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IMPROVEMENT OF MIGRATION STATISTICS

Report of the Secretary-General

1. This paper presents a review of the history of international activities in improving migration statistics, the current interest in the field and sources of migration statistics. After reviewing the situation, the Commission may wish to recommend a programme of work designed to improve international and internal migration statistics to the level where they can supply the type of information required to meet the diversity of interests set forth in part II below.

I. HISTORY

2. Interest in international migration statistics and the need for their improvement has a long history. Some consideration was given to migration statistics by the International Statistical Institute at its sessions in Vienna in 1891, Budapest in 1901, Berlin in 1903, Rome in 1926, Warsaw in 1929 and Madrid in 1931. Migration statistics were also considered at the International Conference on Emigration and Immigration held at Rome in 1924 and at the Commercial Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, held at Rio de Janeiro in 1927.

3. Since its founding just after the First World War, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been concerned with the international co-ordination of migration statistics, considered mostly from the man-power angle; various technical bodies of the United Nations have also been active in promoting the

improvement of these data from the broader demographic, economic and social points of view. The text of the recommendations and resolutions on migration statistics adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1922, the resolutions of the International Conference on Migration Statistics convened in 1932 at Geneva by the International Labour Organisation and the 1949 draft recommendations for the improvement of migration statistics, drawn up by the Population Commission and endorsed in the same year by the Statistical Commission at its fourth session, are contained in Problems of Migration Statistics^{1/} as well as in the original reports of the conferences or commissions concerned.

4. The 1949 provisional recommendations of the United Nations were revised at the beginning of 1953 by the Population Commission and the Statistical Commission, taking into account the previous international resolutions and recommendations on the subject and the results of extensive consultations with the competent statistical services of the countries interested in this subject. The text of the 1953 recommendations is given in International Migration Statistics.^{2/}

5. To confirm the 1953 recommendations as international standards, the Economic and Social Council adopted resolution 469 E (XV) on 27 April 1953. This resolution called the recommendations to the attention of Governments and expressed the hope that consideration might be given to the conclusion of suitable arrangements for the collection of migration statistics as recommended. These 1953 recommendations remain the current international standards. No additional work in this area has been authorized by the Statistical Commission, despite a growing interest in the field.

II. CURRENT INTEREST

A. Population projections

6. Interest in international and internal migration statistics has been growing during the last few years in many areas. Chief of these is perhaps the area of population projections, especially rural/urban shifts of population and the problems of projecting population trends without having information on these shifts.

^{1/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1950.XIII.1.

^{2/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1953.XVII.10.

7. From the functional point of view, international migration statistics belong to the field of demographic statistics. This relationship derives from the simple fact that the net balance of international migration is one of the two components of the total increase or decrease of national populations during a specified period of time; the other component is natural increase, or the net balance of births and deaths, among the population in question. Further, the net balance of permanent migration is a component of change in the de jure population while the net balance of arrivals and departures (travellers) is a component of the change in the de facto population.

8. In exactly the same way, internal migration statistics provide the migration component of the total increase or decrease in subnational population groups, the other component being the natural increase among the subnational population groups in question.

9. Attempts to project population have not yet been able to take the migration component into account^{3/} because of the dearth of statistics and also because assumptions as to future trends are not easy to make. Nevertheless, in considering a revision of the world population projections for 1965 to 1985, the Population Commission at its fifteenth session "suggested that, in addition to urban-rural migrations, other internal and external migratory movements should also be taken into account"^{4/}. It is clear that in order to do this, a study of the volume and characteristics of international migration statistics will have to be made and the Commission recommended such a study. In so doing, it was pointed out that "improvement in that branch of demographic statistics was felt to be especially important since they were fundamental to improvement in demographic projections"^{5/}.

^{3/} The Future Growth of World Population (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 58.XIII.2), pp.13-18, and World Population Prospects, as assessed in 1963 (United Nations publication, Sales No.: 66.XIII.2), p.4.

^{4/} Report of the Fifteenth Session of the Population Commission (E/4763) para. 30.

^{5/} Ibid., para. 23 .

B. Urbanization

10. In 1961, the Economic and Social Council approved proposals for a concerted international action programme in the field of urbanization and, by its resolution 830 B (XXXII), invited "the United Nations, including the regional economic commissions and the specialized agencies concerned, to strengthen their work on various aspects of urbanization and to make the necessary provisions for full participation in the concerted programme of international action in this field."^{6/}

11. Human beings are converging at a generally accelerating pace on the larger towns and cities. They come from rural areas and smaller localities in the same country and, as has been noted above, also from foreign countries, primarily in search of employment or as political refugees. Thus, the study of urbanization must take account both of international migration and of internal migration.

12. At its meeting from 2-4 September 1964, the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Long-Range Programme of Work in the Field of Population noted that "Rural-urban migration is a major factor in urbanization. Migration and the natural increase of the urban population have major demographic implications. Conversely, the economic and social developments in cities affect the future needs for migration, the vital rates of the population and the characteristics of the population. As migrations are selective, they have important bearings on the composition of the urban and the rural population with regard to sex, age, education, occupation and other characteristics."^{7/} The Ad Hoc Committee recommended that statistics be increased and improved, since "the extension and improvement of demographic statistics are indispensable to long-run advancement in research and technical work in all population fields."^{8/}

^{6/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Thirty-second Session, Supplement No.1, p.13.

^{7/} "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Long-Range Programme of Work in the Field of Population" (E/CN.9/182), paras. 38-39.

^{8/} Ibid., para.28.

13. In 1967, the Secretary-General's Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Programmes in Demographic Aspects of Urbanization, meeting in Sydney, Australia, also emphasized the need for accurate statistics in the area.^{9/}

14. More recently, the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Programmes in Demographic Aspects of Social Development urged "the development of vital and migration statistics ... in view of the lack of data on births, deaths and migration in almost all developing countries". The Committee emphasized "that no research and action in the population and social fields is possible unless adequate basic data became available".^{10/}

15. In speaking of "migration", the Committee tended to speak of "internal migration" since members were aware that the study of international migration did not originally fall within the five priority areas of research and technical work established by the Population Commission. "However, it considered that international migration often forms a substantial part of total migration and that it should be studied, as it has serious implications, both social and demographic, for the countries concerned. Under changing conditions, for instance, the relative importance of international, interregional and rural-urban movements may undergo significant shifts, and the contributions to economic and social development made by migrants to cities may differ according to their areas of origin. International co-operative studies on such topics may be promoted at regional levels, as well as the collection of pertinent statistics".^{11/}

16. The question of whether international migration should be considered part of "urbanization and migration", the priority area of research established by the Population Commission at its thirteenth session, was also considered by the Commission at its fifteenth session, in November 1969. The Commission came to the unanimous conclusion that it should be so included and recommended that a study of the volume and characteristics of international migration be undertaken by the United Nations Population Division (see also paragraph 9 above).

^{9/} "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Programmes in Demographic Aspects of Urbanization" (E/CN.9/218).

^{10/} "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Programmes in Demographic Aspects of Social Development" (E/CN.9/222), para.90.

^{11/} Ibid., para. 43.

C. The Brain Drain

17. The term "brain drain", which was coined originally to describe the emigration of British engineers and scientists to the United States, had a strong connotation of loss. Now it is applied to all emigration of highly trained people from one country to another, without any real assessment of its effect on individual countries of origin.^{12/}

18. Attempts to measure the magnitude of the "brain drain" have always been impeded by lack of statistics. Migration statistics by country of origin and destination are notoriously deficient but, in addition, very few countries have data according to occupation or professional qualifications.

19. In considering the problem of "brain drain" and how to measure it, the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Committee for the Development and Utilization of Human Resources of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) agreed, on 30 January 1968, that the question of obtaining further information from exit and entry forms should be examined by the United Nations Statistical Office. On 19 March 1968, therefore, forms drafted by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to be used at all points at which nationals leave their country, and re-entry forms for all nationals returning, were sent to the Statistical Office for comment. However, the Statistical Office was not able to support the proposal to collect such data at the frontiers. It was opposed to increasing border formalities in the way suggested by UNITAR because of the various injunctions against this in Statistical Commission resolutions, (see paragraphs 21-25 above) and also for the more important reason that the proportion of "brain-drain" cases was too small to justify the collection of data on all persons moving across national frontiers. More appropriate and more economical methods were recommended.

20. The outflow of trained professional and technical personnel from the developing to the developed countries, its causes, its consequences and practical remedies for the problems resulting from it, became the subject of General Assembly resolution 2417 (XXIII) on 17 December 1968. The General Assembly recalled the Secretary-General's report on the development and utilization of human resources - in particular, the section dealing with the migration of highly trained personnel

^{12/} International Labour Review, vol.99. No.4 (April 1969),p.401.

from developing countries - noted that many developing countries were not yet technically equipped to assess adequately the magnitude and characteristics of the outflow of their trained personnel, and requested the Secretary-General to "draw the attention of the appropriate organizations and programmes within the United Nations system to the need to assist the Governments of the developing countries which are Members of the United Nations, at their request, in improving their statistical and research activities aimed at assessing the magnitude and characteristics of the outflow of their trained personnel."^{13/} The Commission may wish to take action as requested by the General Assembly.

D. International tourist statistics

21. The Economic and Social Council resolution 469 (XV), mentioned in paragraph 5 above, specifically states that any improvement in migration statistics should be achieved "without introducing impediments to the movement of people".

22. When the Statistical Commission considered international tourist statistics at its ninth session, in 1956, it cautioned against increasing, for the sake of collecting statistical data, the formalities to which travellers were already subjected. None the less, the Commission also stated that it "was of the opinion that both statistics of foreign visitors and migration statistics were components of passenger travel statistics" and that "for statistical purposes there would be advantages in using the word 'visitors' for this larger class of travellers, as was done in the Commission's recommendation on migration statistics".^{14/}

23. At its twelfth session, in 1962, the Commission "emphasized the importance of considering the movement of tourists as part of the total movement of persons across frontiers and therefore drew attention to the need of consistency between tourist statistics and statistics of migrants".^{15/}

24. At its thirteenth session, in 1965, the Commission adopted resolution 4 (XIII) requesting a "study of methods and definitions suitable for use in the field of

^{13/} Official Records of the General Assembly: Twenty-third Session, Supplement No.18 (A/7218), p.33.

^{14/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Twenty-second Session, Supplement No.7 (E/2876), para. 153.

^{15/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No.13 (E/3633), para. 131.

international travel statistics with a view to enabling the Commission to make recommendations for the improvement of statistics in this field".^{16/} The Commission again emphasized that "the number of tourists formed part of the data on the total movement of persons across frontiers and that any definitions adopted should... be based on a consistent set of recommendations covering all types of international movements of persons".^{17/}

25. At its fifteenth session, in 1968, the Commission considered the "Report of the Expert Group on International Travel Statistics" (E/CN.3/385) and recommended that the Secretariat should stimulate progress in this field by holding seminars and compiling manuals of appropriate statistical methods. Since travel statistics are acknowledged to be intimately related to migration statistics, it appears that the manuals mentioned would have to take account of this fact.

E. Refugees

26. Another group of persons which moves over frontiers and, therefore, is of interest in connexion with the demographic aspects of migration statistics, is the refugee population. One of the most acute refugee problems is found in the African continent. Great numbers of persons are said to be involved in eastern and southern Africa. These refugees can be divided into three principal categories: political refugees who have fled from political oppression members of liberation have left their countries to seek military training in anticipation of future struggles for the independence of their countries, and those who have left their countries because of fear occasioned by political, social or economic upheavals there.^{18/} Since all these affect the characteristics of the populations of the host or asylum country, it is clear that any system set up to measure migration

^{16/} Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No.13 (E/4045), para.47.

^{17/} Ibid. paragraph.44.

^{18/} "Report of the Conference on the Legal, Economic and Social Aspects of African Refugees' Problems" (E/CN.14/442), paras.15-16.

would have also to take account of the magnitude and characteristics of the groups. Moreover, the refugees represent a considerable loss of manpower and human resources to the country of origin, while their arrival puts great strain on the already limited resources of the host governments, and intensifies the problem of orderly economic and social development.^{19/} In their role as a loss to the country of origin, they are not unlike the "brain drain".

F. Nomadic groups

27. One special type of migration which is a unique example of social and economic adjustment is the movement of nomadic or semi-nomadic groups. These are usually itinerant agricultural workers or herdsmen who move with the seasons in search of grass or special crops. Nomads are a problem, particularly in Africa, with the result that the problem of enumerating nomads in that continent was explored in a special study^{20/} prepared for the Economic Commission for Africa's Working Group on Censuses of Population and Housing, which met from 21 to 29 June 1965.

III. SOURCES OF MIGRATION STATISTICS

A. Current statistics from frontier control activities

28. The United Nations Statistical Office has been responsible for the collection, storage and retrieval of international migration statistics since 1959. Prior to that year, the International Labour Organisation carried this responsibility.

29. Both the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations Statistical Office utilized annual questionnaires to Governments for purposes of collection.

The United Nations collection programme consists of four tables, as follows:

Table 1. Major categories of departures and arrivals

Table 2. Inter-continental and continental migrants (Long-term emigrants and immigrants)

^{19/} Ibid., para.36.

^{20/} "Problems of Enumerating Nomads in Africa". (E/CN.14/CAS.4/CPH/4).

Table 3. Long-term emigrants and immigrants by country of intended long-term residence or by country of last long-term residence

Table 4. Long-term emigrants and long-term immigrants by sex and age

30. It will be noted that these data, in theory, provide the current numbers of travellers arriving and departing, and of these, how many are long-term (permanent) migrants, short-term (temporary) migrants, visitors (transit, holiday, education, business, etc.), residents returning after a short stay abroad and persons departing after a short stay. They do not provide the type of statistics needed for studying the "brain drain" except in so far as they show country of origin and destination.

B. Current statistics from continuous population register systems

31. Current statistics on both internal and international migration are obtainable from some continuous population register systems. As shown in the study on Methodology and Evaluation of Population Registers and Similar Systems,^{21/} twenty-two countries have indicated that their systems provide data on internal migration and thirteen have stated that their systems are a source of international migration statistics. It should be noted, however, that the information is not extracted from the registers themselves but is compiled from notifications of change of residence, from forms used in transferring persons from one local register to another or from office lists of arrivals and departures.

32. At least theoretically, details on the characteristics of the migrants concerned need not be confined to the information supplied at the time of migration but could be extended to include all the information recorded on the register files for each person. The extent to which this is actually done is not known at the moment.

C. Retrospective population census data

33. Statistics on international migrants can be obtained indirectly from population census results, utilizing for this purpose tabulations which distinguish migrants from non-migrants in terms of (1) foreign-born and native population and (2) national (citizen) and alien population.

^{21/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 69.XVII.15.

34. Separation of foreign-born persons from natives is based on the answer to a question on "place of birth", which is common to most population censuses. The data obtained in this way are useful also for internal migration studies, if they show the geographic unit of birth of the native population, as indications of the magnitude of migration into and out of each part of the country, and of the origins and destinations of the migrants. A weakness of these data is that the dates of the movements are not specified. A person found in a given area at the census date, who was born in another area of the country, may have migrated at any time during his life; furthermore, he may have migrated several times to different areas, and the information on place of birth would not reveal the various moves.

35. The value of census data for studies of international migration can be improved by asking about place of residence of each individual at a specified date in the past, or about length of residence in the present place, plus place of previous residence. The Principles and Recommendations for the 1970 Population Censuses^{22/} include "place of birth" and "place of usual residence" as "recommended" topics and "place of previous residence", "duration of residence" and "citizenship", as "other useful" topics. Appropriate tabulations using these topics are also included.

36. To extend the use of census data to studies of urbanization, the Principles also recommend that urban/rural residence be investigated. A total of twenty-four of the twenty-nine recommended tabulations of other variables are designed to show the urban/rural split and, in addition, there are tabulations of localities by size-class and sex, and a listing of cities of 100,000 or more inhabitants by population size. If tabulations of migration topics mentioned in paras. 33-35 were cross-classified by the urban/rural variable, it would be possible to study migration between urban and rural areas and between localities of selected population size.

37. In a country where satisfactory records of births and deaths are maintained, the net gain or loss of population in each area by migration during the interval

^{22/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 67.XVII.3

between two censuses may be estimated by comparing the increase or decrease of population shown by censuses with the recorded balance of births and deaths. It is important to realize, however, that the validity of such estimates depends on the achievement of a rather high degree of accuracy both in the census enumerations and in the birth and death records. A relatively small proportionate error in either set of statistics may cause a large proportionate error in the migration estimate. A thorough evaluation of the quality of the data is a prerequisite to any study of internal migration by this method.

38. Where international migration is a negligible factor, estimates of net internal migratory gains and losses, classified by sex and age groups, can be made by comparing tabulations of the population by sex and age groups in each area, at two census dates. If immigration or emigration has taken place on a significant scale and if records are not available on the sex-age characteristics of the persons involved, some adjustment may be made by restricting the comparison to the native population. The population of a given age at the earlier census date is compared with the number of a corresponding higher age at the latter census, allowance being made for mortality during the interval. Birth records are not required for this calculation if the estimate is restricted to the net gains and losses in the age groups of the population already living at the time of the earlier census. Death records also are not required if it can be assumed without risk of serious error that age-specific mortality rates are really the same in all parts of the country. On this assumption, the allowances for mortality may be made by applying standard survival factors computed from the tabulation of population by age and sex for the whole country at the two census dates. This procedure also eliminates errors due to misreporting of ages and faulty enumeration, except to the extent that such errors may vary in the different parts of the country.

D. Demographic sample surveys

39. Data from demographic sample surveys can also be used to provide the same indirect measures of internal migration as the population census results do. The Handbook of Household Surveys: A Practical Guide for Inquiries on Levels of

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Living^{23/} explains how information collected on the topic "place of residence at a specified date in the past" can provide data on the volume and direction of internal migration.

40. In regard to international migration, the sample survey technique can be used on an ad hoc basis to obtain directly information on the number and characteristics of persons crossing designated international frontiers.

E. Vital statistics

41. The "Principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system" (E/CN.3/411) recommends the inclusion of topics for studying the differentials of birth, death, marriage and divorce statistics among migrant and non-migrant population. The topics recommended for births, deaths, marriages and divorces are "place of birth", "place of usual residence", "place of residence at a specified time in the past" and "duration of residence in usual (present) place". A number of tabulations utilizing these topics are also recommended.

42. Epidemiological studies based on migrants are useful in measuring the effect on health of the environment of the place of origin or of the host country, and of changes in habits subsequent to migration.^{24/}

IV. POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

43. The indirect measures of migration described above are not, of course, satisfactory substitutes for current statistics from frontier control activities and from population register systems. It would seem advisable, therefore, that emphasis be placed on direct measures in any consideration of the improvement of migration statistics.

44. In regard to international migration statistics, the Commission may consider that, since the last United Nations recommendations on the subject were promulgated seventeen years ago, efforts should first be concentrated on a review of the present situation in regard to methods of collecting information, types of

^{23/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 64.XVII.13, pp. 30-32.

^{24/} WHO Tech. Rep. Series, No. 365, pp.28-29.

data collected, definitions employed and tabulations published. In effect, this would represent an updating of selected parts of Problems of Migration Statistics^{25/} and of the Analytical Bibliography of International Migration Statistics.^{26/} Once as clear a picture as possible is obtained of the prevailing situation, it might be advisable to convene one or more groups of international experts (perhaps at regional meetings) to consider the steps to be taken in amending or extending the 1953 recommendations and in widening the United Nations programme of collection and dissemination of national data.

45. The collection of current information on internal migration may not be an appropriate subject for world-wide recommendations at this time because of the diversity of regional and even of national situations, but expert consideration of possible techniques (e.g., population register systems, multi-round samples surveys) and of the types of information of particular regional relevance might be suitable for regional meetings. The Commission may wish to recommend that a round of such meetings be planned for 1972 or as soon thereafter as feasible.

^{25/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1950.XIII.10.

^{26/} United Nations publication, Sales No.: 1956.XIII.1.