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**EUROSTAT'S WORK ON MIGRATION
AND ASYLUM STATISTICS ***

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Eurostat's work on migration and asylum statistics

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1. Introduction – role and activities of Eurostat

Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, is the part of the European Commission charged with the collection of harmonised statistics relating to the European Union (EU) and the Candidate Countries for EU membership. Unlike most national statistical offices, however, Eurostat is not generally involved in the primary collection of statistical data. Eurostat instead receives statistics from national statistical offices and other government institutions.

As part of this role, Eurostat has long collected and compiled statistics on international migration.

2. Policy context for Eurostat's work on migration statistics

European law grants EU citizens the right to live and work anywhere in the EU. This right also extends now to citizens of the European Economic Area (consisting of the EU member states as well as Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein). There has, therefore, long been a policy and research interest in migration flows within Europe.

However, most migration policy (in particular, policies relating to migration of non-EU citizens and asylum), together with many other Justice and Home Affairs issues, had remained purely within the member states' responsibility. Although comparisons were made between, for example, particular migration flows into the EU as a whole, there was only limited policy need for these statistics.

The importance of Eurostat's work on migration and asylum has increased in recent years. The Treaty of Amsterdam, which came into force in 1999, gave the European Commission clear policy competence in the field of migration and asylum in the EU. European legislation relating to asylum and migration, which will be binding on all member states of the EU, is being put in place. Areas in which EU legislation has been adopted include minimum standards of reception conditions for asylum applicants and standards for temporary protection. Legislation is being developed in other asylum areas. Related areas in which EU legislation is being discussed include family reunification migration, conditions of entry and residence of third country nationals for the purpose of paid employment and self-employed economic activities, and the status of third country nationals who are long term residents.

To inform the development, application and review of EU policies and legislation, there is an increasing need for relevant and harmonised migration and asylum statistics at both the EU and member state level. These statistics are required by official users, as well as others including researchers, pressure groups and individual citizens.

3. Joint annual data collection

Eurostat's main migration data collection activity is the annual joint questionnaire on migration statistics. Eurostat administers this data collection, in co-operation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Statistical Division, the Council of Europe, and the International Labour Organisation. Data relating to international migration flows, population by citizenship and country of birth, asylum applications and decisions, and labour migration, are requested from national statistical offices in countries of the UN Economic Commission for Europe area. By sending a single annual data request, it is intended to reduce the burden placed on national statistical offices.

A set of empty tables in Excel format is sent by e-mail to each country, together with explanatory notes. Statistical offices are requested to complete the tables and to return them by e-mail to Eurostat. Most data are received by e-mail, although a small (and decreasing) number of countries send information on CD-ROM or diskette, or in printed form. The data are used for the production of Eurostat's statistics, with copies of the responses being sent to the other participating organisations. Arrangements are being put in place for the participating organisations and other potential users to receive data in a processed and validated form - possibly as computer files prepared for loading to the Eurostat databases.

The content of the data collection is defined in agreement with the other participating organisations. Not all of the participating organisations make use of all of the tables. However, the collection has been defined as meeting all or most of these organisations' needs for migration data.

Eurostat sends out the collection in the autumn of each year, requesting data for the previous year - eg. the questionnaire sent out in 2001 related to the 2000 reference year.

4. Publication

Eurostat's migration statistics are published in printed volumes that include detailed statistics from the annual migration data collections and related demographic statistics, together with methodological notes. The volumes are produced in English, French and German. The latest edition of this publication will include a CD-ROM of more detailed tables.

Shorter 'Statistics in Focus' publications of 4-8 pages also address specific migration issues such as asylum or gender differences in patterns of migration. Methodological information is also released in the form of Eurostat Working papers. Statistics in Focus and Working Papers are freely available on the Eurostat web site: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/>

Migration statistics are also available on the Eurostat New Cronos dissemination database under Theme 3 - Population and Social Conditions, Domain: MIGRAT. Tables are available on migration flows, asylum applications and decisions, acquisition of citizenship, and population stocks by citizenship. (A password for accessing New Cronos must be obtained from Eurostat.)

5. Problems with the collection of migration statistics

5.1 Missing data

A key part of Eurostat's role is to produce European-level statistical aggregates based on national statistics. Clearly, this becomes difficult or impossible when some national statistics are not available to Eurostat.

Sometimes data that are available at national level are not supplied to Eurostat and hence are missing from Eurostat's published statistics. This may be because the data request is not received by the person who is able to supply these statistics, or possibly because resources are not available at national level to respond to the data request. The data collection is sent to a contact in the national statistical office who is requested to arrange completion of the different parts of the questionnaire. Often though, other parts of government produce some of the requested statistics. For example, asylum statistics may be produced by the Department of Home Affairs, and migrant labour statistics by the Department of Employment. For some countries, statistics are sent by these other departments directly to Eurostat, possibly without the national statistical office having been informed of this reply. For other countries, a reply is made via the national statistical office. The fact that, often, different people and departments are responsible for each part of the data collection increases the complexity of the process and complicates follow-up contacts regarding missing or incomplete responses.

Sometimes, however, the data requested by Eurostat are simply not available in a particular country. In many cases this is because there is not perceived to be a national policy need to collect certain information and, therefore, the source data to produce the required statistics either do not exist or are not exploited. An example of this can be seen in several countries that exclude their own national citizens from migration inflow statistics. The effect of this is to make it impossible to calculate total migration inflow figures for such countries.

5.2 Definitions of migration and migrants

Countries are asked to supply data according to the definitions in the United Nations Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration (Revision 1). Extracts from these definitions are sent together with the data request. It is known though that countries are frequently unable to supply data that fully meet these definitions. In some cases the differences between the national definitions and the UN recommended definitions are relatively small. In other cases, however, the data supplied are based on national migrant definitions that differ greatly from the UN definitions. Often, the definition of a migrant in the statistics depends on national policy and procedures for the administration of migration. For example, civil registration as a resident may be required after a six month stay in a country. Therefore, where the statistical data are extracted from a population register, the period of stay required to be counted as a migrant in the statistics might be six months, rather than twelve months as used in the UN definition.

Frequent requests to Eurostat for migration statistics include enquiries from users wishing to find out about migrant flows into or out of the EU as a whole, to compare migrant flows to and from the different member states, or to analyse migrant flows between the member states. Where the data collected and published by Eurostat are based on differing definitions, there is a risk that the data will be mis-interpreted. There may also be some doubts about the validity of producing EU

aggregate figures where some of the component national statistics are based on greatly differing definitions.

5.3 Metadata

To properly meet data requests and to avoid mis-interpretation of the statistics, it is essential that the migration data collected and published by Eurostat should be as harmonised and comparable as possible. Where differences in definition are unavoidable, it is important that these should be well documented and that users should understand the likely effects on the statistics.

6. Ongoing work and future developments

6.1 Quality and metadata

Eurostat is beginning a programme of checking the quality of its migration statistics databases. This aims at reducing the amount of missing data in the databases, confirming through contact with national data suppliers that missing data really are not available, and reducing the number of errors in the statistics by reviewing the data and checking anomalous figures (such as improbably large or small figures, excessive differences between years, improbable differences when compared with similar data from other sources).

Improvements need to be made to metadata relating to data sources and definitions used at national level. This information will need to be collected via the data collection questionnaires and through additional requests for metadata.

6.2 Revisions to the joint annual migration data collection

Further work is needed to refine the content and procedures of the joint annual data collection. There is potentially a conflict between the need to have as comprehensive a data collection as possible and the fact that a simpler collection may lead to a better response rate.

Efforts need to be made to make completion of the data collection easier for data suppliers. For example, revisions to the explanatory notes sent with the data collection may assist national statisticians in more closely meeting the requested migration definitions.

The timing of the data collection is subject to discussion and review. An earlier collection would mean more timely statistics could be produced, but could increase the amount of missing data.

All such changes will need to be discussed with the other organisations that participate in the joint collection, as well as data suppliers and users of the statistics. Eurostat is committed to the joint approach to migration data collection from national statistical authorities and wishes to ensure the ongoing success of the current collection.

6.3 Monthly and quarterly data collections

In addition to the joint annual data collection, Eurostat also undertakes two collections of monthly and quarterly statistics relating to asylum and enforcement measures against illegal migration. These collections developed as collaborative actions with the European Commission's Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs, together with working groups of the EU Council of Ministers. Data are collected in the form of Excel tables sent to Eurostat by Departments of Home Affairs and Justice, immigration authorities and similar bodies in the EU and EU Candidate Countries, as well as Iceland and Norway.

Currently only a selection of these monthly and quarterly statistics are published, although work is underway to make these statistics more widely available as regular Eurostat publications.

6.4 New data collection on legal migration

Eurostat has also recently finished a feasibility study for a new data collection relating to legal entry and stay of non-EU citizens in the EU and Candidate Countries. This has examined the availability of data from sources such as long-stay visa applications, and residence and work permits. The study has identified a large number of potential data sources in most countries, the problem being the lack of harmonisation between sources and definitions. Based on this study, a final decision on whether to proceed with such a data collection will be taken later in 2002.

6.5 Statistical legislation

In many statistical domains, EU national statistical authorities are obliged by European law to supply data to Eurostat. Currently, the only EU statistical legislation pertaining to migration is a 1976 regulation relating to migrant worker statistics. Work is beginning on the preparation of updated statistical legislation for migration and asylum. This will give the data collections a firmer legal base. However, differences in migration policies and administrative systems at national level, combined with the differences in available data sources, mean that such developments must be planned with care. The workability within the different member states of any proposed migration data collection, including definitions, would need to be tested before being incorporated within legislation. It is likely that data collections would first be subject to revised (non-legally binding) agreements between Eurostat and the national statistical authorities, before legislation was put in place.