IOM's Activities on Migration Data:
An Overview

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental body, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration, advance understanding of migration issues, encourage social and economic development through migration, and work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

1. Introduction

The aim of this note is to highlight IOM's activities on the collection, processing and dissemination of migration data and related information on international migration. The first section outlines the main objectives of IOM's activities in the field of migration data. The second section discusses the number of initiatives taken by IOM in pursuit of these objectives. The note concludes by highlighting areas for further work.

2. Objectives of IOM's activities on migration data

A key objective of IOM activities in the field of migration data is to enhance the capacity of governments to collect reliable and comprehensive statistics and data on migration and to advance understanding of migration issues more generally.

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The data and related information collected and made available by IOM and IOM's activities on data management serve various purposes:

- To promote informed debate on current issues of migration at national, regional and international level.

- For formulation, monitoring and assessment of technical cooperation projects in the field of migration.

- To increase understanding on the part of policymakers of how migration data can be used in the context of migration policymaking and management.

- To increase the capacity of governments to collect reliable data on migration which could be usefully applied in policymaking.

- To meet external demands for information. As the only international organization dedicated solely to migration, IOM receives frequent requests for information on international migration trends and migration policy from governments and other parties (NGOs, researchers, journalists).

3. IOM's work on international migration statistics and related activities

3.1 Compilation of operational statistics on migration

IOM routinely collects statistics relating to its operational programmes and projects in over 133 countries. These cover a range of different migratory movements including repatriation and resettlement of refugees, and the returns of such migrant categories as highly qualified persons, victims of trafficking, stranded transit migrants, internally displaced persons, unsuccessful asylum seekers, and soldiers as part of demobilization programmes. In addition, data are collected on cases of settling consequences of forced displacement through the claims and compensation programme.

IOM's statistical files cover all operations since the founding of the Organization in 1951. All quantitative information regarding the movement of persons assisted by IOM is stored in a database *Mosaic*. *Mosaic* contains statistics for IOM
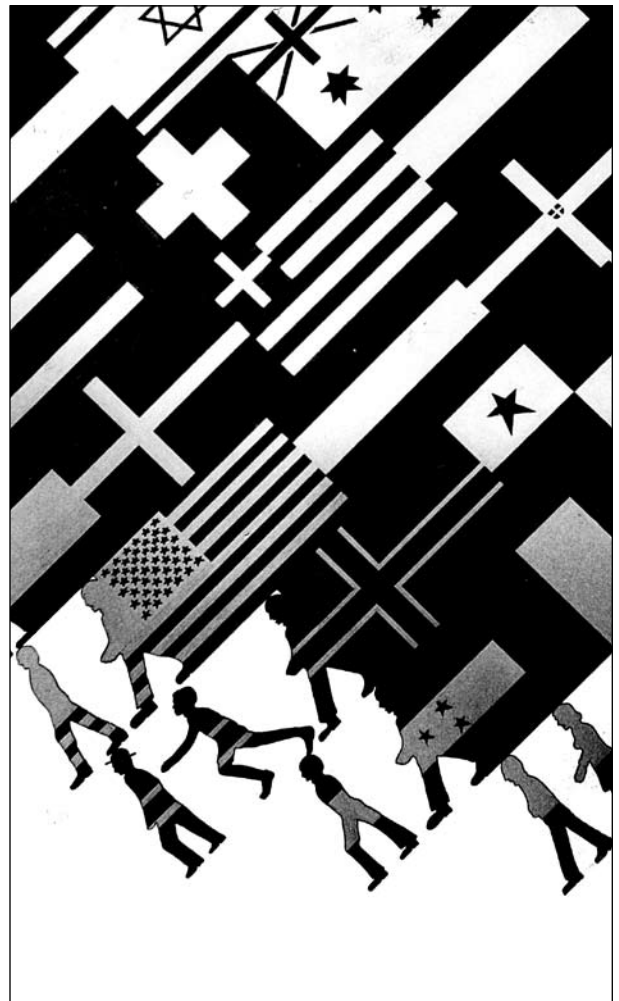
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movements dating back to January 1992. The database includes information on migrants' and refugees' nationality, sex, age, family composition and the origin/destination of each movement. For some countries additional data are available, such as reasons for return, the means of transport used and the time spent in the host country. There are also separate information databases on migrant/refugee health and trafficking. All the information databases are currently integrated into one new database called *MIMOSA* (Migrant Management Operational System Application). *MIMOSA* will allow IOM staff to share data between activities within their mission. The data will then be consolidated in a Central Data Repository (CDR) that users can query for reports through a web application.

IOM collects data relating to:

- **Resettlement**: IOM assists with the resettlement of persons accepted under regular

immigration programmes. In particular, it helps with the processing of relevant documentation, performing medical screening and arranging safe, reliable and economical means of transportation. IOM statistics related to resettlement derive from these activities and provide information on the socio-economic profile and the health status of persons assisted with resettlement.

- **Emergency/Post-emergency (Repatriation)**: One of the major programmes implemented by IOM is organizing and facilitating the repatriation of refugees and other groups, such as Internally Displaced People (IDPs), during and after emergencies. IOM statistics relating to this form of assistance fall under two broad headings: "Repatriation of refugees", referring to the voluntary repatriation of refugees organized in accordance with UNHCR's protection concerns and procedures, and "Post-emergency movement assistance", including persons who may not be refugees, such as IDPs and soldiers involved in demobilization programmes.

- **Assisted Voluntary Return**: IOM implements some 30 regular programmes and many more projects facilitating voluntary return and reintegration assistance. IOM has one of the most comprehensive databases on voluntary assisted returns, which can provide statistical information on the socio-economic profile of returnees. IOM return statistics are produced on a monthly basis. They can include unsuccessful asylum seekers, migrants in irregular situations, stranded migrants, refugees and legal migrants (varies according to the eligibility criteria of programmes).

- **Migration Health**: IOM's Migration Health Department specializes in health assessments of refugees and migrants, which are carried out at the request of resettlement countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. IOM also assists in the detection and treatment of conditions that may pose a risk to public health (e.g. tuberculosis) or an excessive burden on the health services of the resettlement countries requesting services (e.g. heart disease). The data on incidences of the health conditions of concern detected during

health assessments are available at a regional level. This information is collected either locally or within the medical module of *MIMOSA*. All available health-related statistics are published in the Annual Migration Health Report.

- **Counter-trafficking**: In recent years, IOM has considerably expanded its counter-trafficking programmes. These provide a rare source of international data on trafficking based on information obtained directly from victims of trafficking who have been assisted by IOM. IOM collects both qualitative and quantitative data, such as the number of victims assisted, their country of origin, age, travel route, and how they were trafficked. Where available, information is also collected on the nationality.

Data on trafficking are compiled into a special database, the Counter-Trafficking Module Database (CTM Database). The CTM Database facilitates the management of assistance, voluntary return and reintegration activities for victims of trafficking and strengthens the research capacity and understanding of the causes, processes, trends and consequences of trafficking.

Operational statistics are essentially collected for project development, evaluation and management purposes and to enable the Organization to report on its activities to Member States and donors. However, they are also useful for analytical and research purposes. More recently, efforts have been made to improve data collection in order to assist IOM in policy analysis and to achieve a better understanding of both regular and irregular migration.

3.2. Building capacity in data collection and exchange

A fundamental challenge to the application, sharing and management of migration data is that statistical data on migration, if available at all, is either dispersed among different institutions within the state and/or not comparable with statistics of other states. A major reason for this problem is that governments often lack the resources and trained personnel to develop an effective data management system.

Photo: © IOM, 2005

In the past years, IOM has developed and been involved in a number of capacity-building projects and programmes aimed at addressing this particular challenge at different levels.

National data collection

A number of IOM missions in different parts of the world have been assisting governments to enhance their data collection system, both within a single agency and at inter-agency level. In Tajikistan, within the Central Asian Partnership Group Programme funded by Danish Danida, IOM helped to develop a Migration Information System (MIS) for the State Migration Service. A local database allows the storing, processing and analysing of data from migration cards filled in at the borders. In Moldova, within a broader capacity-building Sida-financed programme, IOM Chisinau is working closely with the migration authorities on uniting data sources from different agencies into an integrated information system for migration management. In Sri Lanka, IOM, together with the Department of Census and Statistics, has conducted an assessment of national migration data collection and is closely working with the Ministry of Planning and Finance (MP&F) to establish an inter-ministerial steering committee on data collection and management.

Varying local conditions as well as uneven and, at times, contradictory national definitions of trafficking, make the collection of accurate statistics on this kind of crime difficult and hamper the global effort to combat it. IOM has, for instance, recently conducted a pilot project aimed at assisting ASEAN countries to improve their statistical collection methodology for trafficking by reviewing existing data collection methods as well as available data for crimes closely associated with trafficking.

Bilateral data collection

Appropriate matching of supply and demand plays an important role in the success of labour migration programmes. This can best be achieved if there is close cooperation between sending and receiving countries on data collection. IOM facilitates bilateral forms of cooperation on data collection, especially in the field of labour migration. For example, the Integrated Information System (IMIS) between Egypt and Italy implemented by IOM, the Italian and the Egyptian governments, is a technical match-making tool: its website provides information on job opportunities abroad serving as a virtual portal for Egyptian migrants. At the same time, it provides services to Egyptian job seekers and to employers abroad. IMIS is also used to collect data on the Egyptian diaspora in Italy by registering Egyptians with the IMIS database to which Egyptian embassies have access too.

Regional data sharing processes

Information sharing and analysis starts with the need to develop a common understanding of terminology and definitions. IOM has been involved in and helped to develop data-sharing mechanisms between states, especially within the context of Regional Consultative Processes.

For instance, at the regional level, under the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), also known as the Puebla Process, IOM assisted in launching the Statistics Information System on Migration in Mesoamerica (SIEMMES) – a statistical information system to monitor the magnitude and characteristics of migration among and through Central American countries and Mexico. The system is fed with information from three basic sources: entry and departure records, population census and surveys. By cooperating with national migration and statistics directorates, the project synchronises migration-related information from the various statistical sources, for example by using a standardized entry and departure card throughout Central America, as well as incorporating questions to identify immigrants and emigration in the national population censuses. The results are published on the website.

The Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM) has been created to collect and share agreed migration-related statistics and relevant legislative and political documentation in the participating countries of eastern Europe and Central Asia. At the centre of the DSM is a specially developed database with an online interface which serves as a tool for storing data on the agreed indicators and producing dynamic reports. So far, the agreement has been to share data on six indicators, including data supplied by the governments on the number of foreigners, work permits, and border crossings, and data on asylum and refugee status determination supplied by UNHCR.

Building capacity at both national and regional levels – the "Generic Model"

For some countries it is not the lack of will to implement and develop effective data management, but rather the capacity to move in that direction owing to the lack of finance, trained personnel, or the need for assistance in developing a national plan on migration data management.

In an attempt to assist governments to overcome this fundamental challenge, IOM has developed a "Generic Model" for data collection. Recognizing that the collection of data depends on access to resources, the model builds on existing national statistical infrastructures, but also takes into account the experiences and lessons of other countries. The "Generic Model" provides targeted assistance at the national level while facilitating regional dialogue and informal information exchange between countries. The activities at the centre of this approach include creating national networks with well defined focal points, mapping out statistical infrastructures, agreeing on minimum sets of data and five to ten indicators, targeted assistance in IT upgrade and trainings, study tours and regional technical and thematic meetings.

First developed in eastern Europe, the "Generic Model" is also applied in the Caribbean. Funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and with the support of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), IOM assists a select number of Caribbean countries to improve their capacity to collect and exchange migration-related data to enhance regional policymaking, fostering greater intra-regional labour mobility and consolidating regional dialogue and cooperation.

3.3 Contribution to methodology and guidelines for developing migration statistics

Through its specialized research unit, the Central Forum for Migration Research (CEFMR) based in Warsaw, Poland, IOM has also contributed to improving the measurement and analysis of international migration. CEFMR has been involved in projects assessing the quality of migration data in EUROSTAT database, compiling official EUROSTAT statistics and harmonizing statistics at the European level. CEFMR participated in the THESIM (Towards Harmonised European Statistics on International Migration) project, which resulted in the most comprehensive documentation of migration statistics throughout the EU.

IOM also assists governments in incorporating migration question into their national household census and developing outreach strategies for surveys. IOM, for instance, provided technical support and advice on survey techniques and outreach strategies to the Government of Thailand with regard to migrant communities under-represented in previous household censuses.

IOM has also contributed to international efforts to provide guidelines and training on migration data management. IOM's training tool kit the "Essentials of Migration Management" (EMM) contains 32 thematic modules related to migration management, including a lesson plan for migration and statistical data, operation data management and migration intelligence.

IOM's manual "Sharing Data – Where To Start: An Emerging Approach to Migration Data Management" is an important source of information for states interested in establishing an effective mechanism for the sharing of migration-related data with other states. "Sharing data – where to start" conceptualizes a new approach that builds on the experience of existing regional mechanisms of migration and asylum data management, but allows of greater flexibility in the sharing of data. The manual provides practical guidance to states on how to build capacity for data collection and sharing from the "bottom-up", taking due account of the data management structures already existing in the country.

Through its national office in Vienna, Austria, IOM is also one of the National Contact Points of the European Migration Network, which, among other things, has the mandate to assess the quality of migration statistics delivered by European Union Member States to the Commission. IOM also actively supported the European Commission (EC) in building migration data management capacities in the western Balkans. As part of EC-sponsored Regional Programme "Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation" (CARDS) IOM, together with the Swedish Migration Board, organized "Consultations on a way forward to enhancing migration statistics, collection, and application and exchange in the framework of the EU Acquis" in 2005.

3.4. Promoting research and policy dialogue

IOM collects migration data through ongoing research and promotes policy dialogue activities related to migration data. The range of activities regarding research and policy dialogue has grown in recent years, including new areas of data collection such as, for instance, diaspora.

IOM's flagship publication "The World Migration Report" provides a comprehensive overview of the main migration trends at the regional and global level. The next edition in 2008 will, inter alia, provide statistics related to international labour migration.

IOM also conducts research studies that provide statistical data on migration trends in specific countries and regions, such as situation and country reports on migration. For example, a second edition of "International Migration in Thailand" is being prepared by IOM on behalf of the UN Thailand Thematic Working Group on International Migration. In Central America, IOM produces "Movimientas Internacionales a Través de las Fronteras Centroamericas", a series specifically dedicated to trends in migration flows in the region.

Another important source for migration data and trends are IOM's thematic studies on current migration challenges such as human trafficking, irregular migration, remittances, return and

migration and development. Often drawing on IOM's operational data and innovative survey work conducted by IOM's offices, these studies provide up-to-date information on migration trends in different areas. In the field of remittances, for example, different types of surveys have been carried out in Colombia (2003), Guatemala (2004), Bangladesh (2004), Albania (2005), Moldova (2005), Serbia and Switzerland (2006/7) to analyse the flow and impact of migrant workers' remittances on home country development.

IOM also facilitates dialogue between data producers and users. As part of its International Dialogue on Migration, IOM hosted the Workshop on Approaches to Data Collection and Data Management in Geneva in September 2003. This workshop highlighted effective approaches to national, regional and international migration data collection as well as challenges and lessons learnt. Policy makers and data management experts from more than 83 countries participated in this workshop.

IOM also promote policy dialogue on data collection and methods through expert meetings and workshops on specific migration topics. For example, an Expert Group meeting was held in Rome in 2004 to discuss how to improve data on research on trafficking. Data issues related to diaspora were also explored in a workshop held within the framework of IOM's International Dialogue on Migration in 2005.

4. Priority areas for future work and different types of challenges

- **Contribute to the efforts towards the creation of more reliable and harmonized statistics on international migratio**n. Widely differing definitions of migration and data collection methodologies impede efforts to collect more comparative and reliable data on migration. IOM will continue to be involved in methodological work to improve migration measurement through better collection of metadata and improved estimates of migration flows and stocks.

- **Building governmental capacities in collecting and sharing reliable and timely data on migration**. Knowledge about how to collect data in any migration-related field (be it border management, counter-trafficking or labour migration), how to process it and to move from a single administrative record to reliable statistics is lacking in many countries, especially in those where migration management systems are still in formation. IOM will increase its activities on capacity building in data management through a bottom-up approach by providing targeted assistance at the national level, while facilitating regional dialogue and information exchange between countries.

- **Improve the use of and dissemination of internal data**. IOM collects a wealth of data on migration through its projects worldwide. Although IOM's internal data collection is primarily designed for operational and administrative purposes, further action will be taken to facilitate analysis and dissemination of IOM's internal data for policy planning and research. The aim will be to produce a regular statistical report on select areas of IOM data for public use (for instance, website).

- **Mainstreaming migration questions into population census and other existing surveys**. Population censuses are a widely used instrument for collecting data and perhaps provide the most comprehensive source of internationally comparable information on international migration in the world. National Statistical Offices have taken an increasing interest in mainstreaming migration questions in this and other surveys. Given its close relations to the government and to the migrant community, IOM will play a more active role in advising governments on the design and assisting in the implementation of population censuses and other specialised surveys.

- **Enhancing collaboration with other international actors in migration statistics**. A number of international organizations and processes have been active in this area, such as UNECE; IGC, Eurostat, UNSD, ILO, UNPD, COE, OSCE, OECD. It is in everyone's interest that more advanced information sharing and collaboration is pursued among organizations to avoid duplication of activities and ensure the trust of partner governments.

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