

Online Meetings on Migration Statistics 27-29 October 2020

ABSTRACT

Title	Adjusting Canada's estimates of emigration in the context of COVID-19 using U.S. visa data
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Session	Measuring migration at times of the pandemic

International travel restrictions around the world following the COVID-19 pandemic substantially altered Canadian's migration trends. It is assumed that this situation has notably led to a considerable decline in the number of emigrants leaving Canada.

Canadian emigration is difficult to measure accurately because Canada does not have a population register and emigrants do not have to officially report their departure. Statistics Canada relies on demographic models based on administrative data from previous years (Canada Child Benefit data) to estimate preliminary numbers of emigrants. These models rely on the assumption that recent trends are continuing. They are less appropriate given the abrupt changes in trends stemming from the COVID-19 situation. Consequently, Statistics Canada decided to adjust its usual emigration models for 2020.

This presentation will discuss how U.S. visa data were used to adjust Canada's monthly estimates of permanent and temporary emigration in the context of the pandemic. Monthly immigrant visa statistics issued at U.S. embassies in Canada were used to adjust the estimates of the number of emigrants while non-immigrant visa statistics were used to adjust the estimates of the number of temporary emigrants. These data were used because 1) they are very timely, 2) they show a strong decrease consistent with travel restrictions and 3) the United States is the main destination country of Canadian emigrants. The adjustments resulted in a marked decrease in the number of both emigrants and temporary emigrants beginning in March 2020.

These adjustments showed the potential and challenges of using statistics from the country of destination (mirror statistics) to monitor and adjust Canadian emigration statistics. They also fostered collaboration between demographers from Statistics Canada and the United States Census Bureau. Finally, they reaffirmed the need for very current demographic data and the relevance of being transparent with key stakeholders and users.