Data Sources for Migration Statistics

SADC Workshop on the Use of Administrative Data for Migration Statistics

17-21 March 2025, Johannesburg, South Africa

Elena De Jesús
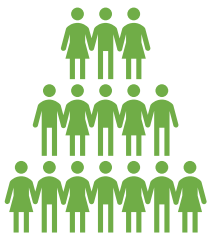
Core Migration Statistics

			Primary topics for disaggregation
STOCKS	1.1	Number/proportion of _____ in the total resident population **Foreign-born population** **Foreign citizen** Foreign-born citizen Native-born foreign citizen **Foreign-born foreign citizen** **Native-born (native) citizens**	1.Age 2.Sex 3.Country of birth 4.Country of citizenship
	1.2	Number of _____ who obtained citizenship over a given year Native-born foreign citizen **Foreign-born foreign citizen**	1.Age 2.Sex 3.Country of birth 4.Country of citizenship
FLOWS	1.3	Annual number of immigrants who are _____ **Foreign-born population** **Foreign citizen** Foreign-born citizen Native-born foreign citizen **Foreign-born foreign citizen** **Native-born (native) citizens**	1.Age 2.Sex 3.Country of birth 4.Country of citizenship
	1.4	Annual number of emigrants who are _____ **Foreign-born population** **Foreign citizen** Foreign-born citizen Native-born foreign citizen **Foreign-born foreign citizen** **Native-born (native) citizens**	1.Age 2.Sex 3.Country of birth 4.Country of citizenship

POLICY AREA 1

Improve the measurement of international migration and temporary mobility stocks and flows

Stocks: size, characteristics and geographic distributions of international migrant and temporary populations present in the country at a particular point in time

Flows: number of immigrants and emigrants during a given year

United Nations | DESA Statistics Division

Data Sources

Population Census

Comprehensive national enumeration of all persons capturing demographic data

Surveys

- Specialized migration surveys
- HH surveys / LFS
- Passenger surveys

Administrative Data Sources

- Population registers
- Border records
- Residence permits
- Visa databases
- Social security records

Non-traditional data sources

Can supplement traditional data sources, filling data gaps

Population Census - Advantages

Universal Coverage*

of resident population, including undocumented migrants, refugees and stateless persons

Reliable source

in the absence of comprehensive administrative registers

Rich socio-demographic data

and characteristics allow comparisons between migrants and non-migrants

Basis for survey sampling frames

and population estimates between census years

* In theory

Population Census - Limitations

Infrequent
New data available approximately every 10 years
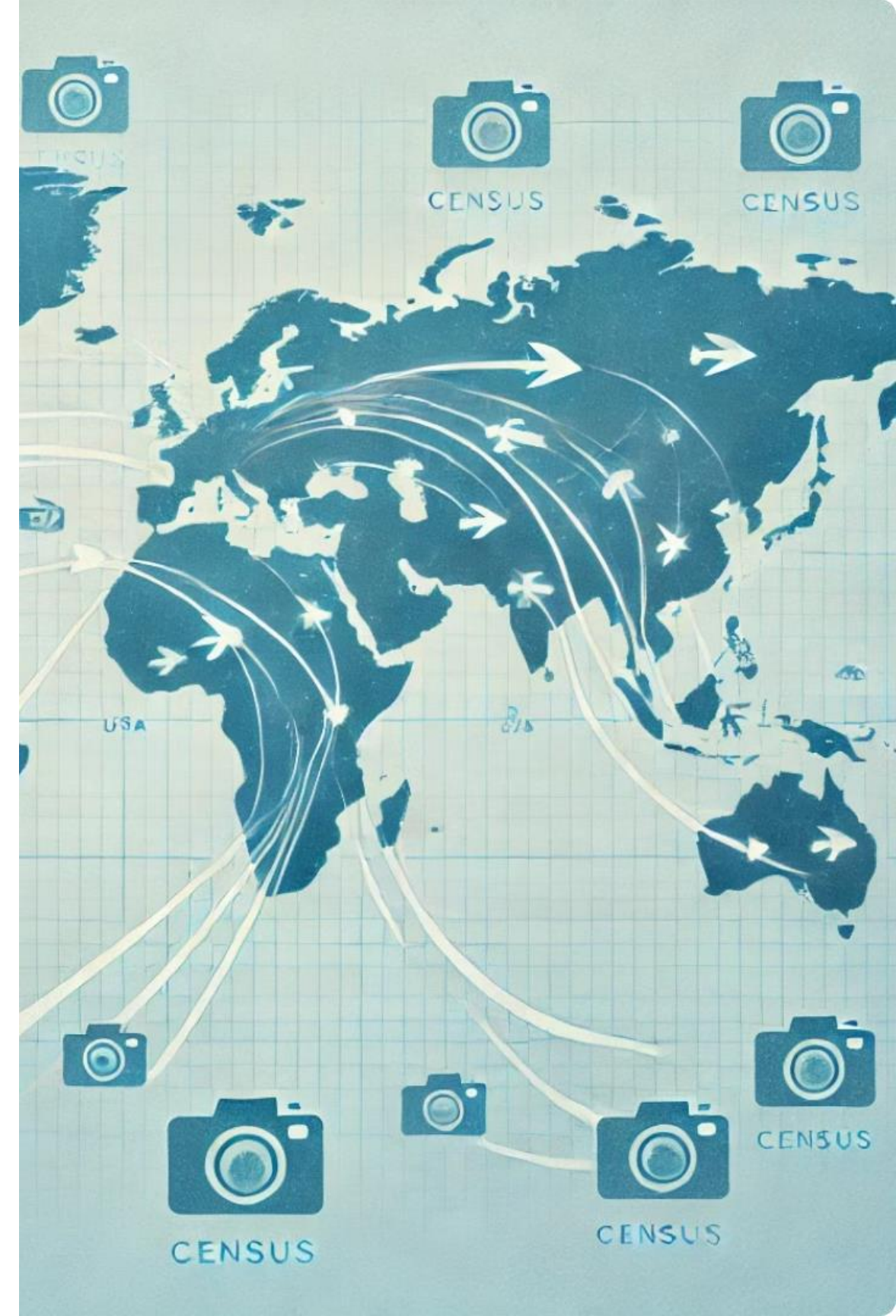
Limited Space
Questionnaire space is costly, limiting migration-specific questions

Flow Limitations
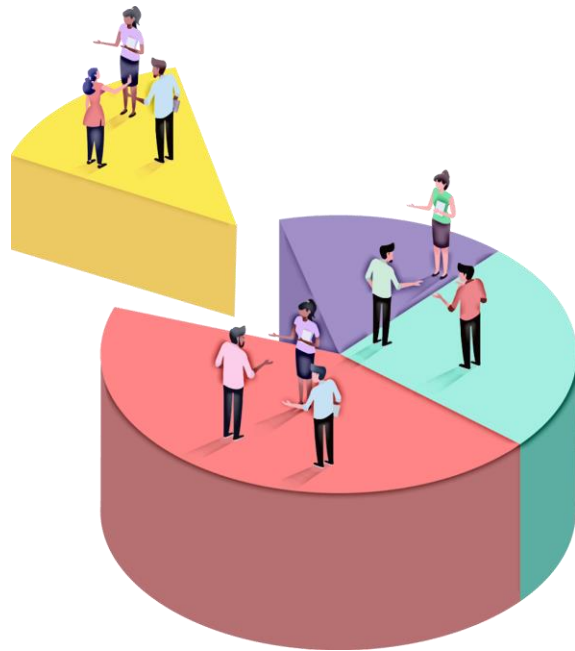Cannot capture detailed migration flows, particularly emigration

Undercounting
Potential undercounting of highly mobile populations, undocumented, etc.

Surveys

- ➢ **Specialized migration surveys**

- ➢ **Modules added to household surveys**

- ➢ **Passenger surveys**

Advantages

+ More frequent than censuses

+ Can include detailed migration modules

+ Allow in-depth analysis of migration causes/consequences

+ Flexible design to target migrant populations

Limitations

- Sample size issues for migrant subgroups

- Cannot capture full migration flows

- Potential underrepresentation of migrants

- Can be resource intensive

Surveys

Specialized migration surveys	Modules added to HH surveys / LFS	Passenger surveys
Advantages		
• Flexible, targeted design • Allow in-depth analysis of migration causes/ consequences	• Regular data collection • Cost-effective • Allow for mainstreaming migration data into various social areas covered by the surveys	• Information on international mobility
Limitations		
• Resource intensive - unsuitable for annual international migration statistics • Usually carried out in a receiving country	• Large samples needed to identify enough migrants for meaningful analysis • Non-random missing data • Concentration of migrants in specific regions	• Low proportion of migrants among all border-crossers • Potential exclusion of less frequent origins/destinations • Limited interview time, restricting the number of questions

Administrative Data Sources

Stocks

- Integrated population registration systems

- Centralized population registers

- Social security and health insurance registers

- Income and tax registers

- Residence permit databases

- Consular registers

- Acquisition of citizenship databases

Flows

- Border records

- Visa databases

- Residence / work / study permit databases

- Social security and health insurance registers

Administrative Data Sources

+ **Continuous collection**
Continuous monitoring of migration flows and updates of population stocks

+ **Cost-effective and timely**
Low marginal cost

+ **Captures specific events**
Visa issuances, border crossings, citizenship changes

+ **Key variables**
Often includes key variables like date of arrival, legal status

- **Duration of stay and intent not captured**
Typically contains dates of events or validity periods of documents

- **Limited coverage**
Limited to documented migrants

- **Registration lag**
Can lead to under or overcounting of the resident population

- **Multiple statuses**
One individual can have different statuses across systems

- **Inconsistent definitions or concepts**
May not align with statistical concepts, Definitions may not be consistent across sources

Non-traditional Data Sources

+ Fill data gaps

+ Hard-to-count phenomena

- Ethical considerations

- Inherent bias

- Data access

- Complex analysis

United Nations | DESA Statistics Division

Potential sources for calculating core migration statistics

1.1: Number/ proportion of foreign-born, foreign citizens, etc. in total resident population (STOCK)

- Population census

- Population register (where available)

- Integrated administrative data

1.2: Number of people who obtained citizenship over a given year (STOCK)

- Administrative records on naturalization

- Population register (where available)

1.3: Annual number of immigrants (FLOW)

- Population register

- Integrated border crossing and residence permit data

- Survey data (e.g., questions on residence one year ago)

- Social security and health registers

1.4: Annual number of emigrants (FLOW)

- Population register (where available and well-maintained)

- Mirror statistics from main destination countries

- Household surveys with emigration modules

Mapping administrative sources for migration statistics

- Border control/immigration office

- Population registers

- Registers of foreign citizens

- Registers of asylum seekers and refugees

- Register of workers abroad

- Resident permit database

- Exit permit database

- Work / study permit database

- Visa issuance

- Tax and/or social security records

- Health/medical records

- Education/school records

Thank you!

Questions?

P.S. Continue filling in mapping tool!