
UN/POP/MIG/2002/11

28 June 2002

ENGLISH ONLY

COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat

New York, 11-12 July 2002

**ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT IN THE COLLECTION,
COMPILATION AND USE OF STATISTICAL DATA ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ***

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe **

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** ECE, Geneva, Switzerland.

Contribution submitted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe¹

I. Introduction

The present note summarises the activities carried out by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in the field of international migration, with reference in particular to the collection, compilation and use of statistical data on international migration.

In the past, two organisational units of the UNECE (the Statistical Division and the Population Activities Unit) conducted work in the field of international migration. In the mid 1990s (1992-1997) the Population Activities Unit carried out a research project on east-west migration within the region and it resulted in a series of studies and reports, including the International Migration Bulletin. Due to shortage of extra-budgetary funds, after concluding the project, the Population Activities Unit did not continue work in this important area. Consequently, at present only the Statistical Division is continuing to work in this field.

The UNECE's Statistical Division is regularly engaged in two activities in the area of international migration, under the work programme of the Conference of European Statisticians: (i) the organisation of the Joint ECE-Eurostat intergovernmental meetings on migration statistics at approximately two-year intervals; and (ii) the annual compilation of statistics on international migration flows, based on data collected through the Joint Migration Questionnaire coordinated by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Demographic and Migration Statistics.

II. The Joint ECE-Eurostat intergovernmental meetings on migration statistics

The joint meetings on migration statistics represent an important forum where various aspects of the collection, compilation and use of data on international migration are discussed by national and international experts in the field of international migration statistics. One of the issues that are discussed at the meetings is the implementation of the 1997 set of UN Recommendations on International Migration Statistics. On the occasion of the 2001 meeting, the UNECE Secretariat had prepared a report on the implementation of the UN Recommendations that included a summary of national experiences.²

The next work session on migration statistics will take place in Geneva on 28-30 April 2003 (dates to be confirmed), with the following provisional agenda:

- (i) First results on international migration from the 2000 round of population censuses, comparison with other sources and any indications on coverage and reliability (proposed organiser: France);
- (ii) Results of the pilot exercises on border card systems and work on residence permit systems carried out in 2002 in specific MED-MIGR countries and the collection of

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² The report, as well as all other documents presented at the 2001 meeting, can be downloaded from the UNECE's website, at the following address: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2001.05.migration.htm>

international migration data from the MED-MIGR countries (proposed organised: MED-MIGR expert);

- (iii) Estimates of undocumented migration and of other major categories of migrants not included in standard immigration and emigration statistics (proposed organiser: Eurostat);
- (iv) Synergies between international migration statistics and statistics on other topics with particular relevance to policy needs, including the need for international flow statistics in providing services across borders (proposed organiser: UNSD in cooperation with the Interagency Task Force on Statistics on Trade in Services).

III. Compilation of statistics on international migration flows

The UNECE's Statistical Division is active in the field of migration data collection by participating in the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Demographic and Migration Statistics (recently, the UNECE's Population Activities Unit has also joined the IWG). The working group, among other things, coordinates the activities associated with the collection of migration data from NSOs in the ECE region through the Joint Migration Questionnaire. The aim of this joint data collection exercise - in which participate also Eurostat, the Council of Europe, United Nations Statistics Division and International Labour Office - is to minimize the burden on national authorities providing migration data and at the same time to improve data comparability.

Out of the various statistical tables which compose the Joint Migration Questionnaire, the UNECE's Statistical Division currently use only two tables: table 2 on long term immigration by country of last residence; and table 4 on long term emigration by country of next residence. These data are used by the UNECE's Statistical Division to compile the matrices of international migration flows.

In these matrices, each cell corresponds to the long-term migration flow in the year of reference from one country to another. In each cell, and therefore for each migration flow, two figures are indicated: the figure reported by the country of origin and the figure reported by the country of destination. In theory, if both countries used the same definition of long-term migrant (that is, the definition indicated in the UN Recommendations) and if there was no underreporting, the two figures should be equal. In practice, the two figures are almost always different, and the relative extent of the difference between the two figures is a very good indicator of the lack of comparability of the two figures and of the deficiencies in the quality of either or both figures. In many cases the difference between the two figures is very significant, which suggest that at least one of the two figures suffers from serious underreporting (or, less likely, overreporting). This result indicates that in general terms the overall reliability and comparability of data on international migration flows is far from being satisfactory.

In the past few years, due to lack of resources, the UNECE's Statistical Division compiled only partially the matrices of international migration flows, and made no additional use of the data included in the Joint Migration Questionnaire. For the future, it is envisaged that the matrices would be completed in full for each year. Moreover, if resources will become available, some analyses of the matrices could be carried out. This analytical work could be aimed on one side at evaluating data quality and on the other side at trying to assess the trends on long-term migration flows, keeping always in mind data quality concerns.

