Migration Statistics Mainstreaming

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The increasing demand for migration statistics

Migration has become an increasingly important phenomenon for European societies. Not only has migration shaped considerably the population in many European countries in the past, but the impacts are likely to continue in the future. During 2008 alone, about 3.8 million people immigrated into one of the EU Member States and at least 2.3 million emigrants are reported to have left one of the EU Member States. The total number of non-nationals, in other words people who are not citizens of their country of residence, living on the territory of the EU Member States on 1 January 2009 was 31.8 million representing 6.4 % of the EU-27's population. One year later, on 1 January 2010, the number of non-nationals was 32.5 million, or 6.5 % of the total population.

At the occasion of special events that hit the headlines of the newspapers, the challenges linked to migration come to the surface for everybody. This has been the case recently with the events in Northern Africa that have resulted in media coverage of refugee boats arriving on the shores of Lampedusa. But while media attention is given to migration only at the occasion of special events that go out of the norm, the permanent flow of immigration and emigration is not covered by the media – despite its impact on both receiving and sending societies.

Policy makers, however, have realised that such large-scale movements call for policy attention. First of all policy-makers need to address the challenge of integrating migrants into their host societies in order to ensure that ghettoisation is limited, if not avoided, to give migrants the opportunities of becoming full members of their host societies, participating actively in all spheres of life. Secondly, policy-makers are interested in influencing the size and the composition of future migration flows and in particular to attract migrants with the right qualifications to ensure sufficient labour supply for the national economies.

Luckily for statisticians, but not only for us, we are living in a time that values fact-based policy making. Policy makers are calling for factual information including high-quality statistics in order to design policies, monitor their implementation and evaluate their outcomes. What is true in general, is of course also true for migration policies. Policy makers would like to understand who are the migrants that live in our societies and who are the potential migrants that are interested in moving to our countries. How many are they, what are their demographic characteristics, but also what are/have been their reasons for migrating, how long do they intend to stay, what level and what type of qualification do they possess, what occupations do they have, what are their links with their countries of origin, which obstacles do they face when coming to the host societies, etc., etc.

What can official statistics offer in face of such demands? Unfortunately, in most countries the offer is limited – to put it mildly. For a long time, migration has been considered mainly as one of the components of demographic change together with fertility and mortality. Consequently, migration statistics have been considered as a part of demography. And as it is the case for other demographic statistics, the main interest of migration statistics was in breakdowns by age and sex of both migration flows and migrant stocks. Owing to the particular phenomenon,

the only additional disaggregation collected was citizenship or country of birth, possibly country of previous and next residence for the flow statistics. And nothing else.

A typical example is the development of EU legislation on migration statistics. Contrary to most other areas of EU statistics, migration statistics at the level of the EU has been based on gentlemen's agreements until 2007, when the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Regulation on Community statistics on migration and international protection. This Regulation defines what statistics the EEA Member States[1] have to provide to Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union. The requirements stipulated in this Regulation are still firmly rooted in the demographic view of migration with breakdowns not going beyond country of citizenship, country of birth, country of previous usual residence, country of next usual residence and of course sex and age. The only opening towards a better understanding of who these migrants really are stems from the requirements on residence permits covering in particular the reasons for the permit being issued.

Apart from this glimpse on reasons for migration (limited to third-country nationals being issued a residence permit for the first time), the Regulation does not foresee any additional information on these migrants. No information on their education, their occupation or their integration into the labour market, let alone any information on other dimensions of integration, such as language competencies, interaction with the native population or feelings of belonging.

In some Member States, these challenges have already been recognised earlier, but there is no systematic and definitely no comparable statistical information available covering the needs of social and migration policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that as one of the outcomes of the IV Ministerial Conference on Integration, held in Zaragoza on 15-16 April 2010, the final declaration calls for an examination of a list of integration indicators, including the availability and quality of the data needed to calculate these indicators. The indicators chosen concern the areas of employment, education, social inclusion, active citizenship, which are considered basic areas for integration.[2]

Migration statistics mainstreaming as an effective and efficient answer

These justified requests for better and more statistics on migrants come at a time, where any request for additional statistics is met with resistance by those who are called upon to produce the data. National Statistical Institutes in the EU have suffered serious budgetary cuts as a consequence of the financial and economic crisis. In such times, even the continuity of established statistics is at stake. The development of new statistics is under extreme scrutiny.

How can official statistics square the circle and respond to these policy demands in times of serious budgetary constraints? In order to overcome this dilemma, Eurostat has developed the approach of mainstreaming migration statistics.

Originally the idea of mainstreaming has been developed in the area of policy making for equal opportunities between women and men by the United Nations. It consisted in adding a gender perspective to all areas of activity, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels, instead of defining an isolated equal opportunities policy.[3] What has been developed in the area of policy making has since then been successfully translated to statistics as well. It has become common practice that most statistics on equal opportunities are being produced by adding the gender dimension to all other relevant existing statistics (e.g. education statistics, employment statistics, statistics on income and living conditions). Such an approach has been considered as being both effective and efficient.

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[1] EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein

[2] http://www.tt.mtin.es/eu2010/en/noticias/documentos/201004/21-001.pdf

[3] UNITED NATIONS, Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997, 18.9.1997

What has become a matter of course in the area of gender statistics has now been proposed for the area of migration statistics: It is proposed that instead of creating additional surveys or other data sources on migrants, the need for information on migration and migrants should be taken into account as part of an ongoing development of a wide range of economic and above all social statistics, regardless of whether these statistics are based on administrative data sources or on statistical surveys. If implemented successfully, this approach would produce a whole range of relevant statistics (e.g. concerning education, employment, income and living conditions) as a by-product of standard statistical operations and therefore in a very cost-effective manner.

The basic idea is simple. But unfortunately, mainstreaming the migration dimension into statistics is more complex than mainstreaming the gender dimension into statistics and requires additional efforts. This is due to the fact that from a statistical perspective the target groups – women on the one side, migrants on the other – differ in important respects. Therefore, the remainder of the paper will outline how the EU programme on mainstreaming migration statistics addresses these specific issues.

Defining the migrants

First of all, the definition of the target group for migration mainstreaming, the migrants, is not immediately obvious. Whereas gender falls neatly into two categories that are identical for all policies aiming at gender equal opportunities, users of migration statistics do not necessarily agree on what a migrant is: for some users a migrant is defined via his/her citizenship (as a foreigner or non-national), for others via his/her country of birth (as a person born outside the country), and for even others persons with migrant background include second and sometimes also third generation migrants and are therefore defined by the country of birth of their ancestors. For some policy purposes, interest is even in specific subgroups such as recently arrived migrants or migrants who have acquired the nationality of the host country.

It all depends on the specific policy issues at stake. Two examples from EU policy making are used to illustrate the point.

Article 79 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states that: "The Union shall develop a common immigration policy aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the efficient management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in Member States, and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings." Consequently, EU policies in the area of immigration/ integration focus on third-country nationals, i.e. persons defined by their citizenship (citizenship outside the EU).

The European Parliament resolution on the Communication from the Commission on immigration, integration and employment" (COM(2003) 336 - 2003/2147(INI)) at point 3, page 3 "emphasises that different groups of migrants require different policies for integration; stresses that integration concerns not only newly-arrived migrants but also long-term resident third country nationals and second and third generation migrants, and that this must be taken into account in policy-making."

It is therefore a pre-condition for migration mainstreaming that a consensus is reached on the target group(s) to be considered.

The following scheme illustrates the main groups of interest and their relationships.
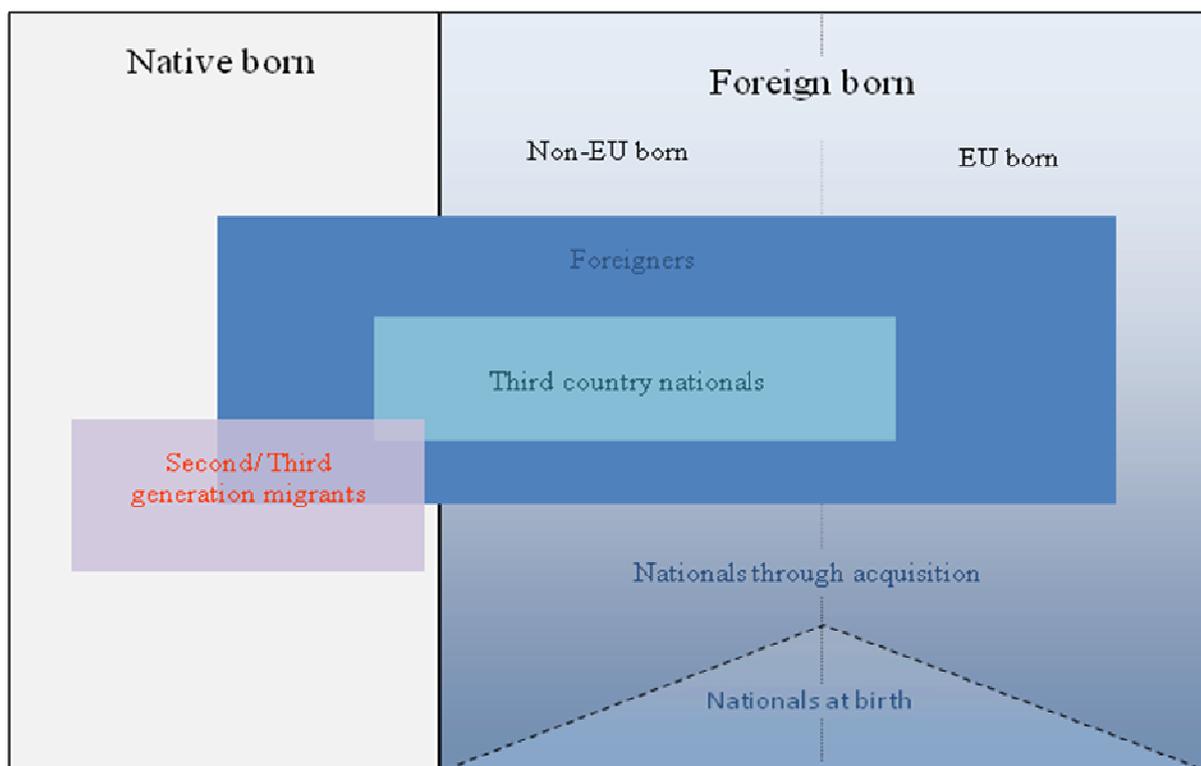
Therefore, a basic strand of the work programme aims at defining and prioritising the different possible target groups. As the statistical variables that are needed to identify these groups (such as current citizenship, citizenship at birth, country of birth, country of birth of parents, year of arrival) are numerous, prioritisation will need to take into account the importance of the user needs as well as the feasibility of collecting data according to the desired variables. Whatever decision(s) will be taken, covering migrants appropriately is likely to require the introduction of more than one dimension.

Statistics on migrants based on statistical surveys

Once agreement is reached on the target groups under consideration, various characteristics of this population group hamper the smooth mainstreaming, at least as regards statistical surveys.

Migrants do not only usually constitute a minority (with the respective impact on the necessary sample size), but a minority that is often not adequately covered in sample surveys. Several factors contribute to this difficulty: Most sample surveys do not cover collective households, in which certain groups of migrants might be concentrated (e.g. institutions for asylum applicants, collective households for blue-collar workers), the sample frame might not be sufficiently updated to include recent migrants, the sample design might prove inappropriate for an accurate coverage of migrants and last but not least, the participation of migrants might be skewed towards those that are better integrated, be it due to language proficiency required for participation in statistical surveys or due to a higher level of trust in the statistical agency collecting the data.

Therefore, there is a certain likelihood that the sampling and the fieldwork approach of the surveys concerned would need to be adapted in order to ensure a sufficient and balanced representation of the migrant group of interest. For this reason, a second strand of the work programme is devoted to reviewing the sampling methodologies and the fieldwork approach of

the two big European sample surveys, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC).

If these difficulties can be overcome, these two surveys would be able to provide a wide range of relevant statistical information on migrants, be it their educational attainment level, their status in employment or their level of social inclusion. Despite the cost of adapting the surveys for this purpose, we still believe that such a mainstreaming approach would be effective and efficient.

It is clear that there are additional information needs as regards migrants that are specific to this population group and thus hamper the mainstreaming approach. Both for migratory policies and integration policies, there is a need to have reliable statistics on the reasons for migration, the language abilities of the migrants, the recognition of their qualifications in the host society, their integration into the host society or perceived obstacles to successful integration. Building on the mainstreaming approach, such questions could then be tackled by adding specific migration related questions - in the form of a migrant module - to existing surveys.

Statistics on migrants based on administrative data sources

Numerous National Statistical Institutes are currently orienting their production of statistical data to a more extensive use of data from administrative sources. This orientation, which is clearly driven by budgetary concerns, has a number of advantages including the reduction of response burden and the sustainability of the information. Energy is currently devoted to making best use of such data without compromising on data quality.

As regards migration statistics, there are additional drawbacks of administrative data sources. Contrary to gender, the migrant status of a person is often not recorded in administrative data sources. Efforts will need to be devoted to convincing the holders of such data sources to include a migrant marker in their data source and to record this information reliably. This approach is likely to be successful in those cases in which the holders of the administrative information perceive the request as a win-win situation, in which they also gain important information for their own purposes.

Another obstacle to the successful usage of administrative data sources lies in the fact that such data sources tend not to record or not to record reliably information that relates to the migrant before s/he entered the host country. E.g., it is clear that most education registers record the educational qualifications acquired in the country, but disregard completely any education qualification acquired before entry. If statistics on educational attainment were based on such sources, the educational attainment of migrants would be clearly underestimated.

Consequently, a third strand of the work programme is devoted to investigate options for developing the statistical use of administrative data.

Conclusion

While the mainstreaming of migration statistics poses a number of important challenges in comparison to the mainstreaming of gender statistics, we still believe that the approach can be effective and is able to reply to policy needs in an efficient manner. It requires, however, that all stakeholders realise that "there are no free lunches": broad household surveys might need to include migration statistics as one of their legitimate purposes and holders of administrative data might need to consider the win-win situation that can be derived from the quality requirements that result from the usage of administrative data sources for statistical purposes.