different agencies in the country.

## **SESSION VI “Migration data collected at borders”**

Issues about data collected at the borders, that were not discussed at the workshop in Bishkek, were the topic for session VI. The State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan provided a presentation of the results of a large-scale sample survey conducted at the borders of the country in 2009. Over 15'000 questionnaires were filled in by passengers entering or leaving the country. Information was collected in three waves: at the moment of the lowest, medium and highest seasonal mobility. The methodology and organizational aspects of the survey were discussed, and some results of data processing were presented. Data could be grouped by different variables that made it possible to obtain rather detailed information of reasons for move (entry/exit) and demographic, social and other characteristics of respondents.

Tajikistan is the only country in the region that has been using migration cards collected at the borders to estimate onward and return labour migration flows of nationals. This source of data is used to complement sample surveys in the country, which underestimate the real size of labour out-migration from the country. The participants were informed about the variables included in the migration card. Details were also provided on the legal base and the institutes responsible for migration regulation and migrants count in the country.

The presentation from the Migration Service of Armenia focused on the main issues on migration statistics in the country, and on how the data collected at the borders could fill the gaps in official data on migration flows. Migrant stocks in Armenia are counted reasonably well, while data on flows are very incomplete. Although Armenia has a population register, the updating of information is problematic, as many people do not declare neither arrival nor departure. It is estimated that the actual outflow from Armenia in the 1990s was twice as much the official figures. Armenia has an advantage of geographical location, with a small number of well-equipped (with electronic systems) border-crossing points that make it possible to rely on statistics collected at the borders. It was emphasized that these statistics make it possible to estimate (in general) the scale of population mobility, migration turnover and see the trends. Nowadays the Border Service of Armenia acts in cooperation with the other national agencies that are interested in data on migration. There are some plans to process information on entries and exits by purpose, duration of planned absence or stay and some other basic characteristics of passengers.

An additional presentation from the UNECE consultant dealt with the interpretation of data collected at the borders. It was discussed how these data could illustrate the impact of political and economic factors on frequency of entries to the country (in the case of the Russian Federation). For example, the economic crisis of 2008 resulted in a noticeable decrease of entries from the main countries sending labour migrants to the RF. 'Cooling' in bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia, and Russia and Poland also led to a dramatic decrease in numbers of entries to the RF of nationals of these countries. It was noted that border statistics count

trips rather than physical persons, thus these data should be interpreted very carefully and used only as an additional source of information.

### **SESSION VII: Availability, needs and quality of administrative data: The producer perspective**

This session was dedicated to the discussion of administrative data production and dissemination for public use, from the perspective of data producers other than the NSIs. The State migration service of Azerbaijan provided information on the recently established Joint Migration Information System. The System was created on the basis of a special Decree of the President. It incorporates all databases and registration systems of foreigners with different status in the country. It became possible to collect, store and process information of different type and have up-to date statistics on foreigners staying in Azerbaijan. Statistics are provided to the users within the country, including the State Statistical Committee. Cooperation was established between the State Migration service of Azerbaijan and similar agencies in Russia and the Netherlands, in the field of capacity building in data collection and processing. The main indicators are available online on the website of the Migration Service in three languages – Azerbaijani, Russian and English.

The representative of the Department of citizenship and migration of the Ministry of Internal affairs of Belarus reported about basic types of data collected by this agency – temporary visitors, temporary or permanent residents, irregular migrants, persons deported to the countries of previous stay, etc. Belarus is one of quite a few post-soviet states that still has a system of exit permits for residence abroad. This information is also available in the agency. The presentation also covered the mechanisms for information exchange between Migration authority and the national statistical agency in Belarus.

The representative of Georgia provided information on the potential use of data from the national Civil Registry of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia to produce statistics on migration flows. Georgia is the only country in the region where the system of registration in a place of residence was abolished in the beginning of 1990s. This immediately led to unprecedented underestimation of migration flows. Since the 1990s the population census is the only source of data on migrant stocks, while data on flows are still not collected. Thus the Civil registry is treated as the main potential source of data on flows. In accordance with a Decree of the Government of Georgia, a Joint electronic system is being established to process, analyse and forecast indicators of international and internal migration. Some international organizations support this project. The establishment of this system will give all authorized agencies the opportunity to quickly access statistics and exchange data.

The Russian Federation delegate focused on the issues of availability and use of administrative data. An example of the administrative statistics of the Federal Migration Service of Russia illustrated what components of data could be used to estimate total stock of foreigners in Russia. According to this approach, today there are about 500'000 foreigners in Russia, that makes about 0.4% of the total population.

### **SESSION VIII: Tools to improve migration data**

Within the framework of this session the UNECE provided reports on recent initiatives to facilitate access to statistics and other information on migration, and increase the 'literacy' of users and policy-makers in understanding migration data, their sources and peculiarities.

The UNECE is preparing an inventory of sources of information on migration (including statistics, policies, legislation, programmes etc.) for all 56 UNECE member countries. The inventory will include governmental agencies, departments and ministries, international organizations, NGOs, research institutions and others. The UNECE will contact soon national experts to review the content of the inventory and possibly add new sources.

The participants found this inventory very useful. It is expected that this resource would greatly simplify migration information search.

The UNECE consultant presented a toolkit (provisional title “Statistics on international migration – a practical guide for the CIS region”) for persons who are not specialists in statistics on migration, but have to work with data on migration. This is a brochure with illustrations and screenshots, where the basic concepts, definitions and data sources of migration are presented in a logical sequence and supported by examples.

In the discussion on the toolkit it was noted that the target group of readers could be very heterogeneous, thus it is not possible to choose the “degree” of simplicity or complexity of the text. In general there is a balance between technical and non-technical information, that could help non-specialists obtain the basic knowledge on statistics of international migration.

The Population Division of the UN-DESA recommended to include a list of control questions to let the readers better understand what they have learnt. Some of the meeting participants suggested that such list could be included into the brochure. Others noted that it would make the toolkit look like a manual, and may weaken the interest in reading this book. There was a counter proposition to include a kind of a glossary and place it in the end of the brochure. The glossary is useful itself and may stimulate reading again some paragraphs if the user understands that he or she has a gap in understanding a concept or a term.

There were some suggestions for possible amendments to some definitions of migrants and a brief description of migration trends. In addition to the brochure it was also recommended to prepare a kind of a shorter leaflet with a very short and simple information on types and sources of migration statistics. Such leaflet may work for ‘promotion’ of the toolkit among the potential users.

In general the draft of the toolkit was approved by the participants as a useful source of basic knowledge on definitions and sources of migration statistics, peculiarities of data interpretation and dissemination. It was recommended to finalize this work and distribute the toolkit in the countries of the region for practical use.

In the closing session, the meeting was positively assessed by its participants and its organizers (UNECE and UNFPA). Obvious progress were noticed with satisfaction not only in data collection and dissemination, but also in the level of discussion of the main challenges met by the countries in this sphere. The participants noted that the countries of the region should work on better usage of administrative sources to satisfy the demands of data users-policy makers, and to develop large-scale sample surveys in countries where they have not yet been developed. International organizations could provide a significant aid in form of consultations, training and technical assistance to improve migration data availability and quality.

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