

IUSSP ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

International Union for the Scientific Study of Population

As the international professional association of demographers, the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) seeks to promote scientific knowledge of demographic trends and the interrelationships between these trends and economic and social development and human welfare. Through its global scientific network of about 2000 members, the IUSSP is well positioned to carry forward this agenda. However, promoting knowledge on international migration is vastly more complicated than advancing knowledge of births or mortality because the definition of migration is largely determined by political and administrative agencies within countries and standards applied vary in accordance with country perceptions of migration trends and data needs. As such the basic facts about immigration trends, immigrant characteristics, and duration of residence of immigrants in another country are poorly known compared to demographic knowledge of fertility, mortality and internal migration.

Because of the poor quality of data on international migration, the IUSSP agenda in the field of international migration has emphasized two dimensions: (1) improvements in the quality of data on international migration; and (2) comparative study of the determinants and consequences of international migration. To carry forward that agenda, the IUSSP set up two working groups in the 1970s. The Working Group on the Methodology for the Study of International Migration (1978-1981) which promoted the inclusion of the "place of birth" question in national population censuses and recommended alternative methodologies for estimating emigration based on questions that could be included in population censuses or household survey forms. The efforts of that Working Group contributed to improvements in data measurement that were subsequently promoted by the United Nations Statistical Office. The Working Group on the Economics of International Migration (1978-1981) was set up to assess the state of the art in the field of international migration and to recommend proposals for future IUSSP activities on the subject.

The IUSSP then set up a Committee on the Economic and Social Aspects of International Migration (1982-1985) which focused its efforts on two topics: the consequences of international migration for sending and receiving countries; and emerging and future international migration patterns and issues that are likely to dominate the field in the future. That group concluded that theoretical propositions far outpaced empirical testing in the field of international migration and recommended that the IUSSP seek ways to advance knowledge that would build on the existing data base on international migration and simultaneously seek to improve it. That work was carried forward by the IUSSP Committee on International Migration (1985-1989) which employed the case study method in its work. To improve data and measurement on international migration, the Committee organized a meeting in collaboration with the U.S. Bureau of the Census and Statistics Canada at which demographic statisticians from a number of countries presented papers on their country's data gathering efforts and made recommendations for improvements. Because that meeting had the sponsorship of two leading statistical agencies and included participants from the United Nations system and country statistical offices who were directly involved in the collection and dissemination of statistics on international migration, many of the recommendations from that meeting subsequently were put into practice.

The second line of work advanced by the Committee on International Migration was to identify sending and receiving countries that were organized into coherent migration systems. The basic premise underlying the migration systems approach is that international migration does not occur randomly between countries nor is it based solely on levels and trends in economic development or gaps between countries in economic development and population growth. The Committee first identified migration systems on an empirical basis - - i.e. sending and receiving countries that sent disproportionate numbers of migrants to a single sending country rather than to others -- and then compared those systems to identify other linkages (economic, social, political, historical, geographic, cultural) within them that were unique to each system.

Case studies of sending and receiving countries in different migration systems were prepared to document migration flows. The migration systems approach proved to be a robust framework for analyzing international migration flows.

The IUSSP Committee on South to North Migration (1991-1995) continued to look at systematic patterns that linked sending and receiving countries into migration networks. The Committee took up the agenda of improving theoretical understanding of how international migration systems developed and continued across space and time. Subsequently the Committee looked at changing patterns of international migration in the contemporary world and policy measures utilized by sending countries to promote labor export and to utilize remittances more effectively as a development tool, and measures adopted by receiving countries in response to changing international migration dynamics.

IUSSP efforts that started almost thirty years ago have now culminated in the advancement of several propositions that need further empirical testing to determine the extent to which they adequately account for trends in international migration today.¹ These propositions include:

1. *International migration does not stem from a lack of economic growth and development but from development itself;*
2. *Immigration is a natural consequence of broader processes of social, political and economic integration across international borders;*
3. *Immigrants are generally responding to a strong and persistent demand that is built into the structure of post-industrial economies;*
4. *Migrants who enter a developed country for the first time generally do not intend to settle permanently;*
5. *International migration is often less influenced by conditions in labor markets than by those in other kinds of markets;*
6. *As international migrants accumulate experience abroad, their motivations change, usually in ways that promote additional trips of longer duration, yielding a rising likelihood of settlement over time;*
7. *International migration tends to build its own infrastructure of support over time;*
8. *Immigrant flows do not last forever -- they have a natural life that may be longer or short but are necessarily of limited duration;*

Each of the scientific groups sponsored by the IUSSP has issued publications that document their work. Presentation and dissemination of scientific findings have long been a hallmark of the IUSSP since knowledge will be best advanced as ideas become widely disseminated and subjected to rigorous empirical testing. Simultaneously with the work of its scientific groups, the IUSSP has organized an international conference every four years at which international migration trends and theoretical and empirical efforts to understand these trends have been presented. The next IUSSP International Population Conference will be held 18-23 July in Tours, France. The International Organizing Committee for that meeting has approved a record number of sessions on international migration, as follows:

1. Migration and networks
2. Migration and employment
3. Population ageing, labor force and international migration
4. Migrant integration
5. International migration statistics and measurement
6. Consequences of migration on areas of origin
7. Trends of international migration flows
8. Impact of international migration policies
9. Demographic effects of international migration on receiving countries
10. Forced migration
11. Irregular migration: measurement, determinants, consequences and policy implications
12. International migration in rural areas

¹ *International Migration: Prospects and Policies*, edited by J. Edward Taylor and Douglas S. Massey, IUSSP/OUP Series on International Studies in Population, Oxford University Press, 2004.

The IUSSP Council has also resolved that a new Scientific Panel on International Migration be set up in the 2004-2005 period to continue to push forward knowledge of international migration. While the agenda for this group is still being determined, a logical next step would be to examine more closely the extent to which the propositions listed above hold up empirically in different migration systems and whether there are types of international migration flows in today's world that are taking on greater importance as globalization forces proceed. Other issues are also important. For example, relatively little attention has been given to the role of complex institutions in structuring international migration flows across countries or to the growing importance of temporary policy measures that permit governments to allow easy access to foreign nationals considered to be "desirable" migrants while keeping out unskilled migrants who are perceived as competitors with nationals for unskilled work. In addition, displacements of populations within and across national borders as a result of military conflict, famine, environmental deterioration, and poverty continue to raise questions regarding the extent to which countries need to keep access open to refugees and displaced persons for humanitarian purposes.