

Conference Theme:

International Migration and Migrant Populations

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FLOWS

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Views expressed are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Statistics Austria.

Provisional Abstract

International migration, with its intricate web of demographic, social, economic and political determinants and consequences, is a topic that has moved to the forefront of the EU agenda. The United Nations (UN) has been active in its efforts to improve the quality and comparability of international migration statistics. In the 20th century international migration has frequently been conceptualised as a distinct event. To some extent however it is questionable whether this conception of measurement covers the empirical reality. One of the features of international migration is that it encompasses events that have potential of being recorded in two countries almost simultaneously and that should consequently be comparable. However, there are significant discrepancies in the statistics gathered by countries of origin and countries of destination by the same migration flow. At the international level a common approach on the measurement of stocks of immigrants is still missing.

The presentation will focus on the conceptual and measurement processes and issues relating to international migration statistics in Austria and its comparison with international standards. With STATISTICS AUSTRIA's new population statistics system (POPREG) it is possible to display the population size in all territorial units of Austria for specific periods and under common time criteria. It provides data on population structure and development and at the same time form the central information base for migration statistics. In the new demographic statistics, people are classed as migrants if they have or had a usual place of residence in Austria for a duration of at least 90 days. Pursuant to international recommendations, the information that is available in POPREG on the residence duration in Austria is consulted to determine the permanent population and international migration figures. However the present statistical recording of international migration flows and of migrant population based on the recommended 12 months concept does not fulfil requirements concerning regulations and measures of international migration as well as for the planning and appropriation of integration resources.

As in- and outflows of temporary stayers largely compensate themselves over a year and only a positive balance of about 10 per cent of the total can be registered in the context of the short-term migration, the impact of long-term migration is most significant. Consequently migration flows with a length of stay with less than a year are only to some extent relevant for the "migration impact". The temporary stayers also yield only very little quotas of about 2 per cent of the net-balance. As the volume of migration flows is not insignificant both for temporary stayers (max. 3 months) and for short-term-migration (3 to 12 months), it seems plausible to conceptualize long-term migration with a length of stay between 3 and 12 months. However migrants with a stay of less than 90 days are generally not considered to take a sensible demographic impact and data is constraint by high levels of uncertainty. The results for Austria show that in applying the 90 day rule, about 90 per cent of the long-term migration impact can already be registered. Interesting findings are to be expected by considering international migration dynamic by nationality.