



INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION STATISTICS

Building upon the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) will set out a range of principles, commitments and understandings among Member States regarding international migration in all its dimensions. The GCM should make an important contribution to global governance and enhance coordination on international migration. For the consideration of Member States, the “Thematic Papers”, developed by IOM, outline core topics and suggestions to inform actors involved in the 2017 consultation process that will lead to the inter-governmental negotiations and final adoption of the GCM.

INTRODUCTION

Policy-makers around the world need timely, reliable, accessible, and comparable data on international migration in order to manage migration effectively and protect the rights of migrants. Lack of migration data, or poor presentation or analysis of such data, often leads to misperceptions about the scale of migration and its effects. Lack of data can also result in poorly designed policy and interventions, and makes it much harder to identify and assist migrants in vulnerable situations.¹

While addressing the paucity of data on migration has been recognized for many years as an issue requiring immediate action,² States have yet to agree on how best to address data gaps and increase the availability of data on migration. The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) process therefore provides an opportunity for the international community to agree on a set of priorities to improve data on international migration in the coming years, building on commitments made elsewhere, such as in the New York Declaration. This will be important in order to understand better the drivers and impacts of migration, as well as the needs and vulnerabilities of migrants.

The inclusion of references to migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides further impetus to improve data on international migration. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require the collection and analysis of data on the costs and effects of migration, as well as data disaggregated by migratory status to ensure that nobody is “left behind”. Furthermore, SDG target 10.7 calls upon States to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration through well-managed migration policies (see Annex 1 for examples of the key SDG migration-related references).

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants goes even further, calling upon States to ensure that migration data are:

“Disaggregated by sex and age and include information on regular and irregular flows, the economic impacts of migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, the needs of refugees, migrants and host communities and other issues”.

While it is too early to say what the GCM recommendations will be, and how they will be monitored, it seems inevitable that a priority should be to enhance international efforts to collect, analyse and share migration data more effectively in the future.



ISSUES

It has been widely recognized that there are many gaps in our knowledge about migration – including on migration flows and drivers, and its impacts – due to a paucity of good data.³ For example, a 2008 report by the Center for Global Development cites the lack of “detailed, comparable disaggregated data on migrant stocks and flows as the greatest obstacle to the formulation of evidence-based policies”.⁴

More recently, the 2017 report of the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Migration, Peter Sutherland, notes that “the global community is still struggling to establish basic facts, such as who migrants are, where they are, where they come from and where they have moved to, especially with regard to movements between developing countries”.⁵

Internationally comparable data on migration are relatively scarce, and only one of the key migration indicators linked to the SDGs is currently ranked as a Tier 1 indicator.⁶ It remains difficult to answer even basic questions, such as on the number of people around the world who migrated in any particular year. Only approximately one in four countries around the world regularly provide the UN Statistics Division with data on international migration flows. For example, in Asia, only 10 of the 48 countries in the region provided data on inflows and outflows of migrants between 2005 and 2014.

Moreover, basic information about national migration policies is often lacking. There is currently no comprehensive global survey of national migration policies. Furthermore, data on the health and well-being of migrants are not collected in a systematic manner across the globe and are especially lacking in developing countries.⁷ Given that many migrants are undocumented, data on migrants in especially vulnerable situations is often very difficult to obtain. Large numbers of migrants therefore remain invisible, and represent a significant share of the migrant population in many countries.

There are many reasons why data on migration may be limited, not fully analysed, shared or utilized. To give but a few examples, countries may lack the human and financial resources to collect and analyse migration data. If migration is regarded as a sensitive national issue, little priority may be given to data collection. Even if data are collected, they may not be fully shared within or between countries, if policymakers fear that data may be misinterpreted. From a technical perspective there are many challenges given the dynamic nature of migration.⁸ Migrants may represent only a small percentage of the population of a country and may not be easily identified in national surveys. Countries often use different definitions of migration which are not comparable. Migrants in an irregular situation, may simply not want to be counted by national authorities, for fear of being returned.

While the best migration data often come from censuses, these can be several years old. Censuses usually only include a limited number of questions on migration, and thus cannot provide the detailed information needed for a comprehensive analysis of either the causes or the consequences of international migration. In order to conduct such analysis, more specialized household surveys of migrant populations are needed, but there is currently no global migration survey programme to help countries gather such data.



SUGGESTED ACTION

The actions below should complement the planned actions that many States are already undertaking or will undertake to monitor the SDGs, including efforts to disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status.

1. Encourage countries to prepare a national “Migration Data Plan”

States around the world should assess their own migration data needs through the development of national Migration Data Plans. These plans could be informed by national migration reports highlighting key trends, and outlining data gaps and needs. Holistic national migration reports were first proposed in 2005 as a means to gather in one place all data relating to migration at the national level, and were not conceived to be merely statistical reports.⁹ The process of collecting and analysing data was also intended to promote greater policy coherence and greater understanding of capacity-building needs.

In preparing such reports, countries could establish inter-ministerial groups to assess what data are currently collected and how data are utilized and shared. Creating an inter-ministerial working group including migration policy representatives and officials from national statistical offices can help to raise awareness about the importance of investing in data collection to enhance policy-making.

States should also be encouraged to make better use of the data that is already collected. Too often migration data are scattered within countries, between different agencies and ministries, making it difficult to obtain an accurate understanding of national migration trends and data gaps.

National data consultations can also highlight the importance of increasing the usefulness of data, by establishing a set of principles to ensure that data are used responsibly, ensuring the privacy and rights of all individuals, including migrants.¹⁰ Given the increased use of advanced technology in migration management, data theft, data loss, and the disclosure of sensitive data, countries should be encouraged to develop and implement data protection guidelines.

2. Invest in data capacity building

If more countries develop Migration Data Plans, it will become easier for the international community to determine priorities for capacity-building assistance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly calls for enhancing capacity-building to support national plans to implement the SDGs. Target 17.18 aims to enhance “capacity-building support to (...) increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity and *migratory status*. There is a clear need for much better data on the health, education, employment, and income status of migrants in order to ensure that migrants are not left behind.

Better data are also needed to help reduce the risks and costs associated with migration, especially when crises occur and movements are sudden and large-scale. Too many migrants are currently embarking on dangerous journeys, putting their lives at risk, whilst others are being severely exploited and trafficked. While progress has been made in recent years in gathering data on unsafe migration, much more could be done to monitor migrant fatalities globally.¹¹ Innovative methods of gathering data on migrants in vulnerable situations need to be developed and shared more widely.¹²

With a growing awareness of the need for a “development data revolution”,¹³ there are new opportunities to make a stronger case for migration data capacity-building. To realize these opportunities, it is essential that migration is integrated into wider efforts to improve data on sustainable development indicators.

It is likely that only specialised surveys can provide the rich data needed to fully understand migratory flows and their impact. Some have suggested that there is a case for developing a World Migration Survey,



as so many policy questions about migration cannot be fully answered using current sources of migration data.¹⁴

3. Facilitate data dialogue between States

Much of the data that a country may need to manage migration effectively is likely to be collected by another country that is hosting their nationals. Although there is broad agreement that data on migration are important and need to be improved, there has been relatively little discussion at the global level about how best to address migration data gaps. A dedicated international forum on migration statistics could help to foster greater dialogue between countries, which could help to identify common data gaps and priorities for action.

Statistical projects and initiatives on migration are currently underway in many countries. However, these initiatives often remain fragmented, confined to each discipline and are not usually brought together and disseminated in a comprehensive manner. A new International Forum on Migration Statistics proposed by OECD, IOM and UN DESA in partnership with many other agencies and stakeholders will meet for the first time in January 2018 in Paris.¹⁵ The Forum will provide an important opportunity to promote a “data dialogue” between countries of origin, destination and transit which often have different data priorities and capacities.

4. Exploit non-traditional data sources

An increasing amount of data on migration today is not generated by the national statistical offices of governments but by the private sector or international agencies. One significant example is the unprecedented amount of data automatically generated through the use of digital devices or web-based platforms and tools, known commonly as “Big Data”. Innovations in technology and reductions in the cost of digital devices worldwide have meant that digital data are being produced in real time, at an unprecedented rate. In fact, the “volume” of data available today is larger than at any point in human history. In addition, the number and size of organizations working in the migration field on behalf of migrants has grown enormously in recent years, which in turn has generated more migration data.¹⁶

The number of migration studies drawing on Big Data is still relatively limited but rapidly increasing.¹⁷ However, the use of Big Data comes with significant challenges, including serious privacy, ethical and human rights issues related to the use of data inadvertently generated by users of mobile devices and web-based platforms. Concerns over the use of Big Data for any purpose, including research, need to be identified and adequately addressed by policy-makers, perhaps through the creation of a regulatory system setting out conditions and limits to access to and use of certain kinds of data.

5. Monitor data progress more systematically

In order to raise awareness about the importance of collecting, analysing and sharing data on migration, a global report could be produced bi-annually by the UN, with contributions from a range of stakeholders, which would highlight the progress that is being made around the world to improve data on migration and to propose practical recommendations for making further progress. Such a report could focus in particular on ways in which to gather data which will facilitate the monitoring of GCM recommendations.

This exercise should build upon and complement SDG monitoring, including of the migration indicators which are currently ranked according to a 3 tier classification.¹⁸ Such a report could outline how data on migration is improving each year at the global level.¹⁹ It would provide a benchmark of progress. A standard reporting framework could be developed to monitor improvements in data collection and capacity development. The preparation of a regular global report on the “State of Migration Data” would also help the international community identify priority areas for improvements in global data collection and analysis.



ANNEX

Annex 1. Examples of key SDG migration-related references

Goal 4 on education

Target 4.b. (scholarships)

By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.

Goal 5 on gender equality

Target 5.2. (gender-based violence)

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Goal 8 on employment and decent work

Target 8.7. (ending modern slavery)

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

Target 8.8. (migrant worker rights)

Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and between countries

Target 10.7. (safe migration)

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies by 2030.

Target 10.c. (migrant remittances)

By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies

Target 16.2. (trafficking of children)

End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

Goal 17 on global partnership



¹ Given that approx. half of all migrants are women, it is especially important that data are disaggregated by sex.

² As long ago as 1998, the UN noted “Despite the growing importance of international migration and the concerns it often raises, the statistics needed to characterize migration flows, monitor changes over time and provide Governments with a solid basis for the formulation and implementation of policy are often lacking”. UN Recommendations on International Migration, UN, New York, 1998.

³ See CGD, 2009 op.cit, and the 2009 UNDP Human Development Report, “Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development, and Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration, 2017, op.cit.

⁴ Centre for Global Development, (2009), “Migrants Count: Five Steps Toward Better Migration Data”, Washington DC.

⁵ Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Migration, UN General Assembly, 3 February 2017, A/71/728.

⁶ By Tier 1 the UN means “an indicator is conceptually clear, there is an established methodology and standards available and data are regularly produced by countries”. See presentation by Keiko Osaki, “Migration and the SDGs”, Conference on Improving Data on International Migration, December 2-3, Berlin, 2016, www.GMDAC.iom.int

⁷ The 2nd Global Consultations on Migration Health, organized by IOM, WHO and the Government of Sri Lanka in March 2017 recognized this challenge and called for the establishment of a global clearinghouse that can fulfill the goal of identifying and sharing information about good data practices relating to migrant health.

⁸ See UN Recommendations on Migration Statistics, 1998, op.cit.

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Migration and Development: Some concrete orientations COM (2005) 390, p. 37, annex 8

¹⁰ See IOM, 2010, “Data Protection Manual”, IOM, Geneva.

¹¹ See “Fatal Journeys Volume 2”, IOM, Geneva, 2016 for an overview of current data gaps on this subject.

¹² See Debora Gonzalez (2016) “IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix in the context of migration flows to Europe”, “Migration Policy Practice”, October-December 2016, www.iom.int.

¹³ In 2014, the UN Secretary-General’s Independent Expert Advisory Group on a “Data Revolution for Sustainable Development”, published the report “A World that Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development”. The report recommends a “significant investment” of funds to support the “development data revolution, following an assessment of capacity development needs.

¹⁴ See Richard Bilsborrow, 2016, “The Global Need for Better Data on International Migration and the Special Potential of Household Surveys”.

¹⁵ The International Forum on Migration Statistics will bring together producers, analysts and users of migration statistics. The event will enhance the exchange of information, promote mutual learning and facilitate cooperation among relevant stakeholders.

¹⁶ The growth of IOM’s operations means that it is generating more data than ever before – see www.GMDAC.iom.int for a summary of IOM’s statistical activities 2011-2015.

¹⁷ Laczko, Frank, and Rango, Marzia (2014), “Can Big Data help us achieve a “migration data revolution” ? , Migration Policy and Practice, vol. IV, Number 2, April-June.

¹⁸ The current Tier system used by the UN Statistics Division to rank SDG indicators is: Tier 1, Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available and data regularly produced. Tier 2, Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available but data are not regularly produced by countries. Tier 3, Indicator for which there are no established methodology and standards or methodology/standards are being developed/tested.

¹⁹ One option would be to monitor the recommendations of the Commission on International Migration Data for Development Research and Policy. The final report of the Commission entitled “Migrants Count: Five steps to better migration data” makes 5 key recommendations:

1. Ensure that more censuses include basic questions on migration,
2. Use administrative data on international migrants more extensively,
3. Make better use of the migration data collected in labour-force surveys,
4. Integrate migration modules into existing household surveys,
5. Make publicly available micro-data from migration surveys and censuses.