

I. OPENING

The Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, with financial support from the International Organization for Migration, organized a meeting on 11 and 12 July 2002 in New York to discuss issues related to the collection and exchange of information on international migration. As the issue of international migration has moved to the forefront of the international agenda, demands for information on international migration have grown. However, the data needed to characterize international population movements, monitor changes over time and provide Governments with a solid basis for policy formulation and implementation are far from complete. International monitoring and reporting activities are hindered by data availability, quality and comparability. In a context of scarce data and expanding demands, coordination among those who collect and analyze information on international migration is increasingly imperative. The perceived need for increased coordination prompted the Population Division to organize this meeting. A broad array of international, inter-governmental and other relevant organizations that collect, analyze and disseminate information on international migration participated in the meeting.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Joseph Chamie, Director of the Population Division. He welcomed participants coming from a broad range of international and regional organizations and explained that the meeting was organized in response to General Assembly's Resolution 56/203 of 21 December 2001, which called upon all relevant organizations to continue to address the issue of international migration and development. He described the primary objectives of the meeting, namely: (a) to share and exchange information on existing and planned data collection activities as well as on their use in the area of international migration; (b) to identify major gaps or areas of missing information; and (c) to facilitate coordination of activities within the United Nations system and among other relevant international and regional organizations as well as national institutions concerned with international migration. He hoped that the meeting would help build a more solid basis for discussions on international migration and would provide further information on international migration and development to the General Assembly.

This report summarizes the main points of the discussions by substantive session and presents the conclusions of the meeting.

II. INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: MEASUREMENT AND POLICY ISSUES

The session started with the presentation of two background papers prepared by the Population Division, each touching upon a different aspect of international migration information, namely, measurement and policy issues. Mr. Joseph Grinblat, Chief of the Mortality and Migration Section, presented an overview of the challenges and limitations encountered in estimating international migration, namely, those related to data availability, quality and comparability, as well as those of timeliness and completeness in data dissemination. He also presented recent estimates and studies on levels and trends of international migration carried out by the Population Division. Mr. Jean-Pierre Gonnot, of the Population Policy Section, briefly described the work of the Population Division in monitoring international migration policies. Unlike the area of migration statistics, where the Division is primarily a data user, the Population Division has been a major source of information on Government migration policies for almost 30 years. The presentation reviewed the sources of information used, the range of policy issues monitored and the form in which the information was disseminated. Mr. Gonnot subsequently discussed issues of data availability vis-à-vis the policy agenda on international migration. Despite the growing importance of international migration and the concerns it often raises, the information needed to hold an informed debate on the issue are often not available.

The ensuing discussion focused on two main topics: (a) Governments' capacities and willingness to produce and share information; and (b) coordination among those working on international migration at the international

and national levels. Mr. Charles Keely (Georgetown University), who chaired the session, suggested that a first step to improve quality and comparability of international migration statistics would be to establish an international statistical regime for international migration. There should be an agency responsible for defining a uniform data collection system, and persuading Governments that international migration is not a unilateral concern. Participants noted that the primary responsibility for data production would still be at the country level. The challenge for international agencies was to contribute to improving national capacities to produce data, taking into account a range of regional or national needs, and to encourage Governments to share these data more widely. Strategies to identify Governments' interests and improve national capacities had to be defined.

Direct contact with Government officials was important to increase cooperation and improve coordination among national and international partners. At the international level, coordination was necessary to streamline requests made to national Governments and to avoid duplication of efforts. It was noted that international data requests, coming mainly from the United Nations Statistics Division, had evolved to increasingly accommodate differing national definitions, but more could be done to adapt to national realities. In addition, the data collected had to be made available to national organizations; the lack of dissemination was contributing to overlapping efforts. There were calls to revise and develop existing frameworks, to integrate various dimensions of international migration and to help link trends more closely with policies. It was felt that international organizations could make further use of existing sources of information, including those that were not purposely on international migration. Surveys were also viewed as necessary in those countries or regions where basic data sources are missing.

In his closing remarks, the chair noted that participants had agreed that: (a) efforts should be made to both encourage and facilitate national reporting on international migration; and (b) improved coordination of requests made by international organizations was necessary to reduce the burden of demands on national Governments.

III. MAJOR CHALLENGES IN GATHERING INFORMATION ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Mr. Eivind Hoffmann (International Labour Organization, ILO), chair for the session, started by drawing a number of conclusions from the papers contributed to the meeting. Based on these contributions, there were two major challenges in gathering information on international migration: (a) to ensure that national organizations produce the necessary information and share it; and (b) to ensure that international organizations that collect information on international migration know and use what other organizations are collecting and, also, ensure that all areas and needs are covered. The chairman asked participants to briefly describe their activities and the lessons learned from them.

ILO's work had originally focused on the collection of information on labour migration policy, but collection activities had expanded in the mid-1990s to include levels and trends of international migrant workers. The data, available on the web¹, were mostly drawn through international initiatives; efforts to gather additional data had encountered little success. One lesson learned from these activities was the importance of providing technical assistance to countries. The representative of the International Migration Policy Programme (IMP) noted that, by approaching Government officials through training programmes, they had developed the necessary trust to share information by ensuring that politically sensitive information would remain confidential. The representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) observed that, unlike migrant statistics, information on refugees was gathered by one single international organization, through existing national offices that knew national structures well. Among the factors that had contributed to UNHCR's success were: the existence of an International Convention relating to the Status of Refugees; a clear definition of the status of refugee; and the existence of a single organization to monitor refugee flows. Technical assistance had also proven fundamental to overcome some of the difficulties experienced in obtaining and compiling information. The role of technology was crucial in the data dissemination process. In general, though, as data availability increased, issues of comparability arose. UNHCR's representative raised the issue of use and abuse of the data distributed: Could international organizations regulate data use? Could they limit their abuse? The

¹ See <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/ilmdb/ilmdb.htm>

participant from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) explained the problems encountered in gathering data on foreign students, namely those of data availability and comparability. UNESCO organized workshops yearly to inform and network directly with the statisticians that provide these data.

The United Nations Statistics Division described the international migration data collected and the methods used to collect them. Data collection was done through two questionnaires, namely, a regular annual questionnaire dispatched for the purposes of the *Demographic Yearbook* (DYB) and a census inquiry dispatched periodically after a census exercise. The information collected included both long- and short-term migrants. Unfortunately, detailed statistics on international migration had not appeared in the DYB since 1989, but the DYB 2000 was going to include census data on international migrants. Priority actions for the future were to: analyze non-responses to the questionnaires; encourage the use of the 1997 *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*²; develop further the International Migration website³; and review the DYB questionnaire to make it consistent with the definitions used in the 1997 *Recommendations*.

The chairman also invited regional organizations to describe their contributions to data collection and capacity building. The Sahel Institute, through its Center for Studies and Research on Population (CERPOD), conducted a series of longitudinal surveys (8) called REMUAO in Western African countries in the early 1990s. Due to lack of funding, CERPOD was not in a position to conduct additional data-collection activities. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) had been collecting census data on international migration through the IMILA project, created in the 1970s to provide technical cooperation and training to the national statistical offices in the region. Census data processed by ECLAC allowed for analyses at both the micro and macro levels. This information had provided an empirical framework for the study of international migration in the region and had contributed to generating knowledge on the issue. In the European Union, Eurostat conducted a data collection exercise jointly with 4 other institutions (ILO, the United Nations Statistics Division, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). Since the Amsterdam Treaty⁴ political interest on international migration flows to and from the European Union had increased. The major challenges encountered in reporting on international migration were: missing data, either not available or not reported to Eurostat; lack of comparability –diversity of national definitions-; metadata – many countries did not describe definitions and sources used-. One lesson learned through Eurostat's data-collection activities was the importance of facilitating communication among the various national agencies working on international migration. The activities of the League of Arab States, presented by the Population Division due to the absence of the organization's representative, included the creation of various quantitative and qualitative databases on international migration; the creation and update of a website on international migration; the publication of a biannual regional report on migration and the organization of regular meetings for exchange and dialog on international migration. The Asia Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN), a coalition of scholars working in East and South Asia and the Pacific, did not collect primary data but encouraged empirical research and the collation of existing datasets. Some activities had not been achieved due to lack of funding and the reluctance by Governments to share data that were considered politically sensitive.

The usefulness and reach of the 1997 *Recommendations* were discussed by several participants. Some participants thought that the framework of the *Recommendations* had to be extended to include, for instance, international migrant workers. A suggestion was made for the United Nations Statistics Division to organize regional workshops to familiarize national organizations with the *Recommendations*. Some participants noted that being in direct contact with Government officials was necessary to inform the relevant managers, and not only statisticians, of the framework provided by the *Recommendations*. It was also felt that a simpler, shorter version of the *Recommendations* should be produced. Feedback from country officials and international organizations was necessary to review and simplify them. A major challenge of the *Recommendations* was that of reconciling the demographic perspective, based on which a person who moves to reside in a country other than that of his birth or usual residence is a migrant, regardless of period of stay, citizenship and other

² *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14.

³ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/migration/index.htm>

⁴ The Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force on 1 May 1999, revised several provisions of the Treaty on the European Union. For more information about these treaties, see <http://europa.eu.int/abc/obj/amst/en/index.htm>

characteristics, with the legal framework that determines the individual status. Countries were not always able to provide information according to these different conceptual frameworks. The need to take a human rights approach into account in data-gathering activities was also raised. Overall, additional work was required, based on the *Recommendations*, to create a common migration language that would lead to a common understanding of the issues. This common migration language would come in addition to, but not replace, national practices.

The need to consider rising phenomena, such as temporary or short-term migration, movement of the highly skilled and the issue of multiple residence and dual nationality, was also raised. Emphasis was made on the need to gather data and report on short-term or temporary international migration. It was also suggested that business constituencies and their concerns be taken into consideration in data collection and policy analysis. Through inter-company transfers, businesses were able to drive changes in national policies. The implications of trade negotiations for migration policy and data-collection efforts were also mentioned. This issue would be further discussed in Session IV.

In closing the session, the chair observed that participants had agreed on the importance of building national capacity at various levels, technical and managerial, and in several sectors (including trade, the labour market, etc.). Capacity-building efforts had to take into account regional and national particularities. Also, while there was awareness of the need to improve coordination and cooperation, the extent to which efforts were coordinated or whether coordination had produced results was unclear.

IV. UNMET NEEDS FOR INFORMATION AND COORDINATION OF FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Mr. Robert Paiva (International Organization for Migration), chair for the first part of this session, opened the discussion with a series of questions: What information did Governments need that they were not getting? What information did international and regional organizations need? What concrete recommendations could be made to meet the existing and emerging needs? How could international organizations contribute to improve coordination among different national institutions?

On the topic of national versus international needs, it was pointed out that the 1997 *Recommendations* should be seen as a common language, necessary to satisfy international comparison needs, but that their use did not preclude the possibility of maintaining diverse national frameworks. Some participants reiterated that the scope of the *Recommendations* needed to be expanded, if they were to become a common framework.

Some participants described the unmet needs expressed by Governments in regional workshops and intergovernmental fora. According to the IMP representative, Governments requested assistance to develop comprehensive legislation on international migration, refugees and internally-displaced persons; to strengthen capacities at various levels through technical and financial assistance; to establish greater cooperation among countries and within them; and to develop methods to measure specific issues, namely undocumented migration. On the latter, the representative of the United States General Accounting Office presented and distributed documentation on a survey methodology for estimating sensitive items, such as undocumented migration. The representative of ECLAC said that Governments in the region expressed a need for information on recent migration trends; assistance to devise procedures to study migrants' integration, through censuses or other sources; assistance to study prevailing perceptions and attitudes in receiving countries and to develop training or advocacy programmes for the media; to study migration communities and networks; and to study the extent and impact of remittances.

The representative of Metropolis expressed the need for further research on current international migration matters and suggested that research be included in future coordination meetings. Participants cited areas in which further information and research were needed, namely trafficking, the brain drain, issues related to the protection of foreign workers and family reunification. In addressing these issues, gender perspectives needed to be taken into account. One participant questioned the definition of highly skilled migrants, and wondered whether skills should be measured by education or by the perceived needs for their services in receiving societies. Some participants noted the important role of new technologies in data availability and dissemination. The creation of a

web-based resource on international migration⁵, for instance, had let the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) witness the large demand for basic information on international migration. The need to make information more easily available and to present it in more user-friendly formats was felt by several participants.

The chairman concluded this part of the session by encouraging participants to provide more practical suggestions to improve coordination as well as to meet existing and emerging needs for information.

Ms. Mary Chamie (United Nations Statistics Division), who chaired the second part of Session IV, stressed the need to discuss some of the emerging issues mentioned in the first part of the Session. Short-term migration and the movement of persons in the context of trade of services were among these emerging trends. The Interagency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services was trying to establish a framework to bring international migration into trade discussions.

The representative of the Interagency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services explained that, in the context of the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS), statisticians had been asked to provide data for further negotiations after the Uruguay round of 1995. The Task Force had just finalized a Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services to set out a framework for measuring trade in services. A major statistical gap was found in the area of the international movement of persons related to the supply of services. Mode 4 of GATS provides for the movement of natural persons abroad on a non-permanent basis and leaves it to countries to specify the conditions for acceptance in terms of skills, occupation, etc. of these temporary migrants⁶. However, no internationally comparable statistics on non-permanent migrants have been found. Closer cooperation among statisticians and experts in the areas of trade and international migration is required to assess existing information and needs that emerge from trade agreements. The 1997 *Recommendations* provide a solid but insufficient framework for these emerging needs. It was noted that the *Recommendations* included temporary migration for purposes of work. However, only those that would work and be compensated by the country of destination are considered; this would probably need to be modified.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNCTAD, had asked some organizations (the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, IOM) to provide information on the movement of highly-skilled workers and on the “trade value” of those moves, in terms of loss or gain for sending and receiving countries. Such information was required to assess the impact of these trade agreements.

Questions had been raised on the actual policy impact of better data: What specific policies could be modified with better data? Would Governments have the willingness or capacity to modify policies based on better data? Participants noted that more and better data could at least influence Governments to take certain decisions (regarding protection, for instance), stimulate Governments’ interest and political debates and provide more solid bases for bilateral and international discussions. Data were also important for policy evaluation and to foster regional and international conventions. It was noted that the collection and availability of basic sets of data should be ensured before expanding data collection efforts.

The chair concluded the Session by noting that the question of data availability to address emerging issues had been raised repeatedly. The group saw the need for further inter-agency meetings focused on emerging policy needs. She recommended that a team of experts be put together to work on new policy concerns, including the link between trade in services and migration statistics, and to encourage the use of common concepts and definitions. She also noted that there was no standard agreement on “duration of stay”, and that the concept of temporary migration needed to be revisited. Some important questions had been raised during the discussion and had to be addressed: Did legal frameworks manage migration or, rather, did individuals and private institutions manage legal frameworks? Was there a need for a single international institution to deal with international migration? What were the technologies and policies that managed information about international movements,

⁵ <http://www.migrationinformation.org>

⁶ The General Agreement of Trade in Services distinguishes between four modes of supplying services: cross-border trade, consumption abroad, commercial presence and presence of natural persons. For more information about GATS see http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/serv_e/gatsqa_e.htm#4.

and was there a global understanding of how such management should be achieved? Finally, did emerging trends put the traditional definition of international migration into question?

V. CONCLUSIONS AND CLOSING

The participants of the Meeting stressed the importance of timely, comparable and comprehensive information on international migration. In particular, this information provides a solid basis for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of national and international policies and programmes on international migration. They also recognized the usefulness for all relevant bodies, agencies, funds and programmes to actively share information on their respective roles and activities. In addition, the participants reached the following conclusions:

Capacity building

Needed information on international migration can be generated only when the appropriate national capacity to produce it exists. International organizations should encourage and facilitate the collection, analysis and dissemination of international migration statistics and policies by Governments, in particular by means of technical and financial assistance when needed. It is particularly important that migration policy makers, managers and researchers participate together in capacity-building activities.

Methodology

Multilateral efforts to standardize international migration information and statistics should be strengthened in order to improve the cross-national comparability of information of the statistics on international migration. High priority should be given to facilitating Governments' use of the United Nations' *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*. In particular, the use of the framework proposed by the United Nations Recommendations to integrate the information obtained from different sources should be promoted.

At the same time, existing sources of information on international migration should be fully exploited. In addition, in order to make the information more meaningful, concerned organizations are urged to document better the type of information collected by including detailed information on definitions, sources and methods of analysis.

Research agenda

Relevant organizations are encouraged to strengthen their capacity to look for and collect information on international migration statistics and policies as part of their regular mandated activities. In doing so, they should take into account the evolving nature of international migration issues and policies. Among the issues highlighted were family reunification, trafficking, remittances, flows of skilled migrants, movements of short-term or temporary migrant workers, the relationship between migration and sustainable development and the consequences (intended and unintended) of international migration policies for both sending and receiving countries. In addressing these issues, gender perspectives need to be taken into account. Further research is also needed on the perception and prevailing attitudes toward international migrants in receiving countries.

Coordination

The coordination of organizations that gather and analyze international migration information needs to be strengthened. Concerned organizations should meet regularly to exchange information on ongoing activities, share their experience, and assess unmet needs. Collaboration between international migration experts and those in other fields, in particular those working on information regarding trade in services, should be reinforced. Special attention should be given to the growing importance of international migration as a part of trade in services, requiring new collaboration between statisticians in the two fields.

Coordination activities among relevant organizations should be strengthened, with special attention to avoiding duplication of efforts and to streamlining requests for information made to Governments. Efforts should also be made to assist relevant institutions within countries to coordinate their reporting on international migration, while appropriate safeguards are in place to ensure confidentiality.

The participating organizations recognized the usefulness and importance of this coordination meeting. They agreed that another coordination meeting dealing with international migration should be convened within two years.

The Meeting was concluded in the afternoon of 12 July 2002. Participants expressed their satisfaction with the constructive discussions that took place during those two days. They extended recognition and gratitude in particular to the Population Division and the Statistics Division for their efforts and expressed the hope that they would continue in their leadership roles in this field.