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Data in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the
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Revision of the 1998 Recommendations on Statistics
of International Migration
Why and what?[1]

Prepared by
United Nations Statistics Division

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[1] This document is being reproduced without formal editing.

Introduction

Published in 1998, the *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1* (hereafter called *1998 Recommendations*) aims at providing practical guidance on how to collect statistics on migrant stock and flows relevant to the study of international migration. It reviews the major types of data sources for international migration statistics, as well as ways to integrate them through the use of a framework for data reporting.

The *1998 Recommendations* is the second edition? of international standards on statistics on international migration. The first set of standards was published in 1953 and focused on the collection of information on all arrivals to and departures from a country. The 1953 Recommendations proposed an internationally agreed definition of permanent immigrants on the basis of intended duration of stay and served as an organizing framework for much of the subsequent documentation of international migration.

In 1976, the United Nations developed a new set of guidelines on international migration statistics. The salient features of the 1976 recommendations are the conceptual consistency with other components of statistical systems, notably international tourism statistics, and the identification of a number of additional categories of international population movements. The 1976 recommendations also proposed a large set of model tabulations, which were later criticized as "overly complex" (Kraly and Gnanasekaran, 1987; Simmons, 1987).

The three sets of international standards (1953, 1976 and 1998) were developed with the aim to improve international migration statistics. However, their adoption and use by countries have been slow. Questions raised by countries on the practicality of the *1998 Recommendations*, as well as changes in migration patterns, border control, as well as methods in data collection in the last 20 years have clearly pointed to the need for undertaking a review and update of the *1998 recommendations*. In addition, the importance of accurate and disaggregated migration data as a basis for evidence-based policies has been further acknowledged by recent global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the final draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Recognising the importance of having an updated set of recommendations on international migration statistics, the United Nations Statistical Commission, at its 49th session in 2018, requested the UN Expert Group on Migration Statistics to initiate their revision.

Why a revision is needed?

A clear linkage to data needs for policymaking is necessary

The formulation of sound policies demands solid data. To provide guidance on the collection and use of data, it is important to (a) identify migration policies that are relevant to countries and (b) assess data required to inform those policies.

Many countries have migration policy briefs that reflect important policy concerns related to international migration and those concerns should be used to provide insights on which data are needed. At the global level, two major initiatives – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration – point to policy areas that are important both at the global and national level.

The *1998 Recommendations* approaches migration data collection from a demographic point of view, focusing on the size and characteristics of different types of migration and non-migration flows across countries. The publication also has a very light coverage of data on migrant stocks.   Therefore, the revision should consider incorporating policy priorities at national and international level and identifying data required to respond to policies and to support policy review and evaluation.

Revisiting and re-defining the conceptual framework

The 1998 Recommendations defines an international migrant as "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence" and a person's country of usual residence is "that in which the person lives, i.e., the country that the person has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest." (para. 32) The *1998 Recommendations* further clarifies that "the change of country of usual residence necessary to become an international migrant must involve a period of stay in the country of destination of at least a year". (para. 36). The extent of the duration of stay abroad is what makes the statistical definition of 'migrant' different from the one of 'visitor'.

International migration, as defined in the *1998 Recommendations*, is therefore basically a factual change of country of usual residence, without any reference neither to the individual characteristics of the person such as country of birth, citizenship or holding the permission for legal stay in the hosting country, nor to the reason(s) for the change of country of residence. The *1998 Recommendations* elaborates further the duration element, when the concepts of "long-term migrant" and "short-term migrant" are defined (Box 1). For long-term migrant, a period of at least 12 months residence in the country is required, while a requirement of 3 months but less than 12 months duration of stay is used for short-term migrant.

More than 20 years have passed since *the 1998 Recommendations* has been published. People move more easily than 20 years ago. It has been observed that international migration is growing not only in magnitude but also in scope and complexity. Changes in the patterns of migration may have an important impact on the conceptual framework currently used for international migration and the related definitions. Recent discussions on the relevance of concepts and the applicability of their definitions have raised some critical questions. For instance, is the concept of international migrant and how is defined still relevant and sufficient for national policy purposes? Do we measure - and how - the number of people who move frequently and/or live in a country for short periods for studying or working purposes?

How countries measure international migration has also changed over the past 20 years. Many of the European countries are moving towards integrated population registration systems. On one hand, this move improves the efficiency of national statistical systems in producing data; on the other hand, data generated from such system have limitations that are common to any statistic based on administrative record. The registration and deregistration rules may "dictate" how international migrants are captured by the system.

Another challenge, or opportunity, for measuring international migration, is associated with non-traditional data sources that emerged in the past few years. These new data sources may not be fit for a statistical observation of the 12-month duration of stay (as prescribed in the current *1998 Recommendations*), whilst offering almost real-time snapshots of migration-related phenomena. The timeliness of the information on migration is however an aspect which need to be tackled, especially considering that information is nowadays spread (and demanded) at much higher speed than in the past. How can we take advantage of the timeliness of these new data sources without biasing the statistical information on migration? Should the definition of migration be revised in a way that non-traditional data sources can be a realistic option?

Improving migration data system with a holistic approach

Statistics on international migration within a country are usually collected by multiple agencies including national statistical offices, Ministry of Labour, Foreign Affairs and/or Interior. Improving migration statistics requires a holistic approach rather than treating different data sources in a sectoral manner. A holistic approach implies that different partners collecting and compiling information related to international migration have a clear role that is stipulated legally and their activities are properly coordinated.

The revision of the *1998 Recommendations* will therefore provide guidance on a migration data strategy in the country in terms of delineation of responsibilities, institutional arrangements and coordination mechanisms. The revision will also provide recommendations to countries in terms of quality assurance and methods to assess national migration data systems.

Migration data dissemination and communication strategies

Developing a comprehensive strategy for disseminating and communicating migration data targeting various users should be one of the corner stones of a national migration data system. Such strategy should aim to maximize the use and ensure the relevance of statistical information produced by the national statistical system. A good communication strategy will also help reduce miscommunication and combat xenophobia against migrants. This dimension was not covered by the *1998 Recommendations.*

Incorporating new developments in methodologies and international standards

In the past 20 years, great progress has been made on data collection, compilation and dissemination, to produce more accurate, timely and disaggregated data on migration. This includes more and better use of administrative data, integration of multiple data sources and leveraging new data sources such as social media, mobile phone and satellite imagery.

Additionally, new international standards on areas related to international migration[2] have been developed, which should be taken into consideration in the revision.

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[2] *International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics*, approved the UN Statistical Commission in 2017; *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, rev. 3* (2014). *Guidelines concerning statistics on international labour migration,* adopted by ICLS in 2018.

Proposed annotated outline for the revision
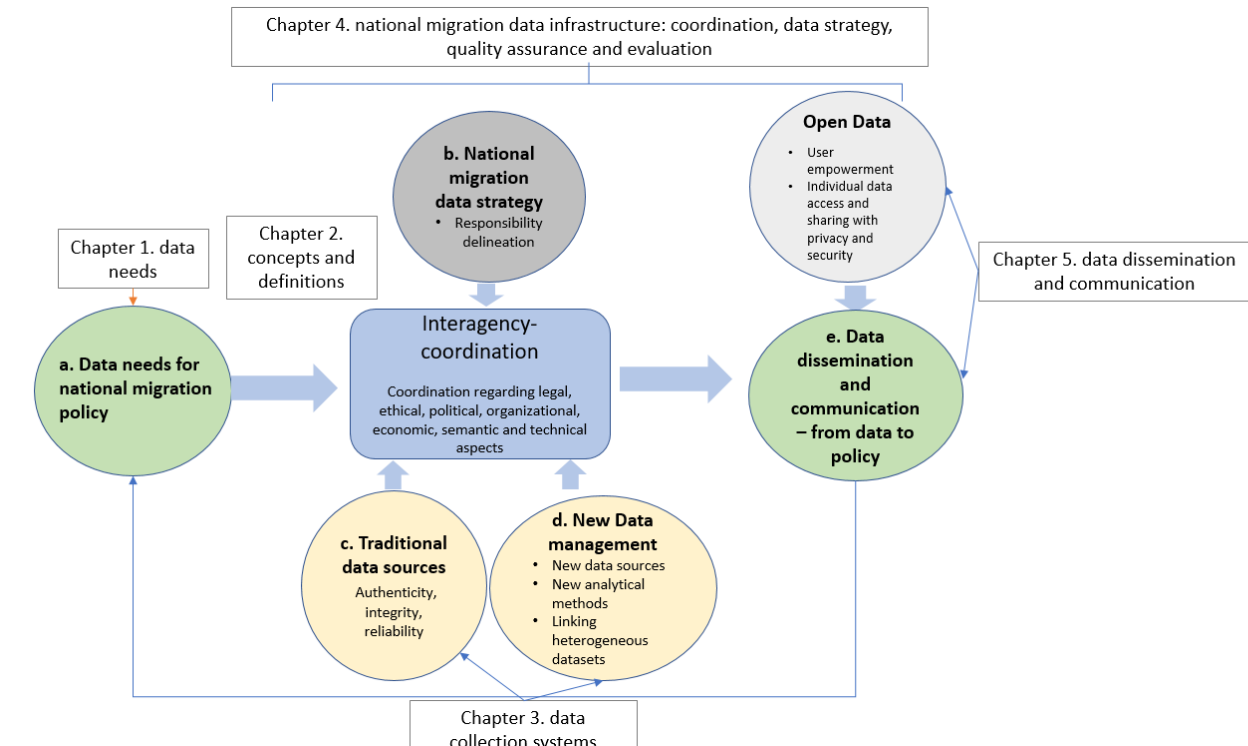
Introduction

- Previous recommendations and the need for a revision
- Purpose and scope of the current/revised Recommendations
- Organisation of the Recommendations

Chapter 1. Data needs for policymaking

Assess data needs to address relevant migration issues, while taking into consideration important international commitment, such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The chapter will guide discussions for the following chapters in the Recommendations. (Based on input from Task force 1)

Chapter 2. Concepts and definitions

The chapter discussed the conceptual framework of migration-relevant concepts and provides statistical definitions for the concepts (Based on input from Task force 2).

Chapter 3. Data collection systems, including traditional and non-traditional data sources

The chapter focuses on the collection and measurement of stocks and flows of migrants and relevant concepts, as well as the integration of migrants and relevant population. Data sources covered in this chapter include both traditional and non-traditional data sources, as well as integrated data sources.

Chapter 4. National statistical system on migration statistics, including quality assurance framework for data related to international migration

The chapter covers recommendations related to national data system for international migration-related statistics. These cover 4 fundamental levels that are related to managing (a) the statistical system for migration statistics; (b) the institutional environment; (c) the statistical processes and (d) statistical outputs. The chapter aims to bridge the United Nations National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF)[3] to statistics on international migration and provides concrete recommendations on how to improve the quality of the data.

The chapter will also cover various tools for assessment of national data on international migration.

Chapter 5. Dissemination and communication of data/user engagement

The chapter recommends strategies for data dissemination and communication, targeting different user groups such as policymakers, general public, researchers.

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[3] United Nations National Quality Assurance Frameworks Manual for Official Statistics, draft available at
https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/BG-Item3d-NQAF-Manual-E.pdf