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COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat

New York, 11-12 July 2002

**ILO ACTIVITIES ON INTERNATIONAL
MIGRATION STATISTICS ***

International Labour Office **

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International Migration Programme (MIGRANT)

Social Protection Sector

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1. Introduction

International migration has emerged as a major economic and social force in the modern world in the context of globalisation trends and its contribution to growth and prosperity in both host and source countries. At the same time, political developments and globalisation processes have profoundly affected the character of international migration in recent years. There is no universally accepted categorization system by which all migrants can be neatly defined and distinguished, with distinctions among refugees, asylum-seekers, migrant workers and other migrants now getting increasingly blurred. While migration issues continue to form headline news items in major media and play a major role in political and electoral campaigns in the West, these issues are debated without a sound basis of reliable statistics. The ILO has long been concerned with migrant worker issues, and has pioneered the development of international instruments for the regulation of migration flows and protection of migrant workers. The Organization has also encouraged policies that make the migration process beneficial for sending and receiving communities, and for labour markets generally. The objective of this note is to highlight ILO activities in the collection, processing and dissemination of information on international migration. The first section outlines the objectives and framework of ILO activities in the field of international migration statistics. The second section lists a number of initiatives taken by the ILO in pursuit of these objectives, and difficulties encountered. The paper concludes by highlighting areas for further work.

2. Objectives and uses of information gathered on migration

ILO is the only UN agency with a constitutional mandate to protect migrant workers. Given that migration involves the movement of human beings, it is intrinsically different from other commodity and financial flows. The ILO's 1944 Philadelphia Declaration reaffirmed that "labour is not a commodity" although many migration practitioners and researchers still use the terms, 'labour exports', and 'labour imports', thereby treating migration of human beings on par with commodity flows.

The major goals of the International Migration Programme of the ILO are: Forging an international consensus on how to manage migration; and, protecting rights of migrant workers and promoting their integration in countries of destination and countries of origin. ILO gathers information on migration for several purposes.

- To meet demands from ILO constituents. As the lead international agency on labour and employment matters, ILO receives frequent requests for information on labour migration and related areas from governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other parties (NGOs, researchers, journalists).
- To monitor compliance with international labour standards on migrant workers, forced labour, gender equality and child labour.
- For more effective implementation of ILO technical cooperation and advisory services.
- To promote informed debate on current issues of migration at international, regional and national levels
- Targeting of advisory services and training programmes
- For formulation, monitoring and assessment of technical cooperation projects

Given the multidisciplinary nature of migration, the ILO information system on international migration is the collaborative product of the work of a number of ILO units, such as the International Migration Branch (MIGRANT), the Bureau of Statistics, the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), the Declaration¹, the Gender Promotion Programme (female migration), the Employment Sector, the International Labour Standards Department, and ILO-AIDS Programme.

It should also be mentioned that statistics on the international migration of workers forms part of a comprehensive body of labour and employment information compiled by the office, and is not an isolated activity. The ILO is a repository of all types of labour information, backed by in-house expertise in the Bureau of Statistics, as well as in the field offices in all major regions. This makes it possible to relate migration information to broader employment and labour market issues facing countries.

3. ILO's work on migration statistics and their dissemination

Within the broad objective of improving the knowledge base on migrant workers, ILO is interested in a variety of qualitative information as well as quantitative and statistical information related to the international migration of workers, and labour markets in sending and receiving countries. Such information relates to legislation on migration, treatment and conditions of work of migrant workers, gender and migration, and rights of migrant workers. Migrant workers here refer to both regular and irregular migrants including those trafficked. In this note, we shall primarily focus on quantitative data gathering in keeping with the theme of the meeting.

ILO's work can be divided into several areas. (Annex 1 provides list of ILO reports and publications on migration statistics.)

- *Contribution to methodology and guidelines for developing migration statistics*

ILO has developed manuals and guidelines for collecting migration statistics. The major works are Bilsborrow et al (1997) and Hoffmann and Lawrence (1996).

Bilsborrow et al (1997) has the form of a textbook on the production of migration statistics in general, with special emphasis on statistics on migrant workers, and is aimed at strengthening the capacity to produce relevant and more meaningful statistics on international migration, as basis for the formulation, implementation and analysis of migration policy. Topics include the international comparability of migration statistics, the potentials and weaknesses of existing data collection systems and the development of meaningful surveys. It also contains guidelines on estimation of remittances.

The working paper by Hoffmann & Lawrence (1996), see also Hoffmann (1997), systematically discusses the capacity of different sources to provide reliable statistics on the number and characteristics of migrant workers entering and leaving a country, living in the country and

¹ The programme to promote the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work , adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 86th Session, Geneva, June 1998 .

abroad and returning to the country of origin. It also discusses how to get reliable information about important descriptive variables for the migrant workers and their work situation, and the result into an inquiry about the statistics available in countries. It concludes by outlining a possible strategy for obtaining some statistics on migrant workers in two different, idealized, situations: a poor country with open borders and a rich country with closely guarded borders.

- *Compilation of global labour migration statistics*

ILO has compiled statistics relevant for understanding labour migration for 86 member countries, mainly through a questionnaire to relevant national authorities. For OECD countries, the ILO is collaborating with the joint questionnaire administered by EUROSTAT in cooperation with the UN Population Division and OECD. For the other countries, ILO employs a similar questionnaire. The first round of compilation was carried out in 1998 to obtain basic data on stocks and flows of migrant labour.

The information collected under this programme is disseminated through an online database called the *International Labour Migration Database (ILM)*. The statistics are presented in 13 basic tables with time series starting from 1986. Of course, some of these statistics are not available for many of the countries, or the full time series. For purposes of comparison, statistics on nationals are provided wherever relevant. The database also allows relevant persons and organisations all around the world to submit information directly to the ILM Database. The new postings are moderated by the ILM Support Staff and added to the ILM Database – if found to be of acceptable quality.

The statistics currently included in ILM relate to officially reported flows and stocks of migrant workers, although it is intended that in the future the database will include information on irregular migration as well.

ILM has been operational since September 1999. The Internet address is:
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/ilmdb/ilmdb.htm>.

Annex II provides a sample page from the ILM database.

While obvious improvements need to be made to with respect to coverage, even when considering the limited statistics actually produced by countries, the ILM database is the only global statistical database on international labour migration.

The content of ILM is limited by several factors, the major one obviously being that the capacity of countries, especially developing countries, for timely collection and processing of migration data is limited. Relevant sources are either completely absent or have limitations which affect seriously the quality of the statistics that can be produced and presented, e.g. in ILM. The information presented there is on reported flows and stocks, but it is known that in many countries there will be substantial underreporting. In addition the participating countries normally have to send tables similar to those requested according to their own definitions and classifications. As a consequence, comparability of statistics between countries will be a problem. The timeliness of the statistics is another problem, as many users would like them to be available earlier than what is possible, given the time needed to prepare them at the national level and thereafter transferring them to ILM. Initial difficulties in obtaining the statistics from

cooperating agencies have been sorted out. The limited resources available in the ILO for this work has made it difficult to sustain the work with ILM and update it continuously as well as to supplement it with statistics that are not submitted without ‘prodding’.

The ILM web page provides hyperlinks to NATLEX – the ILO bibliographic database featuring national laws on: labour, social security and related human rights, which cover migrant workers as well.

With improved coverage, it should be possible to issue bulletins of major indicators or to compile inter-country data arranged by different themes.

- *Advisory services and training of constituents in collection and analysis of statistics on international migrations.*

ILO has provided support to the Informal Network on Foreign Labour in Central and Eastern Europe. A three-day Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics in CEE countries was held in Warsaw, Poland, in June 1999 for the purpose of improving migration statistics in Central and Eastern Europe.² ILO also provided advisory services to Ukraine and Croatia for improving migration statistics, reported in Verma (2000a and 2000b).

The ILO has organized inter-country consultations in Asia as well as in Central and Eastern Europe aimed at identifying areas for harmonizing concepts and definitions, agreeing on modalities for exchanging information, and exchanging experiences on how improvements in statistics feed eventually into better policy-making.

- *Other information on international migrants collected through ongoing research, operational programmes and technical cooperation activities.*

These vary in scope from sub regional, country-level to a specific geographical region within a country. Information relates to interactions between globalisation and migration, irregular migration, discrimination against ethnic and migrant workers, skilled labour migration, conditions of work, female migrants and domestic helpers, and trafficking of women and children.

The information collected is disseminated through special reports, working papers, newsletters and the Internet. The International Migration Programme papers contain the major studies on anti-discrimination, irregular migration, skilled migration, and domestic helpers, also available on the Internet.³ ILO MIGRANT is planning to issue the IMP series in a convenient CD format with search capabilities. The work carried out by other units such as the IPEC and the Declaration on trafficking and forced labour is available on the Internet.⁴

² see ILO Informal Network on Foreign Labour in Central and Eastern Europe (2000). “*Improving Methods of Collecting Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe*”; Report of the Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics in Warsaw 1999, International Labour Office, Geneva.

³ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/publ/index.htm>

⁴ <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipec/simpoc/index.htm>

4. Areas where the data collection efforts need to be strengthened.

The decision of the ILO's Governing Body at its March 2002 session to have a General Discussion of Migrant Workers on the agenda of International Labour Conference in 2004 has important implications for the compilation of up to date information on the issue of migrant workers. While the following have been identified as important areas, it will be important to assign priorities given limited resources.

- Development of statistics on the growth and characteristics of irregular migration.
- Development of key indicators on labour migration: The identification of a limited number of such indicators to summarize and highlight developments with respect to the international migration of workers and their situation is likely to be helpful for both national and international discussions of the related issues.
- Movement of natural persons within the commitments made under GATS; the corporate sector and the governments, especially of developing countries are interested in knowing the extent and nature of movements of this type. With other agencies the UN has developed a draft manual of statistics on trade in services.⁵ But there has not been much progress. ILO raised this at the EUROSTAT inter-agency working group on statistics last February.
- Skilled migration; ILO and OECD research has highlighted the serious gaps in knowledge about skilled migration flows⁶. ILO plans to work with OECD on these issues.
- Trafficking: statistics in connection with the ILO work to combat forced labour and the trafficking of children. Much more work needs to be done on global and regional level to arrive at reasonably reliable estimates on the extent of trafficking.
- Remittances. ILO has for many years been reviewing the reliability of statistics on migrants' remittances and is concerned that it is becoming more and more difficult to find reasonably good estimates. There should be an effort to review systematically the practices followed by the Central Banks in estimating the size of migrants' remittances, and to come up with recommendations on how methods and definitions can be improved. There statistics on remittances by migrant workers and their use are extremely limited

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/decl/index.htm>

⁵ Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services; *Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services; General Agreement on Trade in Services, Annex 1 "Movement of Natural Persons Supplying Services under the GATS"*, Report presented to UN ECOSOC Statistical Commission, International Labour office, Geneva, March 2001.

⁶ Lindsay Lowell and Allan Findlay, *Migration of Highly Skilled Persons from Developing Countries: Impact and Policy Responses*, Synthesis Report, International Migration Paper 44, ILO, Geneva, 2002; OECD (2002). *International mobility of the highly skilled.*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Paris.

and work is urgently needed to find new sources for such data or realistic ways of improving existing ones.

- Global estimates of migration. One should see whether it is possible to apply to migrant workers the current work by the ILO Bureau of Statistics on methodologies of for preparing global and regional estimates on various subjects when relevant statistics are missing for a number of countries.
- Extension of UN recommendations on migration statistics⁷: Most countries find it difficult to follow these recommendations in practice; they provide a good framework for identifying the type of statistics that are needed for a wide range of analytical and descriptive purposes. It will therefore be important to extend the current recommendations, which are predominantly designed for demographic studies, to also cover statistics relevant for the study of the international migration of workers, and the work situation of international migrants.

Last but not least, coordination among various agencies is essential to avoid overlapping and ensure greater coherence and focus in data collection.

⁷ UN; “*Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration*”, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, Series M, No. 58, Rev. 1, New York, 1998.

Annex I: Selected ILO publications and reports on migration statistics

Athukorala, P (1993). “*Statistics on Asian Labour Migration, Review of Sources, Methods and Problems*”, Regional Seminar on International Labour Migration Statistics, ILO-ARTEP, New Delhi; 1993.

Athukorala, P. and Wickramasekara Piyasiri (1996). “*International labour migration statistics in Asia: an appraisal.*” *International Migration* Vol. 34(No. 4): 539-66 pp.

Bilsborrow, R.E.; Hugo, Graeme; Oberai, A.S.; Zlotnik, Hania (1997). “*International Migration Statistics, Guidelines for Improving Data Collection Systems*”; International Labour office, Geneva, 1997.

Hoffmann, Eivind; Lawrence, Sophia (1996). “*Statistics on International Labour Migration, a Review of Sources and Methodological Issues*”, Interdepartmental project on Migrant Workers 1994-95, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Hoffmann, Eivind (1997): “Administrative records and surveys as basis for statistics on international labour migration”, in *International Statistical Review*, 65, 2, pp. 221-246.

ILO-APSDEP 1988. “*Occupational Classification of Workers in Migration*”, ILO Asian and Pacific Skill Development Programme, ILO/UNDP Asian Regional Programme on International Labour Migration, New Delhi.

ILO/ARTEP-UNDP “*International Labour Migration Statistics and Information Networking in Asia*”, ILO Asian Regional Team for Employment Promotion, New Delhi.

ILO/EASMAT (1997). “*Labour statistics based on administrative records: Guidelines on compilation and presentation*”, East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, Bangkok.

ILO Informal Network on Foreign Labour in Central and Eastern Europe (2000). “*Improving Methods of Collecting Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe*”; Report of the Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics in Warsaw 1999, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Oberai, A.S. (1993). “*International Labour Migration Statistics: Use of Censuses and Sample Surveys*”, World Employment Programme, WP.75, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Stalker, Peter (2000). “*Workers without Frontiers, the Impact of Globalization on International Migration*”, International Labour office, Geneva.

Verma, Vijay Kumar (2000a). “*Better Utilization of Existing Data Sources for Generating Migration Statistics: Report on a Mission to Ukraine*”, International Labour Office, Geneva.

Verma, Vijay Kumar (2000b). “*Better Utilization of Existing Data Sources for Generating Migration Statistics: Report on a Mission to Croatia*”; International Labour Office, Geneva.

Annex II: Sample page from the ILM database



International Labour Organization
International Labour Migration Database (ILM)



LABOUR MIGRATION STATISTICS

(Search by statistical table)

1. Select one table
(then wait for page to reload)

- 01. Resident population by sex, citizenship
- 02. Employed persons by sex, citizenship
- 03. Employed persons by economic sector
- 04. Employed persons by occupation
- 05. Employed persons by employment status
- 06. Inflows of [im]migrants by sex, citizenship
- 07. Inflows of employed [im]migrants by sex, citizenship
- 08. Inflows of employed [im]migrants by economic sector
- 09. Inflows of employed [im]migrants by occupation
- 10. Inflows of employed [im]migrants by employment status
- 11. Nationals abroad by sex, host country
- 12. Outflows of nationals by sex, destination
- 13. Outflows of employed nationals by sex, destination

2. Select one country
(then wait for page to reload)

3. Satisfied with your choice ?

Selected Table

Selected Country

OK

Note :
Only countries which have supplied data for the selected table are listed.

Search by country Compare countries



Up



ILM DB



ILM Home



Migrant Home

For further information, please contact MIGRANT at
tel: 41.22.799.7854, fax: 41.22.799.8451 E-mail:
migilm@ilo.org