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Background document
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**Conclusions of the United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration
Statistics: Concepts, Definitions, Data and Indicators, held in June 2020**

Prepared by United Nations Statistics Division

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting on International Migration Statistics: Concepts, Definitions,
Data and Indicators,**

United Nations, New York (Virtual), 4 – 5 and 8 – 9 June 2020

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. The expert group meeting was convened by the United Nations Statistics Division in the framework of the revision of the 1998 UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, as requested by the Statistical Commission at its fiftieth session in 2019 in its decision 50/117. It was attended by members of the Expert Group on Migration Statistics, established by the Statistical Commission at its forty-ninth session.
2. The meeting was addressed by the co-chairs of the Expert Group, Mr. Diego Iturralde, Chief Director of Demography, Statistics South Africa, and Mr. Frank Laczko, Director of the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre, International Organisation for Migration. In his welcome statement, Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the United Nations Statistics Division, expressed his appreciation to the 5 task forces of the Group for their hard work and diligence. Mr. Schweinfest also outlined that progress on Concepts, Definitions, Data and Indicators is a high priority for the Statistical Commission as migration data gaps are still significant, particularly on migrants' flows, while new migration patterns have become more visible, and central in the global agenda, including in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.
3. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was held virtually over the course of four days. The virtual nature of the meeting allowed members to participate with larger than usual delegations, as demonstrated by a steady attendance of more than 60 people.
4. The **objective** of the meeting was to have agreement on the overarching conceptual framework (building blocks) and a strong starting point to define a set of data and indicators for international migration and mobility. To accomplish this objective, the expert group adopted a practical approach (described below), being mindful of developments and challenges at country level, and taking into account that NSOs and governments are currently challenged to produce data on a range of thematic areas relevant to migration and migrants. Furthermore, the expert group made all efforts to create better linkages between key migration policy data needs and statistical measurement of international migration and migrants' characteristics.
5. The meeting, following a presentation of the context and rationale of the revision of the 1998 UN Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, raised a number of issues pertinent to lessons learned from the global consultation conducted in 2019, the proposed conceptual framework, its components and accompanying definitions, and the proposed data and indicators framework.
6. There was overall agreement that the objective of the revision of the 1998 Recommendations is to strike a balance between producing a set of recommendations that foster the production of migration statistics that are relevant for the country context and producing consistent statistics and metadata

that allow for harmonization and international comparability. The agreed framework, its components and accompanying definitions will provide an “ideal” scenario designed for countries that are able to collect data on both stocks and flows (and on migrants as well as their characteristics).

7. It was further agreed that the recommendations should also indicate the **core** topics and set of data and indicators that any country should have the ability to meet as a minimum, while indicating possible **additional** topics and indicators that may be of particular interest for countries, depending on their policy priorities and level of statistical development. The Expert Group decided to follow this approach to maximise the likelihood of Member States’ adoption and implementation. Thus, it was also concluded that hands-on guidelines will also be produced to aid countries in this and bolster their statistical capacity.
8. Task Force 2 presented a conceptual framework for **international mobility and migration** which was broadly agreed upon. The proposed conceptual framework distinguishes clearly migrants from other types of international mobility, e.g. tourists, seasonal workers. The meeting agreed with depicting both migration and selected types of international mobility, relevant to migration policies, in the conceptual framework (and prospective revised international recommendations). The recommendations will cover in detail statistical concepts, definitions and related indicators for international migration, while recognizing other types of international recommendations related to specific groups of migrants (e.g. stateless, refugees, undocumented migrants).
9. The framework on **international migration** focuses on **resident population** consisting of four groups: native-born citizens; native-born foreigners; foreign-born citizens and foreign-born foreigners. The framework indicates also corresponding flows of immigration and emigration and shows the coherence between flows and stocks.
10. Recognizing the importance of national data that respond to national policy demands, the meeting agreed with the conceptual framework **aligning** the measurement of international migration with the country’s measurement of resident population. This will ensure consistency in the production of national statistics. It also entails coherence between flows and stocks as the changes in the size and structure of the stock of migrants are determined by the flows. These features will enhance and improve the use of migration data, particularly at the country level, considering that one of the main outputs of an NSO are the population estimates and projections, of which migration is a key component.
11. To accomplish consistency between flows and stocks at national level, the adoption of a **population accounting approach** related to the framework on international migration was agreed. This shows all the pieces of information needed (births, deaths, immigration, emigration by native/foreign citizenships and native/foreign born) for reconciling stocks and flows at the national level.
12. Given **feedback** received during the meeting, the definition of **residence** was modified to exactly match the latest revision (2017, 3rd rev.) of the Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, which gives countries two options: (i) most of the last 12 - months or intention of stay of at least 6 months, and (ii) 12 months duration of stay or intention of stay of at least 12 months.

It was agreed that the key factor for defining international migration should be the **duration of stay** in the country or abroad. The Expert Group concluded that, despite the difficulties of operationalising **intention of stay**, being completely in line with the Population and Housing Censuses standard improves international comparability, and the likelihood of implementation and the production of policy relevant migration statistics at national level.

13. The framework for **temporary population mobility** was also discussed as an integral part of the overarching framework. Further work is needed to identify which groups to highlight and elaborate as part of international mobility **of temporary (non-resident) population**. The term used to describe people who experience international movements that do not result in change of residence is also to be further discussed (temporary vs. non-resident, or other options).
14. The meeting discussed at length topics, that although relevant to international mobility of temporary population, are **out of scope** from the Expert Group's mandate, as it relates to the revision of international recommendations for statistics on international migration and similar mobility. In this context, it was agreed that certain population subgroups, such as tourists, are going to be acknowledged vis a vis the conceptual framework, but the development of statistics on tourists is beyond the scope of work of the Expert Group.
15. Proposed **statistical definitions** were thoroughly examined. Aided by feedback, Task Force 2 presented amended selected definitions, which were broadly agreed upon; amended definitions include: base populations, international migration and mobility, international migrant, stocks (immigrant and emigrant population) and flows (immigration and emigration). Remaining issues will be addressed in the coming weeks, including (but not limited to) training related mobility and circular movement.
16. The list of topics and concepts that need **further refinement** and work includes (but is not limited to) depicting irregular migration in the conceptual framework, as well as, stateless people, refugees and asylum seekers and other relevant 'hidden' population groups. Among those subgroups, asylum seekers were singled out as a group that should be further discussed and likely be moved under the international migration, as they usually satisfy the duration of stay criteria mentioned above. Task force 2 will also address other specific elements of the conceptual framework raised by members in their written or oral comments in the coming weeks. Members are expected to submit further comments highlighting inconsistencies and challenges as well as alternative solutions by 17 June 2020.
17. Task Force 1 presented an overarching **framework** for a set of data and indicators on international migration and mobility which is consistent with the conceptual framework presented by TF2 and seeks to identify indicators that address key migration policy questions. The proposed framework distinguishes four building blocks, making a distinction between flows and stocks and between emigration and immigration. The meeting agreed broadly with this approach, notwithstanding the challenges in terms of measurement and data sources.
18. Members provided extensive **feedback** on variables and areas that should be added to the framework, needed clarification and suggested other modifications. Members are expected to submit further

comments by 17 June 2020. Task force 1 will revise the overarching framework based on written or oral feedback in the coming weeks, and will write it up. Task force 1 will also identify core and additional topics (variables) and indicators.

19. Country Member States are invited to join Task Force 1 going forward, to ensure that the proposed data framework fits countries' needs.
20. The discussion on the data framework led to the need to scrutinize the data sources landscape and to draw clear interlinkages between proposed variables and indicators and potential data sources. Going forward, Task Force 1 and Task Force 4 working on data sources should collaborate further.
21. The meeting took full advantage of informative, substantial and well-prepared presentations from representatives of Switzerland and Mexico. Those presentations highlighted opportunities and sore points of the conceptual framework by benchmarking it with available data sources at national level. Lessons learned from these two country cases will also be incorporated in the updated version of the conceptual framework and will inform the development of core topics, additional topics and indicator set on international migration and similar mobility.
22. As next steps, the co-chairs of Task force 1 and 2, assisted by the secretariat, committed, by August 2020, to integrate the rich feedback provided by the Group. Such feedback was received not only on the floor (about 40 oral interventions), but also via email (about 30 emails were received over the course of the meeting) and via entries in the chat box of the Webex platform (about 150 entries were logged). By October 2020, the Group should have an agreed position paper on conceptual framework, definitions, and data and indicators. This position paper will be at the core of the Secretary General's report on international migration statistics which will be discussed by the Statistical Commission at its 52nd session in 2021.