

PROGRAMME ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STATISTICS

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This report presents the activities of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) in the area of international migration. The presentation covers activities in: (a) the development of standards and methods; (b) international compilation and dissemination of national data; and (c) technical cooperation and assistance to countries. The report also reviews some of the lessons learned from working with countries, such as issues countries face when collecting international migration statistics, and the future activities of the Statistics Division in the field of international migration.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS AND METHODS

The United Nations Statistics Division issues guidelines and recommendations on concepts and methods to help countries in the collection and dissemination of their data. The recommendations were developed with a view to improving the quality of data and promoting the application of common definitions and concepts by countries to enhance the comparability of data at the international level. The recommendations evolved from a process involving a review of national practices and a series of consultations with international and national experts, culminating in an expert group meeting to review and comment on the draft recommendations. The expert group was composed of representatives from national statistical offices, research and academic institutions, as well as international organisations. The use of expert groups is part of an ongoing dialogue with countries, researchers, and national experts to ensure that the recommendations are both relevant and pragmatic.

The latest revision of the set of recommendations on international migration, *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*¹, was published in 1998. The *Recommendations* resulted from collaborative work between the Statistics Division and the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations with the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), national statistics offices, the United Nations regional commissions, and other organisations, such as the International Labour Office (ILO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

This document reviews new internationally agreed definitions and relevant data sources; and proposes a revised taxonomy of inflows and outflows of international travellers (Sales No. E.98. XVII.14/Table 1-Box2).² The *Recommendations* also present a framework for the compilation of statistics on flows, giving particular attention to the compilation of policy-oriented statistics from existing data. In addition, the *Recommendations* give emphasis to the topics of asylum seekers and refugees, and present definitions of relevant concepts and recommended tabulations.

The Statistical Commission, at its 34th session, in March 2003, requested that a handbook on the collection and compilation of international migration statistics be produced as a practical guide on how the recommendations can be adapted for implementation at the national level and also on the methodologies to be used for the collection and compilation of international migration statistics. The handbook, which is scheduled for 2005, will address the feedback and concerns received from national statistics offices, experts and other users of the *Recommendations*, on the applicability and relevance of the recommendations. The experiences of countries and feedback are being compiled through workshops, expert meetings, and other forms of communication.

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98. XVII.14.

² This new taxonomy replaces one that was presented in the 1979 *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (Sales No. E.79.XVII.18/table 1).

B. COMPILATION AND DISSEMINATION OF GLOBAL DATA

The main vehicle for the Statistics Division's dissemination of international migration statistics is the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* (DYB), a 54-year old publication that presents population and vital statistics for 234 countries and areas in the world. The *Demographic Yearbook* also includes a detailed set of technical notes and footnotes explaining the sources, availability, timeliness, quality, reliability and coverage of the data presented. The data included in the *Yearbook* are generally obtained from a series of questionnaires that are completed by national statistics offices.

International migration statistics are collected via three of the six *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaires: (a) "International migration and travel statistics", an annual questionnaire; (b) "Population census"; and (c) "Population census: economic characteristics". The first is a regular annual questionnaire³ and the data on flows are obtained from three tables:

1. Major categories of international departures and arrivals.
2. Long-term emigrants and immigrants by country of intended long-term residence or by country of last-long term residence.
3. Long-term emigrants and immigrants by age and sex.

The usual sources for this type of yearly information are border statistics and population registers.

The second questionnaire supplies data on:

1. Native and foreign born population by age and sex.
2. Foreign-born population by country of birth, age and sex.
3. Foreign-born population in the country for less than five years by country of birth, age and sex.
4. Population by country of citizenship and sex.

The third questionnaire provides data on:

1. Economically active foreign-born population by occupation.

The sources of data for the second and third questionnaires are population censuses. The questionnaires are sent to countries when it is known that a census has been conducted. Questions on metadata relative to the tables requested are presented in Annex I.

C. TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES

Another activity of the Statistics Division (UNSD) is to provide countries with technical support in the collection and compilation of data and in training statisticians on the application of the United Nations principles and recommendations on statistical concepts and methods. The Statistics Division also responds to requests from national statistics offices to provide technical assistance and advice.

The Statistics Division, in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), organised a "Workshop on Improving the Compilation of International Migration Statistics" held from 15 to 17 September 2003 in Geneva. The main objective of the workshop was to guide statisticians in the use of the United Nations *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*. Participants were introduced to the framework for compiling international migration statistics from available data sources as laid out in the United Nations *Recommendations*. Participants reviewed the requirements for and uses of

³ This questionnaire was not sent out in 2002 because the data collection procedures for international migration statistics (including the questionnaire on "International Migration and Travel Statistics") are currently under review.

international migration statistics; and explored ways to produce more complete and timely statistics to meet the growing demand for data to inform policy and decision-making.

Participants considered the requirements for and uses of international migration statistics with reference to statistics on international trade in services. A parallel meeting of a technical subgroup of the Task Force on Statistics on International Trade in Services was held during the Workshop. The subgroup had been set up to address the need for statistics on mode 4 of trade in services—that is, the international movement of natural persons to provide services—according to the General Agreement of Trade in Services (GATS). The technical subgroup included representatives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), UNCTAD, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and Statistics Division/DESA. Representatives of other international organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), were also present.

Participants stressed the need to reduce the burden on national statistical offices when providing international migration data, and called for better coordination at both the national and international levels. The role of international organisations in building national capacity in the compilation of statistics on international migration was also emphasized, with particular reference to training in the coordination and use of different sources for the collection of international migration data.

The Statistics Division is seeking collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions and other institutions in organising workshops to inform national statisticians about the United Nations *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* and elicit feedback on the relevance of United Nations standards and methods for compiling international migration statistics at the country level.

D. LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE ACTIVITIES

The Statistics Division is currently reviewing the *Demographic Yearbook* (DYB) system. The aim of the review is to ensure that the official national statistics reported to the United Nations through the *Demographic Yearbook* system remain comprehensive, relevant, timely, and readily accessible to interested Member States, researchers, libraries and the public at large. As part of this review, an Expert Group Meeting will be held from 10 to 14 November 2003 in New York. The Experts will recommend actions to be taken to improve the content and coverage of data collection so as to enhance the usefulness of the *Demographic Yearbook* and related outputs, both in terms of content and form.

As part of the *Demographic Yearbook* review, the process of collection and dissemination of international migration statistics is being appraised. The old questionnaire needed to be transformed to conform to revised set of Recommendations on the subject. The review was also prompted by the low levels of response during the past three decades, especially with regard to data on flows, and the difficulty in interpreting and comparing data from different countries. The major shortcomings of the data provided, typical of data on international migration, include incompleteness of the information over time and lack of comparability of the definitions and data sources among countries.

The low response levels regarding data on international migration flows stem from the lack of data collection systems that provide those data and the difficulty of producing all the data required by users from a single data source. To obtain a comprehensive view of international migration processes, the combination of different data sources that produced different types of data (border statistics, residence permits, population registers, etc.) is needed. A review of the data collected by the Statistics Division reveals also that, for countries that have reported data on international migration, the framework used in gathering data for the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaire was not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the range of categories of actually used in national data.

A revised International Travel and Migration Statistics Questionnaire for the DYB system has been developed and was first tested at the “Workshop on Improving the Compilation of International Migration Statistics”. A technical report presenting the results of the test and status of international migration statistics in selected countries will be issued early in 2004 and will be posted on the Statistics Division website at <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/default.htm>.

The United Nations Statistics Division is committed to working in collaboration with interested agencies and national statistical offices with experience in this field, to assist countries in developing appropriate systems for the collection and compilation of international migration statistics. There are several organisations involved in various aspects of international migration statistics, and better coordination among them will eliminate the overlap or duplication of activities and improve efficiency in providing countries the support that they require.

ANNEX I

Metadata collection

Questionnaire on International Migration and Travel Statistics

In this questionnaire it is requested to indicate which of the following statistics has been used:

- Port Statistics (statistics based on manifests);
- Statistics of frontier control (other than those based on manifests);
- Statistics of registration coupons detached from certain documents;
- Statistics of passports issued;
- Statistics of local population registers;
- Other statistics (please specify)

The definition and method of enumeration used, if frontier traffic (the movement of persons residing near the frontier, crossing it frequently and authorized to use simplified travel papers) is included in total departures and total arrivals, and separate figures are available for this special category. Also to indicate whether this special category is included or excluded from the major categories.

Examples for Special categories as follows:

- Border-workers;
- Deportees;
- Contract or seasonal workers;
- Guest workers; work-permit workers;
- Immigrants enjoying special facilities under bilateral or multilateral agreements;
- Visitors under bilateral or multilateral tourism agreements
- Nationals of related countries

Population census questionnaire

In this questionnaire it is requested to identify the present basis of Census tabulation based on:

- a) De facto population or
- b) De jure population

In addition, a set of questions relative to special population groups and census completeness is attached at the beginning of this questionnaire.

1. Disposition of special population groups.

This is to indicate which population group is included or excluded from the population census.

- Nomad
- Military and diplomatic personnel
- Merchant seamen and fishermen
- Civilian residents temporarily in another country as seasonal workers
- Civilian residents who cross a frontier daily to work in another country
- Foreign military, naval and diplomatic personnel and their family
- Transients on ships in harbour at the time of the census

2. Methods used in estimation completeness

- a) Post-enumeration survey
- b) Demographic analysis
- c) Other methods

3. Estimated level of completeness by sex:

- a) Gross under-enumeration (The base denominator of this percentage is enumerated population or estimated “complete “ population or not sure)
- b) Gross over-enumeration (The base denominator of this percentage is enumerated population or estimated “complete” population or not sure.)
- c) Net error (The base denominator of this percentage is enumerated population or estimated “complete” population or not sure.)