Monitoring International Migration Flows in Europe
Towards a Statistical Data Base Combining Data From Different Sources

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Abstract. The paper reviews techniques developed in demography, geography and statistics that are useful for bridging the gap between available data on international migration flows and the information required for policy making and research. The basic idea of the paper is as follows: to establish a coherent and consistent data base that contains sufficiently detailed, up-to-date and accurate information, data from several sources should be combined. That raises issues of definition and measurement, and of how to combine data from different origins properly. The issues may be tackled more easily if the statistics that are being compiled are viewed as different outcomes or manifestations of underlying stochastic processes governing migration. The link between the processes and their outcomes is described by models, the parameters of which must be estimated from the available data. That may be done within the context of socio-demographic accounting. The paper discusses the experience of the U.S. Bureau of the Census in combining migration data from several sources. It also summarizes the many efforts in Europe to establish a coherent and consistent data base on international migration.

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Résumé. Cet article présente des techniques développées en démographie, géographie et statistique, utiles pour réduire l'écart entre les données disponibles sur les flux de migration internationale et l'information nécessaire pour élaborer des politiques et entreprendre des recherches. L'idée de base est la suivante: pour mettre en place une base de données cohérentes et conséquentes qui contienne une information suffisamment détaillée, à jour et précise, il est nécessaire de combiner des données issues de différentes sources. Cela livre des problèmes de définition et de mesure, et pose la question suivante: comment combiner de façon correcte des données d'origine différente? On peut mieux aborder ces problèmes si les statistiques à réunir sont vues comme différents résultats ou manifestations des processus stochastiques sous-jacents qui régissent les migrations. Le lien entre les processus et leurs manifestations est décrit par des modèles, dont les paramètres doivent être estimés à partir des données disponibles.
Cela peut être réalisé dans le contexte de la comptabilité démographique. L'article discute l'expérience du "Bureau of the Census" des États-Unis qui a combiné des données sur les migrations issues de différentes sources. Il présente aussi rapidement les nombreux efforts réalisés en Europe pour établir une base de données cohérente et conséquente sur la migration internationale.

1. Introduction

International migration is a politically sensitive issue. The discussions tend to be emotional, partly because facts are hard to come by. This observation led Dr. Nafis Sadiq, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund, to conclude, on the occasion of the Expert Group Meeting on Population Distribution and Migration held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in January 1993, that "[t]here is a crucial lack of information about both the size and the nature of migration flows" (Sadiq, 1993, p. 4). A similar concern was expressed by the OECD Council, held at the ministerial level on 4 and 5 June 1991: "Ministers request the Organisation, . . . , to intensify its work on assessing and comparing migratory flows and their trends; . . ." A "growing concern about worldwide migratory pressures" was also issued by the London Summit of the G-7 on 17 July 1991.

Much of the debate in Europe on international migration seems to be determined by fear, a view of international migration as threatening, instead of facts. Mr. Pacini, Director of the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation, expressed the opinion of many in Europe when he states: "In the near future, the birth rates in Arab North Africa are not expected to decline sufficiently enough to contain population expansion, nor will the economic gap with Europe narrow significantly. The perpetuation of a situation in which the Maghreb market is increasingly unable to absorb the available labour force will drive vast numbers of young immigrants to Europe" (Pacini, 1992, p. 230). Fear without reason, according to Simon: "Additional immigrants raise the standard of living of native-born persons in Western countries, and have little or no negative effect upon any occupation or income class" (Simon, 1993, p. 116). Arguments pro and contra migration are many and the facts are few. Van de Kaa (1993) presents an analysis of the factors that may influence the thinking on, and reactions to, international migration. The debate and the uncertainties involved in international migration generated a great deal of attention in all spheres of public life.

Adequate migration data are essential, not only to guide the political debate, but also to monitor and manage migratory movements. The objective of this paper is to review a set of techniques which are used by