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Producing migration data using household surveys and other sources

Suitland Working Group: Improving Migration and Migrant Data Using Household Surveys and Other Sources - Questionnaire Repository Project

Note by Eurostat¹

I. Introduction

This paper presents information on the project 'Website Repository of Household Survey Questionnaires for Collecting Data on Migration and Migrant Populations' that was defined under the work plan developed by the Suitland Group in 2009. Although many of the tasks under the project have not been undertaken as planned, other separate projects have, to a great extent, achieved the original aims of this project.

II. Suitland Group: Initial development of the project on a questionnaire repository

Following on from earlier discussions in the framework of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Work Plan on Improving International Migration Statistics, in March 2009 the US Census Bureau hosted a meeting of the Suitland Working Group on Using Household Surveys to Measure Migration and the Size, Distribution and Characteristics of Migrant Populations.

During detailed discussions, in plenary sessions and in breakout groups, the group reviewed a wide range of methodological and data source issues related to the measurement of different topics related to migration and migrant populations. An initial list of 13 potential

¹ Prepared by David Thorogood.

projects was discussed and revised, with some smaller projects that had similar objectives and topics being combined to form a more manageable set of seven larger projects:

1. Literature Review of Methodologies Used to Estimate Emigration
2. Website Repository of Household Survey Questionnaires for Collecting Data on Migration and Migrant Populations
3. Linking Registers and Other Sources of Administrative Data with Surveys to Provide Socioeconomic Information on Migrants
4. Module on Migration and Remittances to Be Included in Nationally Representative Household Surveys
5. Categories, Definitions, and the Importance of Hard-to-Count Migrant Populations
6. Data Quality Issues for Migrant Estimates in Surveys
7. Sampling Frame and Sample Design Issues for Measuring Migrant Populations

For each project, project coordinators were agreed, either at the Suitland Group meeting itself or shortly afterwards. Eurostat took responsibility for coordinating the project on a Website Repository of Household Survey Questionnaires for Collecting Data on Migration and Migrant Populations.

III. The Questionnaire Repository Project

The main aim of this project was to create a web-based repository containing questions and question modules from censuses and surveys that have been used to collect data on migration, the characteristics of migrant populations, and migration-related topics, including remittances. The need for this was confirmed during discussions in the Suitland Group meeting at which it was clear that many organisations had experience of developing and implementing questions relevant to migration statistics, but that there was no information source to which other organisations could readily refer in order to see what developments had taken place elsewhere. It appeared that there was considerable risk of duplication of work as separate organisations developed and tested questions to produce specific statistics, when appropriate questions had already been developed by other organisations.

A further perceived benefit of developing a questionnaire repository was that, by facilitating the use of common questions and concepts, there would be a greater degree of comparability between data produced by different organisations and in different countries. For Eurostat, this was comparable to ongoing work towards the modernisation of social statistics and the development of core social variables to be implemented in all major EU statistical activities. The aim here has been to ensure comparability in the concepts and definitions applied to the most important social variables.

The inclusion of migration-related topics within household surveys may be approached in different ways. For example, the inclusion of even basic questions on country of birth and citizenship within a general household survey allows socio-economic information to be produced and compared for both migrant and non-migrant groups. This is the process that has been used in a number of countries and at EU level to prepare indicators of migrant integration - comparing the situation of migrant and non-migrant population groups with regard to key areas such as unemployment or educational attainment. In other circumstances, information is required on more detailed migrant-specific characteristics such as language ability or experiences of discrimination. Alternatively, additional questions may be used to help identify particular migration-related population groups such

as the native-born descendants of foreign-born persons (2nd generation migrants) or people who migrated for particular reasons. In these cases, it may be appropriate to prepare a module of migration-related questions to be included on an occasional basis in a general household survey, as was done in the 2008 EU Labour Force Survey. More rarely, countries may opt for the more detailed but more expensive approach of undertaking a survey specifically targeted on migrants, adopting survey design and sampling processes suited to providing reliable information on migrants. The questionnaire repository was intended to cover questions used in all of these different approaches and to include both questions aimed at identifying particular migrant groups and those intended to provide information of particular relevance to migrants.

It must be acknowledged that the Questionnaire Repository project has not proceeded as originally planned. In part, this has been due to other competing pressures on staff time and resources – both within Eurostat and in national organisations that were contacted initially as possible contributors to this project. It also became clear that work on compiling information about migration-related survey questions had been included in projects being undertaken outside of the Suitland Group work plan. The next section of this paper will focus on the PROMINSTAT project, although it should be noted that important work in this area has also been undertaken by the World Bank.

IV. PROMINSTAT project

The PROMINSTAT project - Promoting Comparative Quantitative Research in the Field of Migration and Integration in Europe - took place between 2007 and 2010. The project was coordinated by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development and funded by the European Commission under the 6th Framework Programme. The project reviewed the availability and comparability of data related to migration, integration and discrimination in 29 European countries (the 27 EU Member States plus Norway and Switzerland).

The project involved 18 partner institutions, as well as additional experts in related topics. The project advisory board included the UNECE as well as three Directorates General of the European Commission (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, DG Justice, Freedom and Security (now DG Home Affairs), and Eurostat).

The outputs of PROMINSTAT can be grouped into three main parts: country reports on national data collection systems and practices; a database of meta-information covering datasets on migration in the 29 countries; and thematic working papers covering particular topics related to the collection of migration data. In addition to looking at those areas of statistics most directly linked to migration such as demography, migration flows and foreign populations, the project took a broader approach addressing residence permits, acquisition and loss of citizenship, asylum seekers and refugees, unauthorised migration, employment, income, transfers and social benefits, housing and residential patterns, health and access to healthcare, education, family and household, political participation, crime and justice.

General information on PROMINSTAT can be found at the project website: www.prominostat.eu

In relation to an inventory of migration-related questions, of particular importance is the PROMINSTAT database which can be accessed directly on the PROMINSTAT website at: www.prominostat.eu/prominostat/database/

The database provides general information and metadata on statistical datasets relevant to migration and integration research, including the type, coverage and methodology of the datasets, as well as extensive information on the variables. The database covers 1,400 dataset descriptions comprising more than 180,000 variables. The database covers all official public datasets produced by national statistical institutes and other government

agencies, as well as a wide range of research datasets. Datasets included in this database of meta-information include those based on registers, administrative counts of events, censuses and sample surveys.

Example of use made of the PROMINSTAT database

During the development work for the 2014 EU Labour Force Survey ad hoc module on the labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants, Eurostat wanted to have information on questions used in comparable surveys to produce information on migrants' knowledge of the national language(s) of the immigration destination countries. It was important to have example questions that could be discussed with national experts helping in the development and testing of the module. By using the PROMINSTAT database, it was possible to see a range of language-related questions, with the possibility of restricting the search by multiple criteria such as dataset type (census, survey, register etc.), the country that used this question, reference dates, and the different contexts in which the topic 'language' was addressed (self-assessment of ability, use of language at work, participation in language classes, assessment of the importance of language knowledge...). For each of the resulting list of questions, information was provided on which dataset/survey used the question, the other questions in that dataset, the exact question wording and the possible responses. The PROMINSTAT database proved to be a very useful tool for rapidly identifying an appropriate language question that could be adapted for inclusion in the ad hoc module

V. Options for further work

Although it appears that the main aim of the Suitland Group Questionnaire Repository project has been achieved as part of other work, the Suitland Group work plan included a possible secondary phase that covered the creation of a core set of migration variables and question modules. As noted above, this is in line with ongoing activities in Eurostat to develop harmonised core social variables for inclusion in social surveys.

In relation to migration, it could be envisaged to have several core variables (possibly country of birth and citizenship) defined for inclusion in all social statistics datasets. A second tier of recommended migration variables could also be established, either for occasional use or as harmonised concepts and variables that could readily be adopted whenever particular migration-related issues were covered (such as country of birth of parents, language ability, reasons for migration).
