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**THE IMILA PROJECT CONDUCTED BY
THE POPULATION DIVISION, CELADE ***

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Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean **

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** CELADE, ECLAC, Santiago, Chile.

**THE IMILA PROJECT CONDUCTED BY THE POPULATION DIVISION (CELADE)
OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (ECLAC)**

The Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), which is the Population Division of ECLAC, has extensive experience in systematizing, disseminating and analysing international migration data drawn from national population and housing censuses conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean. Other sources of information –such as current records of immigration and emigration, visas, work permits and foreign residents– have only been used to a limited degree while the potential of national household or multi-purpose surveys has not been fully explored. To date, national censuses have proven to be the most reliable source of data for conducting empirical studies, assessing trends, forecasting changes and generating inputs both for population projections and for supporting the design of policies for the management of international migration.

The CELADE IMILA project

The *Project on Investigation of International Migration in Latin America* (IMILA) was conceived in the early 1970s by CELADE and is a concrete example of intraregional cooperation, since it implies that countries hand over responsibility for collecting their data to an international organization in the interest of a common cause: that of determining the extent and characteristics of migration of the region's population. The project began by processing data from the 1960 round of censuses for three countries and, following its success, was used as a basis for systematizing the records of most of the countries that carried out population and housing censuses in the 1970s; this coverage has been maintained up to the present (see table 1). The IMILA project comprises five central elements:

(a) Exchange. The number of persons enumerated in countries other than their country of birth is calculated by processing information on the population born abroad as provided to CELADE by the respective national statistical offices in census databases (or special tabulations); immigrant and emigrant stocks are quantified and characterized for each country at dates corresponding to each census round. Such exchanges are best illustrated through matrix tables showing the origin and destination of migrants between countries.

(b) Migrant specification. The identification of persons according to their migrant status depends on the questions contained in the national censuses. Such specification usually refers to the place (country) of birth, but, in some cases, the year of arrival in the country can also be determined as well as the country of residence on a date prior to that of the census. This makes it possible to have various estimates on immigration and emigration which can be very valuable as inputs in the preparation of population projections.

(c) Migrant profile. The census data provided by each country on persons born abroad is processed to generate a set of 14 basic tables relating to socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics (age, fertility, infant mortality, marital status, education and employment); in most of these tables, the gender of the persons is identified. In addition, the relevant data bases, if available, can be used to study certain basic issues for different geographic levels (from the household to the national level), with specifications on the socio-economic condition.

(d) Dissemination of data. The data systematized under the IMILA project is published periodically by CELADE in its *Demographic Bulletin* and webcast on its subsite on international migration accessible through the ECLAC webpage (www.eclac.cl/celade).

The *Demographic Bulletin No. 65*, published in 2000, contains data on the 1980 and 1990 census rounds. The data bank comprises information from 1970 to 2000.

(e) Geographic coverage. The IMILA project was originally designed to collect information on the 20 Latin American countries, but now also includes statistics on the countries of the English-speaking Caribbean. The coverage has been gradually extended to include Latin American and Caribbean emigrants enumerated in census exercises outside of the region, especially in the United States and Canada, and, to a lesser extent, in other destination countries, including some European countries, Australia, Japan and Israel.

The International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP) and several other international organizations have recognized the IMILA project as a virtually unique example of systematization of census information on international migration and have recommended that other countries in the world undertake this type of information exchange.

Limitations and potential uses of the IMILA data

IMILA makes use of the unquestionable advantages offered by censuses –in particular their universality and the vast range of sociodemographic and socio-economic data that they collect– but it does so subject to the quality of each census operation. Indeed, CELADE has repeatedly cautioned users –researchers, academics, government officials and international organizations and professional associations– that the census information processed by this project has limitations.

Conceptually, the first limitation of the census information is the differential undercount rates for total population and international migrants, which concerns, above all, persons who do not belong to any household and undocumented immigrants (who, even if enumerated, will not identify themselves as such). A second type of limitation concerns the comparability of data at the international level, owing to the irregular periodicity of national census operations, the different interpretations of the notion of residence used, depending on whether authorities have opted for a *de facto* or a *de jure* census, and the variations in working definitions of the features of the population. A third restriction, relating to methodology, stems from the fact that as every census enumerates the existing population at a given point in time, the data refer only to accumulated migrant stocks up to that time (that is, to the total number of immigrants who have survived and who, up to the date of the census, had not returned to their country of origin) and not to the migration movements that took place over the period; in other words, it fails to look at migration as a continuum. A fourth limitation, not unrelated to the foregoing, is the inability to reflect the diversity of the spatial mobility of individuals; nevertheless, efforts are being made to overcome this limitation, as shown in the case of Argentina, where, since the last census (2001), plans have been underway for conducting sample surveys on immigrant households.

From a strictly technical point of view, two points should be stressed. On the one hand, starting with the 1980 census round, most of the IMILA data have been based on census data that each country has made available to CELADE and the procedure is expected to be the same for the 2000 round. While this is affected by budgetary rigidities, since the 1990 round, the data have been processed using the RG4 version of REDATAM (Retrieval of data for small areas by

microcomputer) developed by CELADE.¹ This is considered the surest and most useful way of preserving, updating and refining the IMILA database. With respect to data processing, countries are not sufficiently rigorous in their use of standardized international codes for identifying the country of origin (country of birth or of prior residence) of persons and this makes processing of census data more complicated. Thus, CELADE recommends that national statistical offices should use the relevant international list (Standard Country or Area Codes and Geographic Regions for Statistical Use).

The potential for using census information contained in the IMILA project is illustrated by the numerous research studies which have generated an approximate knowledge of international migration in the region. Since its inception, the project has provided an empirical framework for producing direct estimates of migration and studying regional migration trends and patterns, immigrant and emigrant profiles, in contrast with those of native-born populations, migration in subregions and border regions, migration of skilled labour and the operation of labour markets, living conditions of migrants, migration of young people, return migration and gender issues, among others. The study of international migration is a central component of the programme of work of CELADE and the information is used repeatedly either for the preparation of diagnostic analyses or to corroborate theories. A research study was recently completed on policies for the mobility of skilled labour and another is being prepared on migration and gender. The Division has consistently studied the links between subregional integration processes and migration and the analysis of changes in the migration map.

IMILA and other initiatives on migration in the region

Migration is treated as a priority issue in the Commission's proposals for the construction of a regional agenda for addressing globalization. Thus, CELADE was called upon to contribute to the elaboration of substantive material for the twenty-ninth session of the Commission, which was held in Brasilia, Brazil, in May of this year, and much of the information was taken from the IMILA project.

The impact of the CELADE agenda and the role of IMILA is also exemplified by the Symposium on International Migration in the Americas, held from 4 to 6 September 2000 in San José, Costa Rica, under the auspices of CELADE and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This event was convened to enable public policy-makers, experts, representatives of international organizations and civil society organizations to exchange information, ideas and experiences relating to international migration in the hemisphere. In addition to playing an organizational role, CELADE also presented a paper entitled "International migration trends and patterns in Latin America and the Caribbean", which sums up the contribution of the Population Division of ECLAC to information on international migration in the region, and throughout the continent, thus consolidating a series of studies carried out as part of the regular activities of the Population and Development Area.

By virtue of its experience with the IMILA project, CELADE has participated with OIM, and with statistical institutes and immigration offices in different countries, in joint projects designed to establish subregional information systems on international migration based on the data

¹ This software, which may be downloaded free of charge (www.eclac.cl/celade), enables researchers to operate directly with the census databases and to process the information –including that relating to small geographic areas- and to adapt it to their research objectives.

provided by immigration and emigration records (and others of an administrative or permanent nature) and the population and housing censuses. One such project was the Information System on International Migration in the countries of the Andean Community, conducted from 1996 and 1997 in the Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela). Another, that is currently being implemented is the Statistical Information System on Migration in Central America, which was developed by OIM and CELADE at the request of the Regional Conference on Migration and encompasses Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. In both cases, CELADE has conducted training activities for the analysis of census information on international migration, using the IMILA data bank as the frame of reference.

Conclusion

For over three decades, CELADE has estimated, collated and analysed information on migration patterns and trends in countries in the region and the IMILA data bank has played a very important role in these activities. One useful lesson to be shared is the importance of supplementing the collection and processing of information with research work, an area in which CELADE has been especially active; some of its activities have been conducted jointly with OIM and with financial support from organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). CELADE participates regularly in seminars, workshops and conferences on migration within and outside the region (see www.cepal.cl/celade).

Nevertheless, the IMILA project does have limitations that are very difficult to overcome. These concern, not only the quality of the information on migration revealed by the census, but also the time lag in updating the data bank, which detracts from the timeliness and relevance of the data. While this depends on how prompt countries are in delivering their 2000 census data, budgetary rigidities within CELADE are a hindrance to timely processing. Furthermore, CELADE is not always in a position to create the tabulations specifically requested by users, either because of the cost of processing or because, in some cases, the release of census data is conditional on its being for the exclusive use of CELADE.

References:

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AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION FOR THE IMILA PROJECT
FROM CENSUS ROUNDS

Country	Census rounds				
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000a/
Argentina	1960	1970	1980	1991	
Bolivia		1976		1992	
Brazil			1980	1991	
Chile		1970	1982	1992	
Colombia				1993	2000
Costa Rica	1963	1973	1984		
Cuba					
Ecuador			1982	1990	
El Salvador				1992	
Guatemala		1973	1981	1994	
Haiti		1971			
Honduras					
Mexico				1990	2000
Nicaragua		1971		1995	
Panama		1970	1980	1990	2000
Paraguay		1972	1982	1992	
Peru			1981	1993	
Dominican Republic		1970			
Uruguay		1975	1985	1996	
Venezuela		1971	1981	1990	
Canada		1971	1981/1986		
United States		1970	1980	1990	

Source: IMILA project prepared by CELADE.

a/: Information available up to first half of 2002.