UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS

Meeting of the 2018/2019 Bureau
Washington D.C., 28 February – 1 March 2019

ECE/CES/BUR/2019/FEB/7
29 January 2019

For discussion and
recommendations

Item 3(b) of the Provisional
Agenda

DEFINING AND MEASURING CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Note by the Secretariat

This note summarises the implementation of the definitions published in the UNECE report "Defining and measuring circular migration". **The Bureau reviewed the work on measuring circular migration and provided advice on possible further steps under CES in this area.**

I. BACKGROUND

1. In February 2013, the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) set up the Task Force on Circular Migration to develop a proposal for a common international statistical definition of circular migration. In October 2016, the Bureau reviewed and approved the task force's report *Defining and measuring circular migration*[1]. The report defined a circular migrant for statistical purposes as "a person who has crossed the national borders of the reporting country at least 3 times over a 10-year period, each time with duration of stay (abroad or in the county) of at least 12 months". To meet the policy needs for information on shorter durations of stay, the report also provided an extended definition, referring to the duration of stay (abroad or in the country) of at least 90 days.

2. At its October 2016 meeting, the Bureau asked the UNECE-Eurostat work sessions on migration statistics to follow up and implement the proposals for further work identified in the report. These proposals included testing of the proposed concepts of circular migration, practical implementation of the concepts and definitions, developing technical specifications and breakdowns for reporting circular migration statistics, and research on impact of circular migration on development.

3. The Bureau also requested the secretariat to report on progress made in two years. This is summarised in the present note.

II. PROGRESS OF WORK

4. At the 2017 UNECE-Eurostat work session on migration statistics, Eurostat presented a proposal for a set of tables for long-term circular migration in the conceptual framework of usual residence,[2] including clarifications about the implementation of the circular migration

---

[1] UNECE (2016). Defining and measuring circular migration. New York and Geneva: United Nations. Available at http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44717.
[2] Eurostat (2017). A set of tables for circular migration. Working paper 11 for the UNECE-Eurostat Work

definition and labels for specific sub-categories of migrants. The focus on long-term migration was considered a suitable starting point for this work because of data availability. However, the work session acknowledged that short-term circular migrants are probably more numerous than long-term.

5.   This work illustrated the conceptual complexity related to the measurement of circular migration. It was highlighted that as circular migration is intrinsically longitudinal, the countries with good administrative registers will be in a better position to compile the proposed tables than the countries relying on surveys and censuses.

6.   At the 2018 UNECE-Eurostat work session, Eurostat presented an updated proposal on the tables for measuring circular migration alongside with test results from six countries – Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, and Sweden.[3] All these countries compiled their statistics using registers. The test data showed that circular migrants, including both short and long-term migrants, made up only a small minority – up to 0.8 per cent of a country's total population and up to 4 per cent of all international migrants living in a country.

7.   While the stocks of circular migrants were measured as very low, it was stressed that because of the repetitive nature of this type of migration, the proportion of circular migrants in the flows of migrants is expected to be higher than in the stock of migrants. A comprehensive assessment has not yet been performed for migration flow data. The work session discussed the benefits of macro-data exchange using established Eurostat and UNECE platforms, while noting that the exchange of micro-data would be much more complex due to legal constraints.

III.   NEXT STEPS

8.   Eurostat plans to collect data tables on circular migration from EU countries in 2019 on a voluntary basis, with a view to publish available data in early 2020. The collected data may allow assessing the share of circular migrants in the observed migratory flows, and allow testing the established definition of circular migration more comprehensively. The results of this data collection are planned to be discussed at the 2019 and 2020 UNECE-Eurostat work sessions on migration statistics.

IV.   INPUT REQUESTED FROM THE BUREAU

9.   **The CES Bureau is invited to comment on the work on measuring circular migration and provide advice on possible further steps in this area.**

_____

Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva, 30-31 October 2017). Available at
http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=43943.
[3] Eurostat (2018). Circular migration: new migration topics and revised tables. Working paper 4 for the UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics (Geneva, 24-26 October 2018). Available at
http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47809.