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Improving the quality and availability of migration statistics in Europe *

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper focuses primarily on the ongoing preparation of European legislation governing the collection and supply to Eurostat of statistics on migration and asylum based on harmonised definitions. The paper also gives information about two methodology projects that are planned by Eurostat which will assist Member States in the implementation of this legislation. Finally, there is an update on preparations for an ad hoc module of the Labour Force Survey in 2008 that is designed to provide better information about the socio-economic situation of migrants and their immediate descendants.

2. EUROPEAN-LEVEL POLICY DEVELOPMENTS DRIVING THE NEED FOR IMPROVED MIGRATION

2.1 Understandably, national level migration statistics have developed to meet the particular needs of national systems associated with migration. Differences in national policies and practices on immigration have resulted in differences in the concepts used in the statistics available at national level. Increasingly though, migration is a policy issue that must also be considered at European level, and at a global level. The currently available statistics are far from ideal to meet these increased policy-related data needs. On several occasions, the European Commission and the European Parliament have noted difficulties in developing and reviewing migration and asylum legislation and policies in the absence of comparable statistics. Significant gaps occur in tables where Member States do not have certain key data. Where data are available, they are often based on widely differing national definitions, meaning that aggregates and comparisons can be difficult or misleading. The situation has become more problematic since the late 1990s as the European Commission has gained European-level policy competence in a number of areas relating to immigration and asylum in the EU. Various EU legal acts have been proposed and come into force, resulting in a move towards a common asylum system and more harmonised immigration practices in the EU.

2.2 One important and growing need for comparable migration and asylum statistics in Europe is for the allocation of Community funds to Member States. The framework programme entitled 'Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows' has a large budget that is designed to assist Member States with measures aimed at better securing the external borders of the EU, the return of unauthorised migrants, reception of asylum applicants and refugees and the integration of migrants. As the bulk of this money will be allocated to Member States based on Eurostat's migration and asylum statistics, it is clearly important that these statistics are reliable and of good quality.

3. DEVELOPING EUROPEAN LEGISLATION FOR STATISTICS ON MIGRATION AND ASYLUM

3.1 Most important areas of European statistics are governed by European legislation that defines, for example, the data to be supplied to Eurostat, the reference periods, quality standards to be applied, and the time limits for data supply. EU Member State authorities are obliged under the legislation to supply the specified data. Until now though, Eurostat's migration statistics have been collected on the basis of

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and should not be construed as necessarily representing the views or position of the European Commission (Eurostat).

voluntary agreements with national data suppliers. It was decided several years ago that European statistics on migration should have the same type of binding legal basis as other areas of statistics.

3.2 A proposal² for legislation has been prepared jointly by Eurostat and the Directorate General for Justice, Freedom and Security. Following almost two years' technical consultation, it was adopted formally by the European Commission in September 2005, and has since been the subject of detailed review and negotiation by European Parliament and by the Council of the EU. Although the legislative process is still continuing, it is strongly hoped that an amended version of the proposal could come into force in the first half of 2007.

3.3 The development of this legislation has been extremely challenging. Concepts of migration and residence that have been applied to existing data collections have needed to be reviewed to ensure they remained relevant and feasible. Similarly, definitions that are adequate when undertaking a voluntary data collection are seen to require detailed review, consideration and documentation when moving towards an obligatory data collection with a clear legal base.

3.4 A number of principles were applied during the development of this legislation:

- Member States are free to use any appropriate data sources according to national availability and practices. Given the great differences in the statistical and administrative systems used at national level, it was not feasible to legislate for one specific data source to be used – this could, for example, have had the effect of forcing Member States to introduce population registers or particular surveys where these did not already exist.
- Harmonised statistical definitions are to be used – based on the existing UN Recommendations and on current and planned EU legislation on asylum, border controls and immigration.
- There is an increased emphasis on metadata, with a duty on national data suppliers to report on the data sources and methods used.
- The legislation offers a comprehensive legal framework for the current and foreseeable future needs for migration and asylum statistics – covering migration flows, foreign population stocks, acquisition of citizenship, asylum applications and decisions, measures against illegal immigration, and residence permits.
- Some flexibility for future adaptation. For example, certain new disaggregations of the statistics may be proposed in the future, and can become law through an accelerated route, with proposals being discussed, and a vote of the Member States taken, at a technical rather than political level. Similarly, the statistical definitions may be updated.

Finding workable concepts and definitions

3.5 Although apparently straightforward, the drafting of the common statistical definitions used in the legislation has been the subject of extensive consultation and review by experts in migration and asylum statistics working in national statistical institutes, international organisations and in universities. As these data are frequently supplied, and used, by officials in Ministries of the Interior and related agencies, officials from these agencies have also been involved. In particular, there has been much discussion of:

² http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2005/com2005_0375en01.pdf

- a) What do the definitions in the UN Recommendations actually mean in practice?
- b) Are these concepts and definitions appropriate and feasible in a European context - where border controls between Member States have largely been removed, where there are fewer and fewer restrictions on the right of EU citizens to live, study and work in other Member States, and where growing numbers of people choose, for example, to retire to another Member State while retaining a dwelling in their country of origin?
- c) Can the definitions be applied in all Member States, given the differences in data sources and national statistical and administrative systems?

3.6 A certain number of compromises have had to be made by all sides. The final regulation will differ from the original Commission proposal due to amendments made by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

3.7 Definitions related to *usual residence*, *immigration* and *emigration* contained in the legislation are given below to illustrate some of the issues that have had to be addressed, and which may require further attention during the implementation of the legislation. This is not an exhaustive list of the definitions, or of the issues that have been discussed in their drafting.

Usual residence

- *“usual residence” means the place at which a person normally spends the daily period of rest, regardless of temporary absences for purposes of recreation, holiday, visits to friends and relatives, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage; or, if not available, the place of legal or registered residence*

3.8 This definition has been taken from the current UN Recommendations. Efforts have also been made to ensure that this is compatible with the recommendations for the 2010 round of population censuses. Reflecting discussions over the census recommendations, concerns were raised by several EU Member States as to the treatment of persons with multiple places of residence in different countries – such as students studying abroad or weekly commuters who may have a family home elsewhere. It was noted by several Member States – particularly those that based their statistics on registers – that information on actual place of residence was not available; only the registered place of residence was recorded. This resulted in the secondary definition ‘*if not available, the place of legal or registered residence*’ being added.

3.9 Additionally, some Member States were concerned that the primary definition would also include unauthorised migrants or residents, and that they would be obliged somehow to provide data on these people – which would be impossible for many register-based systems. For this reason, a note was added to the legislation stating that it was not specifically intended to count unauthorised migrants, but that these people might be included if they were covered in the data sources used.

Immigration

- *“immigration” means the action by which a person establishes his or her usual residence in the territory of a Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least twelve months, having previously been usually resident in another Member State or a third country*
- *“Immigrant” means a person undertaking immigration.*

3.10 This definition relates to the concept of long term migration taken from the UN Recommendations. A number of Member States expressed the wish to use a shorter time-limit to define

migration, as this more closely matched their national definitions. However, it was decided to retain the 12-month definition as a well-established standard which more closely related to a change in usual residence. Concerns were also raised about the possibility of basing the definition on *expected* rather than actual duration of residence.

3.11 Some Member States felt that the concept of 'immigration' should not be applied to citizens of that country. In addition to a view that 'immigrant' meant 'foreign', this was in part due to the data sources which are commonly used, such as where immigration data are taken from administrative records of residence permits issued to foreign citizens. In fact, due to the gradual removal of specific registration rules for citizens of other EU Member States (with other EU citizens being treated in the same way as citizens of that country), some Member States wanted immigration to refer only to non-EU citizens. While the reasons behind this are clear, it was important to retain a definition of immigration to include all citizenships, in order to get a full picture of the scale and patterns of migration. It is recognised though that a more restricted concept of immigration – limited to 'controlled' migration of non-EU citizens would be far easier for some data suppliers. These differences in concept also reflect the needs of different statistics users. Officials in Interior Ministries are mainly concerned with immigration of non-EU citizens, whereas those working on population or labour force statistics have an interest in all migration.

Emigration

- *“emigration” means the action by which a person, having previously been usually resident in the territory of a Member State, ceases to have his usual residence in that Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least twelve months*
- *“emigrant” means a person undertaking an emigration*

3.12 The definition of emigration is designed to mirror that of immigration. However, there are known to be very serious problems of non-availability of data for emigration in many Member States. The difficulties of ensuring that population registers accurately reflect departures from the country are well known. Similarly, data based on administrative records of residence permits will generally not include good information on departures. Emigration statistics will be supplied with far less detailed disaggregations than immigration data. The legislation allows for estimations to be used where directly observed data are not available. It is likely that this option will be most used for emigration statistics.

4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEGISLATION – RELATED RESEARCH PROJECTS

4.1 Eurostat is launching two projects to support the implementation of the legislation and, more generally, to improve the availability of migration statistics. These projects are the subject of competitive calls for tender – one already completed and the other due to be published early in 2007.

4.2 The first project is designed to develop and implement statistical modelling techniques that can be applied to estimate migration flows and foreign population stocks in cases where data are incomplete or poorly harmonised. As is noted above, it is intended that the legislation will recognise that statistical estimations may be necessary in some circumstances where data are not directly available. This three year project will also involve visits to interested Member States to assist with the application of these methods to national and well as European data. One expected output from this project will be a series of complete migration matrices showing estimates of migration to and from the Member States.

4.3 The second project aims to provide practical methodological assistance in implementing the legislation. This will cover the redevelopment of existing data sources to make them more suitable for migration statistics (such as revisions to survey sampling procedures, or reviews of methods for ensuring emigrants are de-registered from population registers), assistance in evaluating and documenting current

data sources, and facilitating improved communication between national bodies responsible for migration and asylum data. Again, this project will involve visits by an expert contractor to interested Member States.

5. LABOUR FORCE SURVEY – AD HOC MODULE ON THE LABOUR SITUATION OF MIGRANTS AND THEIR IMMEDIATE DESCENDANTS

5.1 In 2008, there will be an ad hoc module of the Labour Force Survey which has the objectives of identifying the population of migrants and their immediate descendants, providing comparable data on the labour market situation of these people, and of analysing the factors affecting the adaptation of migrants to the labour market.

5.2 The core LFS includes information on respondents' country of birth, citizenship, year of establishment of residence in the country, and country/region of residence 12 months before the survey. The ad hoc module will include information on year of citizenship acquisition, country of birth of mother and of father, total length of residence in host country, and main reason for migration.

5.3 The ad hoc module has been developed following detailed consultation with Member States, international organisations and academic experts. In addition to addressing the questions and content of the module, it has been important to review the suitability of the sample to address questions related to migrants.

5.4 Further details of the ad hoc module are available in a paper prepared for the Joint UNECE/Eurostat work session on migration statistics (November 2006) - <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.10/2006/wp.12.e.pdf>