

Migrants Count

Five Steps Toward Better Migration Data

Report of the Commission on International Migration Data
for Development Research and Policy

Patricia A. Santo Tomas and
Lawrence H. Summers, Co-chairs
Michael Clemens, Project Director

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Members of the Commission participated in a personal capacity and on a voluntary basis. While the report of the commission reflects a broad consensus among the members as individuals, not all members necessarily agreed with every word in the report. This text does not necessarily represent the position of any of the organizations with which the commissioners are affiliated, the Center for Global Development, or the Center's funders and board of directors.

*Summers's affiliation at the time of co-chairing the commission

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Preface

Few doubt that people who migrate from a relatively poor to a relatively rich country improve both their well-being and that of their families. Evidence is also gradually accumulating that migrants make the communities and the countries they left behind better off—through remittances, return investments, and new norms and ideas they bring and send to their home communities. In that sense, international migration is a development phenomenon.

That international migration advances development and is an unstoppable characteristic of today's global economy is a point that has been driven home by two CGD books—one from 2005 by John McHale and non-resident fellow Devesh Kapur and one from 2006 by non-resident fellow Lant Pritchett—and by an impressive set of working papers from research fellow Michael Clemens. Their work confirms that migration will have a major role in shaping global development in this century. Current and future economic crises, epochal demographic shifts, large and growing international wage gaps, increasingly global economic systems, and climate change all mean that people will be on the move in numbers and ways we have not seen before.

At the same time, their analyses and those of others have illuminated the shortcomings of current data, both within and across countries, on who migrants are, where they are, where they came from, and when they moved. Many countries do not collect, do not publish, or do not standardize detailed data on migrants. The strange result is that today it is possible to systematically measure cross-border movements of toys and textiles, of debt, equity, and other forms of capital, but not cross-border movements of people. Our patchy statistics on international migration amount to an enormous blind spot.

The poor state of migration data has limited analysis of how to maximize the benefits and minimize the costs of migration for sending and receiving countries and, as a result, has stunted global understanding and domestic political discourse on a critical development issue. Part of the problem is that international migration is a politically sensitive subject everywhere—from Nigeria and Mexico, which receive migrants respectively from Burkina Faso and Guatemala, to the United States, Europe, and the world's other affluent countries and regions. Political sensitivity is both a cause and result of the data limitations with which analysts and policymakers cope.

Yet managing our increasingly global community in the interests of people requires understanding all the ways we are connected across sovereign borders.

Experts in international meetings have been pointing out these deficiencies since the 1890s, with only limited progress. In the 21st century, we can no

longer wait for the slow evolution of institutions and politics to provide good data. Policy has little chance of responding appropriately to today's reality if the most basic facts of international migration are not widely available and openly assessed around the world. Good statistics are a classic global public good: everyone wants the best statistics, but individual countries and agencies have little incentive to bear the financial and political costs of creating them.

Recognizing this problem, in May 2008 we convened a blue-ribbon group that included some of the world's top experts on creating and using migration data. We asked them to specify a handful of practical and politically feasible priority actions that could be taken in the next few years—by existing institutions and at low cost—to greatly expand the quantity and quality of migration data available to policymakers and researchers. Crucially, we asked them to name exactly which organizations should carry out each recommendation.

Their five recommendations meet the test of political feasibility and technical practicality at reasonable cost. The first is particularly simple, clear, and resounding: every country's census should ask about each person's country of birth, country of citizenship, and country of previous residence. This would finally allow the kind of global "adding up" for movements of people that we can already do for movements of goods and capital and which allows us to understand those other aspects of globalization so much better than we understand migration. But even in the current 2010 census round, many important countries still do not even ask where people were born—including Japan, Mexico, Korea, the Philippines, and Egypt. Roughly a third of countries do not ask about previous residence in another country.

By following this and other recommendations by the Commission, countries have the opportunity to greatly improve migration data at low cost and without any brand-new surveys, offices, or initiatives. International agencies such as the UN, the OECD, and the World Bank can and should support national governments in creating this global good, and this report spells out exactly how. It is my hope that this commission's ideas will become the blueprint for creating a new and clearer vision of international migration over the next few years. Perfect migration data is still far off, but the time for better migration data is now. We are grateful for the financial support and the active engagement of expert staff of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, without which the work of the Commission would not have been possible.

Nancy Birdsall
President
Center for Global Development

Migrants Count:

Five Steps Toward Better Migration Data

1. What Brought Us Together and What We Found

International movements of people are one of the greatest forces that shape and are shaped by global development. The wages of equivalent workers typically differ between rich and poor countries by an order of magnitude more than the prices of goods or capital do, suggesting that the movement of people can cause great economic change (Clemens, Montenegro, and Pritchett 2008). Remittances to developing countries rose by 800 percent between 1990 and 2008, to over US\$280 billion (World Bank 2008). But the development impacts of migration involve more than just money. Human movement responds to and shapes environmental change; it responds to and shapes political change; it responds to and shapes the needs and lives of families—it is the human face of globalization.

The data on international migration that countries now collect and publish are so limited, however, that we know much less about how much and what kind of migration is happening in today's world than we know about international trade and investment flows. This leaves us unable to answer some of the most basic questions about how the movement of people interacts with the development process. Although all migrant destination countries actively regulate and shape this movement, we are setting migration policies in the dark. We remain largely ignorant of how those policies might maximize gains and minimize costs of migration for migrants, for those who remain in poor countries, and for those in destination countries.

The current lack of data—the biggest blind spot in our view of the world economy—leaves us unable to answer crucial questions. How will increasing skill-selectivity in rich countries' immigration policies affect already tenuous professional services in the countries migrants come from? How much return migration or back-and-forth migration occurs today, and what if anything should governments do to shape those movements? Are levels of irregular migration affected by opportunities for legal migration?

While many other questions could be asked about migration—such as how migrants fare in their destinations, why and when they move, what workers rights exist in destinations, and so on—we focus here on the effects of migration on sending countries' development prospects. Without the most basic data on who moves and how they move, we cannot even begin to address these questions, and we default to setting our policies by anecdote and

The data on international migration that countries now collect and publish are so limited that we know much less about migration than we know about international trade and investment.

emotion—or, what is worse, with no recognition of the development impacts of migration policy. Setting such important policy in the dark is a shameful disservice to millions of low-income people worldwide who rightly demand better lives and expanded opportunities.

International agencies have asked governments to collect and disseminate better data for over a century. That this objective remains distant is a major international embarrassment. Yet, there is evidence that the tide is changing. Important steps forward have been made in the recent past. The Commission is convinced that major further progress can be made in the short run, with limited resources, by implementing a few simple steps.

Major progress on migration data can be made in the short run, with limited resources, by implementing a few simple steps.

The Commission believes that improving migration data implies following three parallel tracks. First, we need to improve the basic numbers: what are the levels, trends, and basic characteristics of international migrants? There are important gaps in knowledge about the basic stocks and flows of international migrants. Second, all countries collect some data on international migrants for administrative purposes. By making this information available, we can learn much about the reasons for migration, the duration of stay, and other important aspects of the migration cycle. Yet, counting and registering is not enough. Specific policy questions can be answered only through dedicated research and targeted surveys. Providing access to already collected information at the micro-level would be an important step in the right direction.

The Commission believes that countries, international organizations, and the research community can significantly improve international migration data in the short run—with existing institutions and at low cost—by implementing five recommendations:

1. Ask three basic questions on every population census—about country of citizenship, country of birth, and country of previous residence—then publish cross-tabulations of this information by age and sex.
2. Exploit existing administrative data sources that often contain rich and poorly utilized information on international movements.
3. Compile existing data from the Labor Force Surveys of countries around the world into a single, harmonized, frequently updated database.
4. Provide public access to anonymous individual records of international migrants from surveys and administrative data to allow major improvements in the quality of research while maintaining strict confidentiality.
5. Increase the systematic use of standardized modules of migration-related questions in ongoing household survey programs, particularly those in developing countries.

While these short-term steps represent the quick wins that might yield the fastest, greatest benefits at the least cost given current institutional strengths, many commissioners believe that major progress in the longer term requires a broader recommendation:

Build institutional capacity in developing countries to collect and disseminate migration data, starting with national taskforces to institute regular National Migration Data reports to highlight existing sources and create pressure for improvements in collection and compilation of data.

The recommendations are elaborated in greater detail in this report. Under each recommendation, we indicate why it should be done, how it should be done, and by whom. The report concludes with a discussion the longer-term issue that commissioners identify as being of principal concern: the hard work of building statistical capacity in developing countries.

The bottom line is that statistics matter. The concept of the poverty line, introduced and calculated by Mollie Orshansky (1963) and Walter Heller (CEA 1964: 55) has been momentously influential to the formulation of antipoverty policy. We have the power to make data more important than anecdotes as a driver of migration policies, and there is a historic opportunity to do so now, as the world proceeds through the 2010 census round and as many governments and international agencies acquire critical masses of will and expertise to do better than in the past. By implementing these recommendations we will acquire the means to formulate evidence-based policies that are serious about promoting development. Otherwise, we may have to repeat the same discussion in twenty years, after countless opportunities for improving development prospects have been wasted.

The bottom line is that statistics matter. We have the power to make data more important than anecdotes as a driver of migration policies, and there is a historic opportunity to do so now.

2. Despite Recent Improvements in Data, We Still Cannot Answer Key Questions about Migration and Development

Statistics on international migration continue to be poor because governments have ignored over one hundred years of recommendations from expert groups not unlike this commission. Limited progress has been made by international bodies in the past few years, but even that encouraging work leaves researchers unable to answer very basic questions about the interaction of migration and development.

2.1 A century of ignored recommendations

Bold calls for better migration data are one of the oldest rituals at modern international institutions. In 1891, experts meeting in Vienna at the International

Statistical Institute recommended the standardization and open dissemination of data on stocks of foreigners in each country (Falkner 1895). In 1901, the same body pleaded for international standardization in the definitions of ‘temporary’ and ‘permanent’ migrant (Kraly and Gnanasekaran 1987). Not long thereafter, a fresh call for improved migration statistics became one of the earliest acts of the League of Nations. In October 1922, a meeting at the League’s new International Labor Organization asked all its member states to collect and disseminate annual counts of immigrants as well as emigrants—disaggregated by sex, age, occupation, and country of last residence—and to establish uniform definitions of different types of migrant (ILO 1922).

Lack of better migration data is the greatest obstacle to forming policies to maximize the benefits of migration.

Similar meetings continued into the 1930s, and researchers of the period lamented that “migration statistics, even those of recent date, [were] very incomplete and, for not a few countries, are altogether wanting” (Ferenczi 1929: 55). Following the Second World War came decades of meetings again asking governments to collect and publish better migration data. The United Nations’ 1953 recommendations on the collection of migrant flow data—including standardization in definitions of ‘temporary’ migration—were mostly ignored (Simmons 1987). The UN followed up in 1976 with renewed recommendations on the standardization of statistics, including those on migrant stocks, but they likewise were “not ... implemented widely” (Bilsborrow et al. 1997: 3). A decade later, Levine, Hill, and Warren (1985: 2) regretted that even the United States, which receives more international migrants than any other rich country and has ample capacity to track them, knew “remarkably little about the composition and characteristics of the flow of new arrivals.”

As the 20th century came to an end, the UN concluded that “statistics needed to characterize migration flows, monitor changes over time and provide Governments with a solid basis for the formulation and implementation of policy [were] very often lacking”; even in Europe, not a single country had fully adopted the 1976 recommendations (United Nations 1998: 23, para. 3). A new set of recommendations followed in 1998. But sadly, most governments have ignored these repeated entreaties—based, as they have been, on unenforceable appeals for the common good. As the 21st century opened, the United Nations (2004: 216) observed that statistics on migration were still inadequate:

Less than 40 per cent of countries and areas have provided some migrant stock data since 1985, while the response on flow data is even more scarce. Statistics on international migration suffer from a lack of harmonized concepts and definitions across countries. There is . . . a lack of coordination among various agencies . . . at the national and international levels.

Today the United Nations (2007) continues the hard work of urging governments to include, at the very least, comparable questions on international migration on their 2010 census forms—such as questions about country of

birth, country of citizenship, country of residence one year ago or five years ago, and year of arrival in the country. This might allow slow progress toward serviceable data on stocks of migrants—to the extent that governments are willing to publicly disseminate disaggregated tabulations of the data thus collected. But disaggregated data on flows of migrants in and out of each country (disaggregated, for example, by occupation, sex, or country of citizenship or birth) remain mostly as elusive to policymakers and researchers now as they were decades ago.

The nonexistence or inaccessibility of detailed, comparable, disaggregated data on migrant stocks and flows is the greatest obstacle to the formulation of evidence-based policies to maximize the benefits of migration for economic development around the world. Unsurprisingly, the first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development called loudly for better collection, disaggregation, and dissemination of migration data (de Clercq 2008: 21, 52, 56).

While the Commission is optimistic, it is realistic enough to understand that a century of largely ignored recommendations cannot be reversed overnight. This is especially true for the harmonization of stocks and flows of international migrants. Given the absence of a single internationally accepted legal definition of what constitutes an international migrant and the lack of strong international law to enforce such a definition, the Commission finds that the harmonization of international migration data, beyond country of birth and country of citizenship, remains as elusive now as it was a century ago.¹ Instead, this report advocates a more pragmatic approach of disseminating migration data collected according to national laws and regulations. This approach, of course, requires that the different national definitions are clearly spelled out. Although creating global, harmonized migration data remains the ultimate goal, and the Commission lauds the various initiatives that are underway to bring greater harmonization, it believes that using data collected according to national practices is better than having no information at all.

Several recent initiatives have made laudable progress toward better data.

2.2 Selected recent advances toward better data

In the past few years, several laudable initiatives have responded to these calls for better data, demonstrating that genuine progress can be made. Several of these are listed below, but this is not intended as an exhaustive catalog.

¹ The analogy, or lack thereof, with refugee data illustrates this point. The 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees clearly defines who is a refugee. Most countries in the world have adopted this definition, incorporated it into their national laws, and elaborated individual procedures to screen those who seek asylum. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees oversees the global implementation of the 1951 Convention and has even the power to recognize refugees under its own mandate. The existing global refugee protection regime thus allows for the collection of comparable asylum and refugee data.

2.2.1 Tabulations of empirical data

- The United Nations Population Division has created the “Global Migration Database,” which includes all publicly available tabulations on the international migrant stock by sex, age, and country of birth and citizenship.² The database was created in partnership with the United Nations Statistics Division, UNICEF, UNDP South-South Unit, the World Bank, and the University of Sussex. The Population Division has also published a separate database, “International Migration Flows to and from Selected Countries,” which compiles data on immigration and emigration flows in 15 countries.³
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) has published the “Database on Immigrants in OECD countries,” an extensive set of tabulations providing information on the sex, age structure, occupations, fields of study, and other traits of the foreign-born population of 28 destination countries.⁴
- The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has compiled annual data on refugee stocks, flows, and characteristics, including sex, age, and country of citizenship covering more than 150 countries. In addition, UNHCR maintains a database on monthly asylum applications submitted in 37 industrialized countries by country of citizenship.⁵
- The Migration Policy Institute has created the MPI Data Hub, which compiles a large number of existing tabulations of migrant stock and flow data.⁶
- The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has developed a regional database on the international migrant stock.⁷
- Eurostat, working in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the UN Statistics Division, collects and disseminates data on migration flows and migrant stocks as part of a Joint Annual Questionnaire on International Migration. The use of an agreed joint questionnaire reduces the burden on national data

² <http://esa.un.org/unmigration>

³ Accessible through <http://www.unmigration.org>

⁴ <http://www.oecd.org/els/migration/DIOC>

⁵ <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics.html>

⁶ <http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub>

⁷ <http://www.eclac.cl/Celade/proyectos/migracion/IMILA00e.html>

suppliers and increases comparability among statistics published by different organizations.

- Eurostat also collects and publishes harmonized statistics on asylum applications and decisions.

2.2.2 Tabulations based on estimates

- The World Bank developed tabulations of the foreign-born in OECD countries by country of birth, level of education, and sex for two points in time (Docquier and Marfouk 2005; Docquier, Lowell, and Marfouk 2007).
- The OECD has produced “International Migration Data,” which contains standardized flow statistics for permanent migration by category of entry; it covers 18 OECD countries and roughly 80 percent of permanent migration into the OECD zone.⁸
- The United Nations Population Division compiled the “Trends in Total Migrant Stock” database, with quinquennial estimates of the international migrant stock by sex for all countries and territories in the world from 1960 to 2005.⁹
- The Development Research Center on Migration, Globalization and Poverty at the University of Sussex has published the “Global Migrant Origin Database” (Parsons et al. 2007). This 226-by-226 matrix provides estimates of bilateral migrant stocks between all pairs of countries in the 2000 census round.¹⁰

2.2.3 Anonymous data on individuals, or ‘microdata’

- The Mexican Migration Project, a collaborative research project based at Princeton University and the University of Guadalajara, has disseminated detailed microdata on several thousand individual migrants since 1982. Offshoots of the MMP have begun to collect similar data in eight other Latin American countries. The “Migrations between Africa and Europe” (MAFE) project at France’s Institut National d’Études Démographiques is now extending a related survey method to gather data on 2,550 migrants from Senegal, Ghana, and DR Congo—both in Africa and in Europe. Related methods have also been extended to China, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine (Massey and Capoferro 2007).
- The International Labor Organization has field-tested an extensive “migration module” add-on to Labor Force Surveys in Armenia,

⁸ http://www.oecd.org/document/52/0,3343,en_2649_33931_42274676_1_1_1_37415,00.html

⁹ Accessible through <http://www.unmigration.org>

¹⁰ http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html

Thailand, Ecuador, and Egypt. Several countries have added modules on migration and remittances to censuses and household surveys, including Costa Rica, Ghana, Fiji, Albania, Guatemala, and Moldova (Schachter 2008).

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has worked to improve sending-country efforts at collecting migration microdata in Egypt, Colombia, Guatemala, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, Albania, Moldova, Serbia, and many other countries.
- The Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and Eurostat's "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" project has made available detailed microdata on over 11,000 migrants and non-migrants from Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, and Ghana. Interviews were conducted both in the origin countries and in the destination countries of Spain and Italy.
- The World Bank has worked to include migration modules in several household surveys in countries such as Ghana, Albania, Bulgaria, Tanzania, and Tajikistan; it has also supported specialized surveys in Tonga and surveys of the Japanese diaspora in Brazil.
- Eurostat added a special immigrant module to its 2008 Labor Force Survey, which will generate anonymized individual data on immigrants and their children in EU countries.
- The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series–International (IPUMS–International) project at the University of Minnesota has brought together and standardized millions of anonymized individual records from the censuses of 35 countries, many of which contain data on country of birth and previous residence.¹¹

2.2.4 International standards and guidelines

- The UN's Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration (1998) provides a detailed framework for the compilation of statistics on migration flows including suggestions for standardized definitions of migrant types and guidelines for the collection and tabulation of data on migrant stock, especially via censuses.
- The UN's Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses (2007) gives detailed standards and guidelines for the collection and tabulation of census data relevant to international migration, such as country of birth and country of previous residence.

¹¹ <https://international.ipums.org/international>

- In 2007, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU adopted Regulation (EC) No. 862/2007 on migration and international protection statistics.¹² Under this regulation, EU Member States must supply to Eurostat harmonized statistics on asylum, migrant stocks and flows (inflows and outflows), acquisition of citizenship, and measures against unauthorized migration.¹³ The main disaggregations for these statistics are age, sex, citizenship, country of birth, and countries of destination and origin. The European Commission funded the project THESIM (Towards Harmonized Statistics on International Migration) to review national data availability and statistical definitions, and to assess the steps necessary for national compliance with the new regulation (Poulain et al. 2006).

2.3 Major policy questions that existing data cannot answer

The above efforts are a major advance and the Commission applauds them. They all exhibit limitations, however, that constrain their impact on research: often either they yield aggregated tabulations that prohibit detailed analysis of migrants' movements, or they cover a limited geographic area, or they generate data that are incommensurable in different ways with data from other sources. Here are just a few of the crucial policy questions we often cannot approach even with recently improved migration data:

Causes of movement

- How much return migration and temporary migration is there?
- Should destinations adopt measures to encourage return migration, and how?
- What common traits are shared among people who leave, among people who go back, and among people who move back and forth?
- How many unauthorized migrants are there, and what are their characteristics?
- How will climate change shape migration patterns (Kniveton et al. 2008)?

There remain crucial policy questions that we often cannot approach, despite recent improvements in migration data.

¹² <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:199:0023:0029:EN:PDF>

¹³ See the work of MIMOSA (Migration Modelling for Statistical Analyses), PROMINSTAT (Promoting comparative research in the field of migration and integration in Europe), and ILMAS (Implementation of Legislation on Migration and Asylum Statistics).

Effects of movement

- Are return migrants more productive due to their migration experience? Do they bring back skills, technology, and entrepreneurship as well as money?
- What are the effects of guest worker programs on the countries of origin and the migrants?
- How does high-skill emigration affect education decisions in origin countries?
- How do high-skill diasporas affect trade and investment with the origin?

How policy shapes movement

- Which policies encourage permanent migration and which encourage temporary migration, and to what degrees?
- How can destination-country policies leverage remittances for development?
- How are unauthorized movements shaped by immigration policy?
- How can management of temporary and permanent migration flows help countries navigate through demographic change?

Answering these questions requires disaggregated data that even recent laudable efforts to improve migration data have only begun to generate. Often, for example, the only statistics available to researchers are infrequently updated tabulations of migrants' general traits—such as the total number of foreign-born people of a certain education level, at ten-year intervals. While such data are useful and important, they do not permit detailed analysis of the true effects of that movement on the country of origin. Counting the number of Filipino nurses abroad does not adequately describe the effect of nurse migration on nursing education in the Philippines, for example, since many Filipino nurses privately acquire nursing degrees expressly to emigrate. Counting the number of Indian engineers abroad does not adequately describe the impact of that movement on technological development in India, since engineers abroad have interacted with their home country in complex ways. Counting the number of Mexican laborers in the United States or Moroccan laborers in Spain does not describe the complex patterns of back-and-forth movements that shape development in Mexico and Morocco.

Research on the development effects of migration requires looking for relationships between movement and development outcomes. This is often

impossible without (1) substantially disaggregated tabulations of data on migrants—for example, broken down by year and by individual traits—and (2) in many cases, anonymous data on individual migrants. Suppose, for example, that a researcher observed a (hypothetical) change in a particular European country’s migration policy toward Tunisian nurses in 1997, and wished to understand the development consequences for Tunisia. If the only data available are the number of nurses with “North African” nationality resident in the European country in 1991 and 2001, little can be learned from this experience regarding the potential development impacts of related future changes in policy. On the other hand, if researchers had access to annual data on the arrivals and departures of Tunisian nurses in the European country, or an anonymous sample of individual-level data on Tunisian nurses in the European country that included their year of arrival, the experience would reveal a wealth of information about how the policy change affected Tunisian nurses’ decisions to move, how those movements shaped the lives of people who remained in Tunisia, and so on. Data of this quality have long since been taken for granted by researchers studying the development impacts of international trade and investment.

The Commission notes that one important way to improve the availability of data is the publication of estimates by international agencies. Practice has shown that the wide dissemination of such estimates motivates countries that disagree with them to release more data.

Countries already collect a wealth of data on foreign citizens. However, no country takes full advantage of this storehouse of knowledge to better understand migration processes.

3. Five Steps to Improve Migration Data in the Short Term, with Existing Institutions and at Low Cost

The Commission is hopeful and confident that much of this situation can be fixed. Here it suggests who could take a limited set of basic steps that would make a world of difference for our understanding of the links between migration and development. These could be accomplished in the short term, with existing institutions, at very low cost. A subsequent section discusses longer-term strategy. What follows is not an exhaustive list of how migration data should be improved; rather, it is a prioritized and focused list of high-impact steps that could be taken in the short term, and who should take them.

Recommendation 1: Ask basic census questions, and make the tabulated answers publicly available

The Commission agrees that every population census, in every country, should include questions on the place of birth, country of citizenship, and place of residence either one or five years prior to the census, for each person enumerated—and that four essential tabulations of these results should be openly disseminated.

Why?

The Commission recognizes that the United Nations has made these recommendations consistently for some time but that full compliance is still a distant goal. Because the 2010 round of censuses is already underway, it is urgent to find ways to ensure that the relevant questions are included in the censuses of most countries, and that they are processed, tabulated, and disseminated in a detailed and speedy fashion. The opportunity to affect this process is now, and will not come again for another decade.

How?

The first essential step is for each country on earth to ask the questions on their basic census form, allowing a separate response for each individual country of birth, citizenship, or previous residence. Table 1 shows that large numbers of censuses in the 2000 round did not ask the questions in this way. This may change substantially in the 2010 round of censuses, which is underway at this writing. But Table 1 also shows that progress in the initial censuses of the 2010 round is uneven.

Without anonymous data on individual migrants, it is not possible for researchers to answer some of the most pressing policy questions at the nexus of migration and development.

The second essential step is to publicly tabulate this information, once it is collected. The essential census-based tabulations that each country should publicly disseminate are country of birth, country of citizenship, and country of previous residence (1 or 5 years ago), tabulated (1) by sex, (2) by age, and (3) by level of education.

Production and dissemination of these simple tabulations via the internet would be quick and would carry few costs.

Unfortunately there is no agreed-upon global standard for the form of the question on country of previous residence. Statistical institutes in Europe have agreed on the collection of information on the year of arrival of international migrants, as well as the place of residence one year beforehand (UNECE 2006 and European Union Regulation [EC] No. 763/2008). In contrast, the global census recommendations prepared by the United Nations Statistical Division (2007: 140) consider a question about residence five years beforehand to be “more appropriate for collecting data for the analysis of international migration.” Though it would be ideal for all countries to ask all of these questions, it is far more important that all countries should collect data on previous residence in the ways most appropriate to their needs and circumstances.

Who?

While many countries have made progress in collection and dissemination of this information, several countries crucial to global migration flows report scant information. The Commission particularly notes the paucity of data from developing countries, some which are important migrant destinations, including countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Various national, bilateral, and multilateral actors deal with national population censuses. The United Nations Statistics Division is the main global focal point through its role of setting standards, providing capacity building, and collecting data. The United Nations Population Fund coordinates census support at the country level. The World Bank is an important funding source for census projects. In addition to strengthening the multilateral system, the Commission believes that there is significant scope to mobilize actors outside the United Nations system to provide census expertise, to build capacities at the national level, and to conduct census-based research. However, the Commission believes that the role of the United Nations in setting standards, collecting data, and providing global estimates is unique and may require additional support.

Table 1. Number of censuses that ask key migration questions

<i>Presence of Question</i>	<i>Subject of Question</i>					
	<i>Birth</i>		<i>Citizenship</i>	<i>Previous Residence</i>		
				<i>1 year</i>	<i>5 years</i>	<i>Both</i>
2000 census round						
None	22 (12%)	57 (32%)				
Partial	15 (8%)	23 (13%)				
Complete	140 (79%)	97 (55%)	34 (19%)	64 (36%)	15 (8%)	
Total	177	177	177	177	177	177
2010 census round (as of November 2008)						
None	6	*				
Partial	4	*				
Complete	38	*	10	28	7	
Total	48		48	48	48	

Source: UN Population Division. Data as of November 2008. "None" signifies no question on the census, "Partial" signifies that the question is asked only in 'yes/no' form or about groups of countries (e.g. "Africa", "Latin America"), and "Complete" signifies that the question is asked in a way that allows a separate response for each other country in the world. *Asterisk signifies no data available. 2000 round data omit Kazakhstan. 2010 round data omit 11 other countries whose questionnaires were not available for analysis. Numbers represent censuses, not countries—for example, the 2001 census of Hong Kong, China was conducted separately and differently from the 2000 census of mainland China.

Recommendation 2: Compile and release existing administrative data

The Commission agrees that there is enormous scope for broadening the use of administrative data on visas, work permits, and population registers where available, to greatly enrich understanding of the characteristics of international migrants. Doing so requires closer cooperation between ministries in charge of migration and national statistical offices.

Why?

Essentially all countries already collect a wealth of administrative data on foreign citizens. However, since the information is not disseminated, no country takes full advantage of this storehouse of knowledge to better understand migration processes. Releasing data on visas, border control, residence, and work permits, on consular registers, asylum seekers, and apprehended irregular migrants in particular can offer rich portraits of migrant flows and stocks in fine detail and at minimal additional cost. Although the difficulties to be faced for extracting statistical data from these data sources are real, such sources can help produce timely and detailed statistics on movement. As mentioned below, they may also yield valuable anonymous data on individual migrants (microdata). Bilateral and regional cooperation is also essential since it is not uncommon for origin-country statistics and destination-country statistics about the magnitude of the same flows to differ.

How?

There are many examples of how compiling and releasing administrative data can shed light on otherwise opaque migration phenomena. The national asylum data published by the UN High Commission for Refugees come from administrative sources. The data underlying the UN Population Division's "International Migration Flows to and from Selected Countries" database are taken in large part from administrative data and demonstrate what can be done with existing numbers when they are made public. Schwabish (2009) uses administrative data from the U.S. Social Security system to infer the rate of emigration by those who previously immigrated—an estimate that cannot be made with more traditional migration data, since the United States does not compile statistics on the traits of those who leave the country.

Recent advances in the compilation of administrative data on irregular migration also promise to shed new light on the phenomenon. The European Commission has begun to compile annual data on a range of irregular migration indicators, including apprehensions, returns, and smuggling by nationality.¹⁴ The International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) compiles related data in its Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human

¹⁴ Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Frontiers and Immigration (CIREFI), <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l33100.htm>

Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe. A report by the United States government (GAO 2006: 18-21) points to work by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a model for systematic collection of administrative data on human trafficking.

Who?

Mining this rich vein of migration-relevant data requires closer cooperation between ministries in charge of migration and national statistical offices. There are tremendous gains to such cooperation: the agencies that regulate migration have rich data and close links to policy formation, and national statistical offices have rigorous statistical expertise, close knowledge of international recommendations on statistical harmonization, and expertise on ways to compile tabulations and microdata while maintaining individual privacy and national security. Each can contribute its strengths, and little additional cost need be incurred since the vast majority of the cost of such data—collecting them—has already been borne. Perrin and Poulain (2008) describe a model of how precisely this cooperative process could unleash tremendous amounts of existing migration data at low cost in Ukraine by compiling data now scattered among several agencies into a single register.

Recommendation 3: Centralize Labor Force Surveys

The Commission suggests that the member states of the European Union, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Malaysia, Chile, South Africa, and other countries with frequent and detailed Labor Force Surveys give permission to unify those surveys' individual records into a single, harmonized, annually updated database.

Why?

Several countries all over the world, including all of the major migrant destination countries, currently carry out detailed representative Labor Force Surveys (LFS) at least once a year. Almost all of these gather detailed information on respondents' country of birth, occupation, education, and earnings, and many include information on countries of prior residence for the foreign-born. The enormous expense of collecting the data is already incurred; there remains the relatively small step of compiling them into a usable, harmonized form. The sample sizes of these surveys mean that they do not permit collection of detailed data on migrants from all possible countries of origin, but they do contain a great wealth of information on migrants from major migration corridors.

The European Union now compiles the LFS of all of its members into a unified, harmonized, annually updated database.¹⁵ This proves the tech-

¹⁵ Not all members report country of birth for each individual in the publicly-available form of the Eurostat LFS microdata, but researchers are able to request more detailed information.

nical feasibility of the more global exercise the Commission recommends. Some technical issues remain to be addressed, including working around the possible imperfections in some countries' LFS data, especially in the coverage of non-nationals, and deciding on data storage and interface details to adequately address all countries' requirements for confidentiality and data security. The Commission believes that these issues can be addressed, and that the resulting database—even with any inherent limitations—would allow a quantum leap in our understanding of global labor dynamics.

Who?

This resource could be housed at OECD headquarters to both credibly maintain strict confidentiality of the microdata and allow users to create detailed custom tabulations over the internet. This access could allow users to conduct remote statistical analysis of the data, affording detailed analysis of relationships between different traits of migrants and non-migrants without the user ever possessing or even seeing the underlying microdata that permit the analysis—as the Luxembourg Income Study now successfully does for several national surveys.

Recommendation 4: Provide access to microdata, not just tabulations

The Commission agrees that it would be highly desirable for National Statistical Offices that already collect data on migrants via general or specialized surveys to make anonymous data on individuals available to researchers.¹⁶

Why?

The Conference of European Statisticians has recognized that releasing detailed microdata faces important confidentiality constraints, but it has unequivocally found that several existing measures can adequately limit the risks associated with releasing microdata (UNECE and CES 2007). It recommends “moving from a risk avoidance strategy to a risk management strategy,” and gives several examples of readily transferable best practice in this area from around the world.

We illustrate the need for microdata with one of many possible examples that would allow a large jump in our understanding of the development impacts of migration policy. This is the release of public anonymous data on individual migrants, including type of visa at admission. This could include very basic anonymous data on age, education level, sex, and country of origin for a representative sample of individuals entering on each of several broad visa classes. Without information of this type, it is impossible for researchers to seek answers to some of the most pressing policy questions at the nexus of

¹⁶ Anonymous data on individual migrants, or microdata, means the anonymous, coded replies from large numbers of individual respondents in surveys (not aggregated to statistics), carefully presented to conceal their identity and protect their privacy.

migration and development. When a country shifts its migration policy away from family-reunification visas toward skilled-worker visas, for example, as the United States and the European Union are likely to do in years to come, what is the effect on the skill mix of people who move? There are few sources for such data, meaning that some important development effects of major policy shifts can only be guessed at.

How?

Detailed anonymized data on individuals from the United States census and labor force survey can be freely downloaded from the internet by anyone. Australia, Finland, Sweden, Italy, Canada, and the United Kingdom all permit researchers to work directly with anonymized microdata by various methods, including licensed Public Use Files, remote access facilities, and controlled-access data laboratories. The Netherlands, Denmark, New Zealand, and Slovenia have provisions for researchers to work directly with recently collected microdata—demonstrating that this is quite feasible even in relatively small countries where confidentiality concerns might be greatest (UNECE and CES 2007). Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa give liberal access to anonymized microdata from their censuses, proving that protecting confidentiality is quite feasible in middle-income developing countries.

But not all microdata access is alike. Researchers can ‘access’ microdata from the French census through the Réseau Quetelet, but can only obtain custom tabulations of records, not the microrecords themselves. Such tabulations are useful for some kinds of migration research—such as counting the number of Senegalese physicians in France in 1999—but not for other kinds, such as using statistical analysis to determine whether migrants’ traits differ systematically from traits of non-migrants. The United Kingdom and Canada publish CD-ROMs containing census microdata, but neither contains detailed country-of-birth data for each individual. In these datasets, countries of birth are frequently aggregated into regions, which makes many important migration research questions impossible to ask. The experience of the United States and Australia—many of whose states are much smaller than the United Kingdom and Canada—demonstrate that aggregating countries of birth is not necessary in order to protect respondents’ confidentiality. The International Household Survey Network has established an excellent set of guidelines for the anonymization, storage, documentation, and dissemination of microdata across the globe.¹⁷

Releasing representative anonymous data on individuals by type of visa at admission would depend on a simple decision of the major destination countries. The United States used to publish full, anonymous microdata on all new recipients of legal permanent residency annually from 1973 to 2000, including their visa class of original entry, but it ceased to do so in the climate of fear

¹⁷ <http://www.internationalsurveynetwork.org>

following September 2001. There are feasible ways to resume production of this public good while maintaining strict standards of confidentiality. These methods, successfully employed by census bureaus around the world, include the anonymous reporting of data on a limited number of traits for each individual, the restriction of reporting to a representative sample rather than all individuals, and the use of random perturbation methods to further enhance privacy while maintaining broad statistical accuracy for most uses. The same methods could be extended to include temporary migrants as well, and could be replicated by other important destination countries. In cases where the release of microdata is deemed politically infeasible, detailed disaggregated tabulations of migrants by country of origin, visa class, age, sex, education level, and occupation would still go a long way toward advancing research possibilities.

The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series–International (IPUMS-I) project at the University of Minnesota represents the best practice in making large amounts of census microdata openly available to researchers. At the time of this writing, they have brought together and standardized millions of individual records from the censuses of 35 separate countries. Many countries have, however, been unwilling to give IPUMS-I microrecords that include data crucial to migration research—such as detailed country-of-birth data—which fundamentally limits the usefulness of this potentially invaluable resource.

Who?

The Commission encourages the United Nations Statistics Division, Eurostat and the Committee of European Statisticians to set guidelines for the release of such microdata, including those relative to the protection of privacy and confidentiality, in order to give National Statistical Offices a basis for the release of appropriate microdata for research purposes.

Recommendation 5: Include migration modules on more existing household surveys

The Commission agrees that an essential component of better understanding migration-development relationships is the collection of more and better household survey data based in countries of origin. A core “migration module” of roughly 10 to 15 questions should be included where possible in a greater number of Living Standards Measurement Study surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys, and other ongoing survey efforts. This improvement would carry very limited additional costs.

Why?

Only multi-topic surveys in countries of origin allow detailed links to be established between the migration process and human development outcomes for people and households. They also represent the only feasible method of gathering detailed information on migrants in countries where resource

constraints prohibit specialized surveys focusing exclusively on migrants. Surveys furthermore offer better hope of capturing unauthorized migration—an issue of tremendous policy significance—than other methods.

How?

Several different types of ongoing household surveys in countries of origin present opportunities for the inclusion of migration modules. These include Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Labor Force Surveys (LFS), Household Budget Surveys (HBS), and Income Expenditure Surveys (IES), differing subsets of which are used in different countries. For the purpose of gathering useful research information on migration, LSMS surveys in general offer information that is richer than some other survey types for understanding livelihoods—such as a consumption-based welfare measure. This richness, however, comes at the cost of smaller sample sizes than other surveys such as the DHS. There is therefore no one clear survey type into which migration modules obviously fit in all settings.

Since migrants represent a very small fraction of the population in many countries of origin—and even in some important countries of destination—the sample sizes of traditional survey methods are often fundamentally limited. Traditional survey-based methods are therefore not universally applicable. Nevertheless, migration modules in nationally representative surveys have successfully captured detailed information on reasonably large numbers of migrants in a number of countries, such as the United States and Ghana (Schachter 2008) and more recently in Tajikistan and Bulgaria. Many recent or planned LSMS-type surveys contain information on 10,000 to 15,000 households—which may be sufficiently large to provide data on substantial samples of migrant households—including surveys in Kenya, Angola, Malawi, Iraq, and Guatemala. For more than 20 countries, lifetime migrants represent over 10 percent of the population, with recent migrants constituting 2–3 percent of the population in many cases, so they and the people associated with them will be represented to useful degrees even in national surveys.

Beyond this, some degree of “stratified” sampling (disproportionate oversampling) of migrant populations within the framework of a broader nationally representative survey holds the promise of extending the usefulness of this approach to additional settings. Recent small-scale examples include surveys in Guatemala (e.g. IOM 2008), Ecuador (on Colombian migrants, see Bilsborrow and CEPAR 2006), and Brazil (the Nikkei survey by McKenzie and Mistiaen [2007]). Prior to that, the Push and Pull Factors of International Migration project used disproportionate sampling to select areas in five countries of origin (Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, and Ghana) and two European Union

countries of destination (Italy and Spain) (Schoorl et al. 2000).¹⁸ However, the lack of an appropriate sampling frame to perform the stratification will continue to be a limiting factor unless future population censuses include key questions to identify migrant households.

Implementing this recommendation in countries with a lower prevalence of migration in the overall population may, then, require the minor effort of adding one or two questions to the national census on the migration history of each household. This would help identify areas to oversample in the search for migrant households. To identify areas rich in emigrants, surveys could ask, for example, “How many of your children have lived outside the country at any point in the past, or live outside the country now?” To identify areas rich in immigrants, surveys could ask, “How many people living in this household were born in another country?”¹⁹ Such information would make better migration surveys possible at a lower cost by generating a narrow sampling frame to facilitate targeted migration surveys.

The Commission suggests the following basic questions as a candidate list of desirable, tested, feasible questions to include on any household survey seeking to gather better information on linkages between migration and development. The list is not exhaustive, and some commissioners feel that some questions deserve higher priority than others, but many commissioners believe that a core set of migration-related survey questions should correspond roughly to this list:

1. Previous residence: How many years have you lived in this village/town/city?
 - a. When you came to this place, from which province/district did you move? (If moved from abroad, record name of country.)
 - b. In which province/district were you born? (If born abroad, record name of country.)
2. Returned migrants: In the past 5 years, did you ever migrate to another country for at least 3 months for work, to seek work, or to live?
 - a. In which year was your most recent migration to another country for work?
 - b. To what country and city did you migrate the last time?
 - c. How many months did you stay in that country this last time?
 - d. What was your main occupation while in {country}?
 - e. What was your main occupation before migrating?

¹⁸ A joint project of Eurostat and the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute: <http://www.nidi.knaw.nl/web/html/pushpull>

¹⁹ The most useful exact form and wording of each of these questions would vary in different settings.

3. Current migrants [asked of adult women²⁰]: Do you have any children living outside the household?
 - a. Where is {name} currently living? (If abroad, record country and city; if not, skip rest of section.)
 - b. In what year did {name} move to {country}?
 - c. What was {name}'s occupation, if any, at the time of moving to {country}?
 - d. What was the highest level and grade reached by {name} at the time of leaving?
 - e. What is the highest level and grade reached by {name} today?
 - f. What is {name}'s current occupation, if any?
 - g. Have any members of this household received transfers or gifts in cash from {name} over the course of the last 12 months?
 - h. How many times have you received transfers or cash gifts from {name} in the last 12 months?
 - i. How much did you receive the last time?
 - j. What is the total value of the transfers and cash gifts that {name} has sent the household over the course of the last 12 months?

The Commission also stresses the importance of designing migration surveys with keen attention to capturing information about comparison groups of non-migrants. All too often, research is based on information about migrants alone. This makes it impossible to know if their experiences are different or would be common to non-migrants in similar socio-economic situations, or to investigate either the determinants or consequences of migration (Bilsborrow et al. 1997).

Who?

The World Bank has developed prototype migration modules of 15 to 20 questions that are currently being used within the LSMS surveys of a number of countries. Often the key reason that such modules come to be included in a country's surveys is the presence of a champion in the statistical agency to ensure the migration receives proper attention in survey design, at low marginal cost. The World Bank and the US Agency for International Development, which play key roles in the LSMS and DHS surveys, respectively, could actively encourage such champions. National statistical agencies can encourage ad hoc processes of international coordination on best practices in the use of household surveys for migration data, such as the "Suitland Group" convened this year at the U.S. Census Bureau.

²⁰ Alternatively, one could ask information about all adult children of heads of households and/or their spouses, plus the spouses themselves if no longer household members. Which approach maximizes coverage of migrants while minimizing double counting might vary in different settings. The World Bank is currently field testing different approaches to these questions.

The Commission notes a medium- to long-term goal of moving toward specialized, longitudinal ‘tracking’ studies of migrants, for two reasons. First, while cross-sectional studies with life histories are less expensive, they run the risk of omitting entire households that move out of the sampling frame and do not return—the “exit” or “loss to follow up” problem. Second, in many countries, even where migration is considered important, migrants constitute too small a fraction of the population to appear in large numbers in any feasibly sized survey, particularly in countries of origin—the “rare elements” problem. The high costs of specialized longitudinal migration surveys imply that stratified cross-sections will continue to play an important role in many settings, but the establishment of longitudinal studies in key corridors remains an important goal. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have established major longitudinal studies of immigrants that begin once they arrive in the country; the next step will be for studies of this genre to track individuals across the border.

In the medium to long term, the governments of important migrant origin and destination countries together with international agencies should support a multi-country program of specialized household surveys focusing on migration in developing countries, resembling a scaled-down version of the DHS program. Only specialized surveys on international migration can be designed to collect the detailed before-after data on migrants and non-migrants that are necessary to study in depth the determinants or consequences of international migration for migrants and their households. Fertility, mortality, and natural population growth will continue to decline across much of the world—especially in developing countries. But large international income gaps will persist, and migration will come to play an ever more important role in future changes in population and income distribution. In this sense migration may come to dominate fertility in many settings.

4. In the Longer Term: Building Institutional Capacity to Collect and Disseminate Migration Data in Developing Countries

The lesson of the preceding section is that much can be done in the short term, at nominal cost and within existing institutions, to unleash the potential of existing data collection mechanisms and stores of data already collected. The Commission focuses on such relatively easy actions out of a desire to generate a small number of limited, feasible next steps that might yield to focused action in the near future. Several commissioners agree, however, that such steps will only take us so far, and that progress is limited in the longer term by the more difficult work of building greater institutional capacity in developing countries to collect, store, analyze, and disseminate migration data.

Longer-term efforts must focus on developing countries for at least two reasons. First, virtually all countries of the world are migrant countries of origin, destination, and transit to some degree—and around half of all migrants from developing countries live in other developing countries (Ratha and Shaw 2007). If we focus research too much on more developed destination countries because of their statistical strengths, we will miss important parts of the development story. Second, even in cases in which the principal migration destinations are more developed countries, it can be difficult to get a complete picture of emigration from an important origin country simply by combining disparate destination-country data. Filipino workers, for example, go in large numbers to Saudi Arabia, the United States, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Standardization of those countries' migration data can be very difficult; in the long run, a rigorous picture of such movement is best established by statistics collected uniformly in the Philippines.

An important first step in this process of building lasting institutional capacity is the convening of national taskforces in each developing country. Such taskforces bring together national policymakers, statisticians, researchers, and migration specialists to discuss their common interests in having better migration data and to decide which steps should take priority.

In most settings, the initial job of such a taskforce should be to commission or prepare a National Migration Data Report, to catalog the disparate sources of existing administrative, census, and survey data pertinent to migration, from governmental and sometimes non-governmental sources. Perrin and Poulain (2008) present a model of such a report for the Ukraine.

Every country should be encouraged to prepare such an annual or bi-annual report. With funding from the European Commission, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a template National Migration Data Report which has been discussed and adopted by 10 countries in West and Central Africa. Similar reports have also been prepared by countries participating in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation group and compiled and edited by IOM. Brazil, India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, among other countries, have recently agreed to prepare similar reports.

These national efforts should be facilitated and encouraged at the international level. The IOM, through its network of over 400 offices in 125 member states, could help to facilitate the preparation of National Migration Data Reports at relatively low cost and within a fairly short time frame. A global database with national migration information using a broadly similar reporting template could be created and updated. The OECD has been undertaking a similar task with respect to its member countries for over two decades, but no such systematic compilation of information exists for developing countries. A supportive, coordinating role might also be played by the World Bank and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). While this exercise will not

The five recommendations will only go so far. Long-term improvement requires greater statistical capacity in developing countries.

in itself generate new data in the short-term, it will help to make migration policymakers more aware of the dynamics of migration and will help to make a case for addressing data gaps over the long term through investments in research capacity and data compilation systems.

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