

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Measuring international migration: Concepts and methods

Date: **4-7 December 2006** Place: **New York**
Host: **United Nations Statistics Division**
Contact: **Erlinda Go, Social and Housing Statistics Section (go@un.org and migstat@un.org)**
Website: **<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/egm/migrationegm06>**

In this era of globalization, with ever expanding communication possibilities and enhanced mobility of individuals and economic entities between countries, the number of migrants has increased markedly. Concomitantly, national governments of sending, receiving and transit countries are showing keen interest in international migration, aware of its potential benefits as well as possible negative consequences. However, efforts to deal effectively with issues of migration are impeded by the dearth of statistics on these and related emerging issues.

The statistics needed to characterize migration flows and monitor changes, as well as effectiveness of policies, over time, are very often fragmented and available from incongruent sources. Aiming to improve availability and comparability of immigration statistics, and provide a coherent framework for the collection and compilation of migrant flow and stock, the United Nations released a set of guidelines *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Rev. 1* (1998). An initial assessment conducted by the United Nations, and a review of its Demographic Yearbook system data, suggests not only that the reporting of migration data has not improved, but also that the international recommendations have not been widely adopted by countries.

Objectives of the meeting:

The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) seeks through this expert group to assess requirements for international migration statistics in response to policy interest and the challenges faced by national statistical systems in measuring international migration flows and stock. The meeting will review national practices in the compilation of migration statistics and identify difficulties associated with the recommended concepts and definitions. The meeting will further explore ways to foster cooperation between policy machineries of governments and their data collection agencies, and to develop a plan for the improvement of migration statistics. The outcome will help determine the scope and content of a handbook on statistics of international migration to be prepared by UNSD.

Key issues:

1. The need for statistics on international migration

Perceptions about the net effect of international migration and consequently decisions about the appropriate policy interventions differ significantly, depending on whether the country is -- on balance -- one that is sending, receiving or serving as a transit point for migrants. To bring some clarity to the determination of the data requirements of policy makers, it is important to know:

- a. What are countries' major concerns about international migration, and what are regarded as being potential benefits and costs from either immigration or emigration?
- b. What categories of international migrants are countries interested in measuring?
- c. To what extent are the data needs being met and what are the gaps and deficiencies in the available statistics, with respect to categories, characteristics, push and pull factors, impact, etc.?

2. Concepts and definitions

The use of the concept “usual resident” and “migrant” in statistics is not readily accepted by immigration authorities of some countries, especially those in which the same terms are used in legislative instruments governing migration. While statistical provisions have brought the concept in conformity with what obtains in other economic frameworks, few countries have adopted the recommended definition for data collection.

- a. What criteria do countries use for identifying a migrant? How do elements such as residence, time or duration of stay, and purpose of stay, feature in the definitions?
- b. What parallel terms do countries use to represent the categories of policy interest and how are these defined?
- c. Is there a need to agree on definitions of still other categories of international migrants; e.g., circular migrants, temporary migrants (less than three months), undocumented migrants?
- d. How can other conceptual/analytical frameworks inform the definition of the stock of international migrants?

3. Measurement

Adoption of the recommended definition of migrants requires that several questions be used to categorize them. The questions and parameters used to measure migration vary, however, with the type of instrument employed, resulting in inconsistencies and incomparable estimates between sources and countries.

- a. How are the various criteria related to place of usual residence, duration of stay, and purpose of stay made operational during the data collection process?
- b. What are the experiences and ongoing initiatives to standardize instruments for collecting migration data?
- c. How relevant are administrative statistics, such as school enrollment, foreign investment and remittances, etc., to measuring specific segments of international migration?
- d. What are the criteria applied by each country to identify migrant stock? Some criteria used are place of birth (to identify foreign-born), citizenship (to identify foreigners), and background (to identify persons with foreign background).

4. Sources of data

Most of the data collection systems on international migration (flows and stocks) are directly or indirectly related to the control of international migration, with each system serving a specific need and specific categories of migrants. Moreover, the populations covered by the different sources are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive, thereby complicating the process of arriving at a national aggregate of migrant flows.

- a. What are the ideal sources of data for international migrant stock and flows? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
- b. How are the different sources used to complement each other? How comparable are they, and how can they be combined?
- c. How can coordination be done among different sources within country to produce aggregate statistics? Is it possible to establish linkages across datasets, across borders?

5. Data exchange among countries

Interest is growing on the possibility of measuring emigration through statistical data on immigrants in receiving countries.

- a. Can reliable information on emigrants be obtained through the sharing of immigration data available in receiving countries? What is the experience of the countries on this exercise (in Latin America, Europe and any others)?
- b. What issues should be considered in developing data exchange protocols to facilitate sharing of information on international migration?
- c. What other collaboration among countries and international/ regional organizations can be done to improve the availability and quality of statistics on international migration?