

# Surveys of International Migration

Sixth Coordination Meeting on  
International Migration

United Nations, New York  
November 26-27, 2007

Richard Bilsborrow

# Why use surveys?

- Detailed information is needed
- Too costly to obtain it from existing sources of data, such as a census
- Well-trained interviewers are required to ensure the quality of information gathered

# The importance of well-trained interviewers



“Hi, baldy! I am conducting a survey to find out how sensitive people are.”

# First challenge: Define a sampling frame

- A sampling frame is an arrangement of data that allows the selection of a sample of the population of interest
- A sampling frame should cover ALL the population of interest

# Most commonly used sampling frames for migration surveys

## Stocks of migrants:

- Population census – most common
- Population registers
- Registers of foreigners

## Flows of migrants:

- Border statistics

# Using censuses as sampling frames

Censuses usually cover only immigrants

Criteria to define immigrants:

- *Place of birth – foreign-born*
- *Country of citizenship - foreigners*
- *Country of residence 5 years ago*

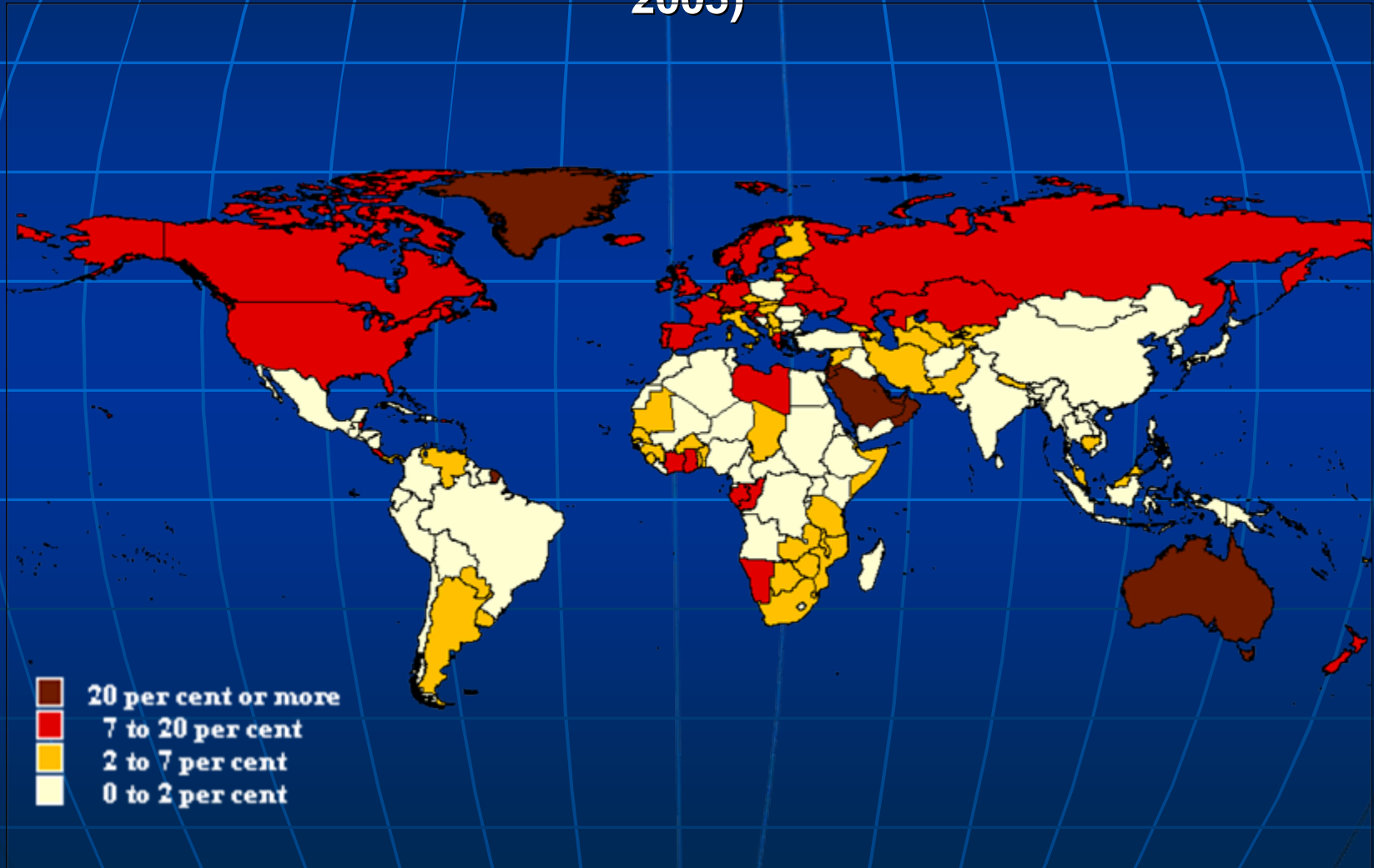
Some ask about emigrants from households

# Advantage of the population census as a sampling frame

- Universal coverage: a census allows the calculation of the *proportion of migrants* in every area of the country
- It thus permits drawing a sample of areas where migrants are concentrated, making the survey less costly while maintaining national representativity

# Second challenge posed by migration surveys: Finding enough migrants

(LIFETIME MIGRANTS AS PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION,  
2005)





# Implication of second challenge: Finding enough migrants

- In most populations, migrants are “rare” elements, especially if the focus is on *recent* migrants
- If migrants are 10% of the population, and 3% are recent migrants, a survey of 10,000 households of 4 persons will yield around 800 recent adult migrants

# One option: Use existing large-scale surveys to collect migration data

- Labour force surveys: advantage is focus on employment, hence on migrants who work
- Other large-scale population surveys

# Advantages of labour force surveys

- Routine in many countries
- Administered by National Statistics Offices
- Cover relatively large samples
- Have national coverage and representation (but some only urban areas)
- Already collect basic demographic information plus employment

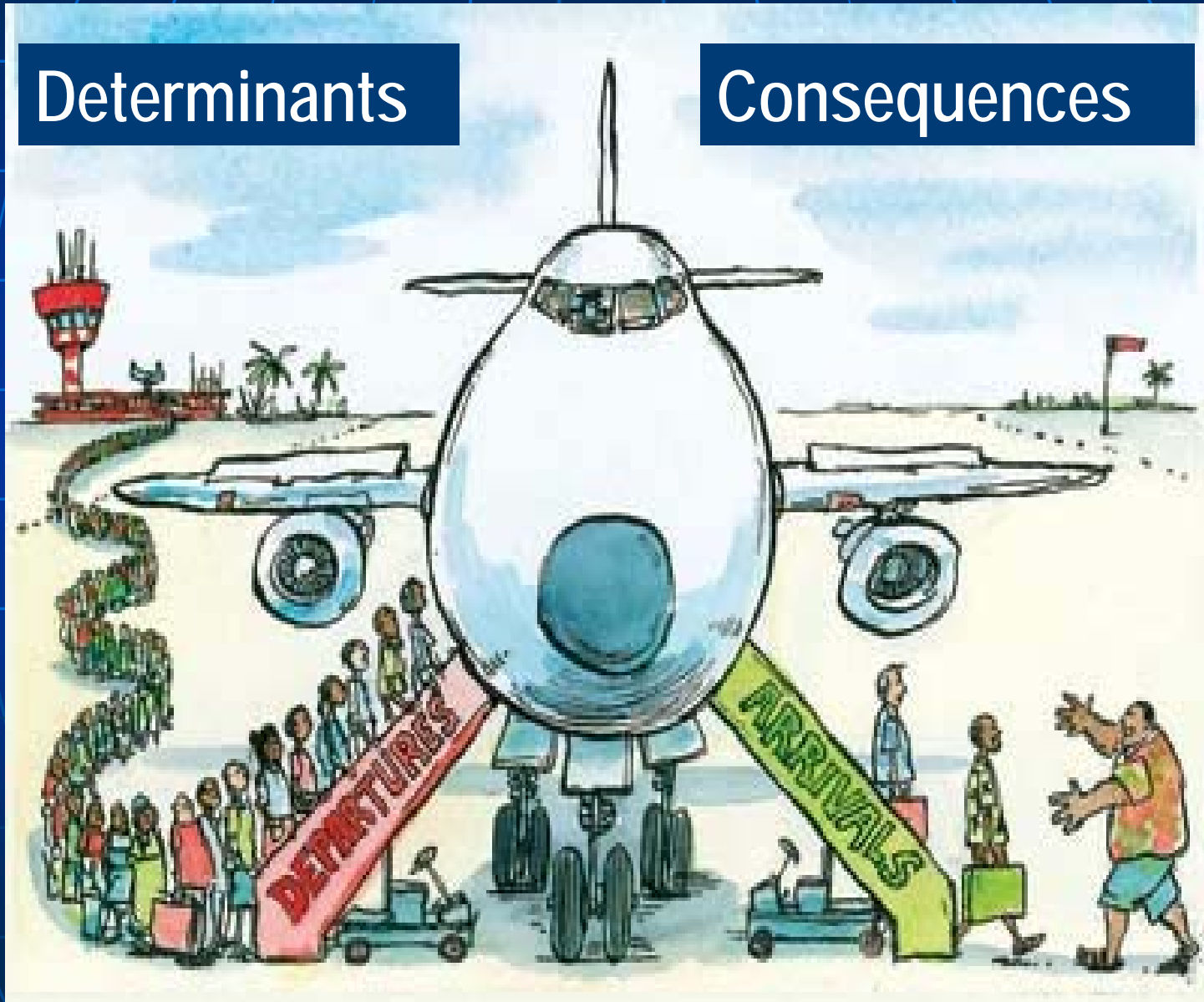
# Third challenge: Deciding how the information will be used



# Basic decision that needs to be taken:

Determinants

Consequences



# Migration is a social experiment

- Migrants, by moving, are subject to a “treatment”
- To assess the effects of the “treatment”, one needs to compare migrants with an appropriate control group of “not treated persons”

# Which is the correct comparison group?

ORIGIN	Emigrants	Non-migrants
DESTINATION	Immigrants	Non-migrants

# The Determinants of International Migration



# The appropriate comparison group to study the *determinants* of migration



Emigrants at destination

Non-migrants at origin

# The challenge of studying the *determinants* of migration

- Get comparable data on emigrants at destination and on non-migrants at origin: ideally, we need contemporaneous surveys at both origin and destination
- Alternative: survey at origin asking “proxy respondents” about emigrants

# Two options: Two surveys or one at origin

## BEST OPTION 1

Survey at origin

PLUS

Survey at destination



## OPTION 2

Survey at origin:  
using proxy  
respondents for  
migrants

**Proviso:**

Migrants  
have to  
leave  
someone  
behind



# What is the appropriate time reference?



Situation of non-migrants at the average time migrants left

We need to know:

Situation of migrants when they left

To study why they left, the situation at the time of the survey is irrelevant

# In sum, to study why people migrated...

- In country of origin, we need to survey households with and without recent emigrants
- In country of destination, we need to survey recent immigrants from the country of origin
- Compare: migrants at time of departure from origin with non-migrants at origin at the average time of departure of migrants

# The consequences of migration

# What is the appropriate comparison group to study the consequences of migration?



Immigrants at destination

Non-migrants at origin



# Contrary to standard practice--

- Comparing immigrants with non-migrants at destination does NOT provide evidence about the *consequences* of migration
- Instead, such studies allow instead the assessment of the integration or adaptation of migrants to the host society



# To study the consequences of migration

- To get comparable data on immigrants at destination and non-migrants at origin: contemporaneous surveys are needed at both origin and destination
- Alternative: a survey at origin asking “proxy respondents” about how emigrants are doing

# Two options: Two surveys or one at origin

## OPTION 1

Survey at origin

PLUS

Survey at destination



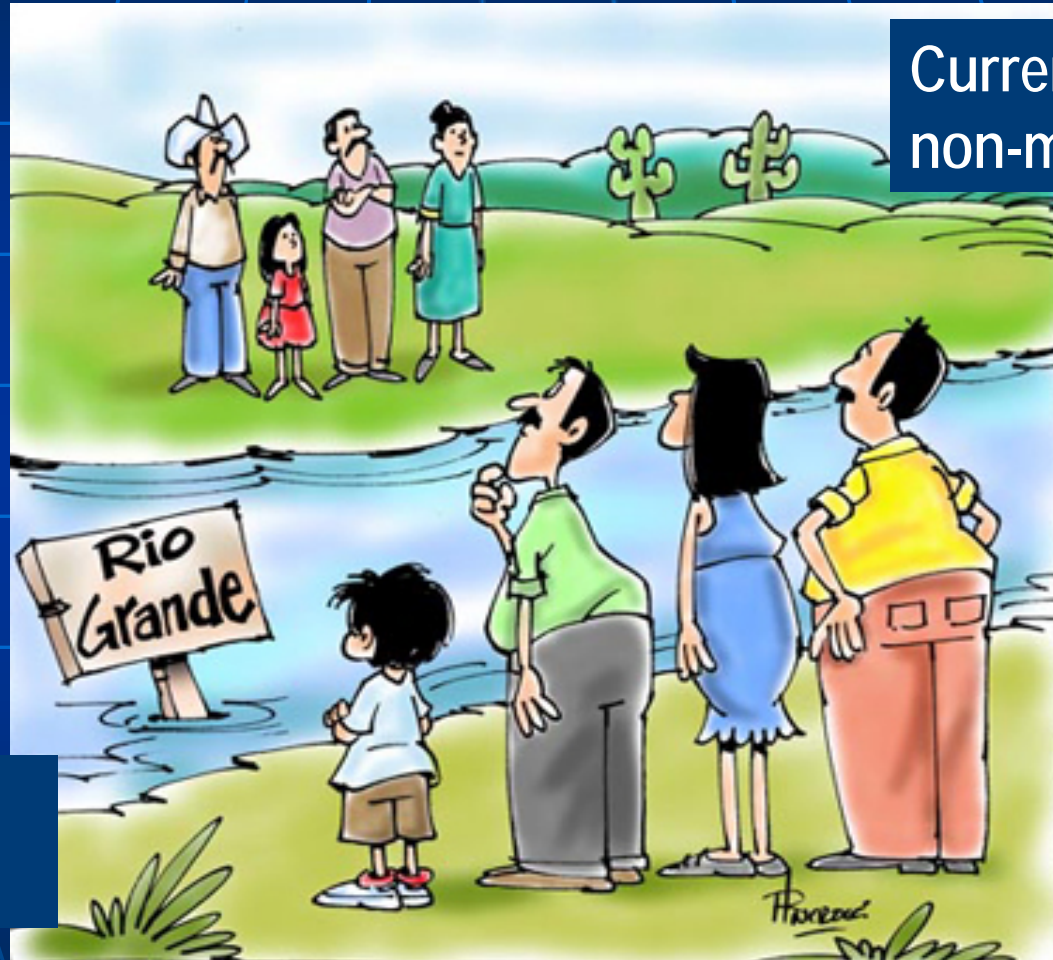
## OPTION 2

Survey at origin:  
using proxy  
respondents for  
migrants

**Proviso:**

Migrants  
have to  
leave  
someone  
behind who  
knows

# Appropriate time reference when the question is: how have they fared?



Current situation of non-migrants

Current situation of migrants

To study consequences, the situation at the *time of the survey* should be the focus



# MIGRATION NETWORKS



Ideally: surveys would be conducted in several countries at a time to be able to compare people at origin with migrants in various destinations or migrants at destination with different origins.

# NIDI-Eurostat Survey Project, 1997-1998

- Five countries of origin: Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal and Ghana
- Two destinations: Italy and Spain
- Migrant: person leaving/arriving in past 10 years
- Common methodology: samples, questionnaires
- Sample sizes were about 1200 migrants in destination countries and 2000 households in origin countries

# Comparison groups from NIDI Project

<i>Non-migrants</i>	<i>Migrants</i>
Egypt, Ghana	Italy
Morocco, Senegal	Spain

# Summary

- Ideally, surveys should be carried out in *several countries* to study the causes *or* consequences of international migration
- Combining data on non-migrants from *various* countries of origin and on migrants from those same countries in one country of destination allows an analysis of the determinants of migrants to the country
- Combining data on non-migrants from one country of origin with data on immigrants in several countries of destination allows an analysis of the consequences of migration for migrants from the origin country