

Statistics and Reality

Concepts and Measurements of Migration in Europe

HEINZ FASSMANN, URSULA REEGER
& WIEBKE SIEVERS (EDS.)

Statistics and Reality

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Concepts and Measurements of
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Preface

Statistics are not synonymous with reality but are, rather, a way of representing the complexity of the world in categories and figures attached to such categories. This becomes immediately obvious when we compare the ways in which comparable phenomena – such as international migration – are statistically represented in different national contexts. The national statistics used to describe international migration are based on different conceptualisations that are closely related to the history of the respective country as well as to the particular history of migration from and to this country. Moreover, countries have various ways of counting their foreign citizens, foreign-born populations, immigrants and ethnic minorities in censuses, population registers, aliens registers and permit databases.

That such differences, in both the concepts and techniques used to measure migration, make any international comparison of the existing data impossible was first pointed out more than 150 years ago. As early as 1891, the congress of the International Statistical Institute drafted a first uniform definition of an international migrant. Since then, several international institutions, most prominently the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations, have heavily invested in harmonising data on international migration by organising conferences and issuing recommendations on concepts, definitions and measurements of this phenomenon (see Kraly & Gnanasekaran 1987; Herm 2006). More recently, such organisations were joined in their efforts by the European Commission. Utilising newly acquired competences, the European Commission proposed a regulation on migration statistics in 2005, which was adopted in a slightly adapted form in 2007, and also invested in a European project investigating the feasibility of its implementation (see Poulain, Perrin & Singleton 2006). Yet, despite all these efforts, the concepts and techniques used to measure migration in the individual countries still differ massively.

As many of the above-described initiatives, the present publication departs from these differences in the measurement of migration. Yet, unlike these ameliorative initiatives, it does not aim to issue a further set of recommendations for the standardisation of data on international migration in Europe. Nor does it try to harmonise existing data on this

topic, as does Eurostat or the so-called SOPEMI (Système d'observation permanente des migrations), a continuous reporting system on international migration established by the OECD (for more information on international data collection see Herm 2006: 90-105). This volume intends to look at the existing national data from a critical perspective with a view to answering the following questions: How do the approaches to counting international migrants vary between countries? How far are these different approaches related to the histories of migration in these countries? How far do the existing statistics mirror the reality of migration in each of these countries? And what historical, political and legal knowledge is necessary in order to correctly interpret the existing data in the different European countries?

The researchers who joined forces in producing this book first realised that there were no answers to these questions in the existing literature on international migration statistics when they put together a state-of-the-art report on this topic for the EU-funded Network of Excellence IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe) or, to be more precise, for the thematic cluster dealing with migration and its regulation, which is coordinated by Heinz Fassmann (see Fassmann, Kohlbacher, Reeger & Sievers 2005). In order to fill this gap, several experts involved in this cluster wrote reports on the statistics in their country and met to present and discuss these in three workshops. These took place in Vienna in April 2005, Osnabrück in September 2005 and Istanbul in March 2006. These workshops resulted in common guidelines for the structure of the chapters collected in this volume.

This background explains the higher level of coherence across contributions than is often the case in comparative studies based on individual country chapters. Each chapter starts with a short overview of the history of migration to the respective country since the Second World War and explains the importance of migration both in real terms and in terms of public and political opinion. This is followed by an overview of stock and flow statistics, including a consideration of their implementation and of the concepts and instruments used to measure migration. In the third part, the authors provide a critical insight into the stocks of immigrants living in their countries and the numbers of people entering and leaving per year. In addition, they comment on trends observed in recent literature, such as the feminisation of migration or the diversification of migrants' origins if the statistics collated in their countries allow this (which was not the case in Poland and Romania, where the data are highly unreliable). The final section is devoted to a critical outlook that emphasises the problems of existing statistical instruments and explores possible future developments. Each chapter is supplemented by an appendix, which, apart from the most

important publications, contains links to available datasets and addresses of statistical offices.

The selection of countries described in this volume includes examples from Western, Central, Southern and Eastern Europe and of both post-colonial and labour migration. It contains reports on the three European countries that have received the largest numbers of immigrants since the Second World War – namely France, Germany and the United Kingdom – but also on smaller countries such as Austria and Belgium, where the share of resident immigrants is similarly high. On the other hand, the book examines several different sending countries, including Turkey – one of the most important countries of origin for migration to the European Union and an accession candidate – and Portugal. Both countries have more recently also begun to receive immigrants. Finally, through Switzerland, the book also looks at the concepts of measuring migration in a non-EU country in the centre of Europe.

We divided the twelve countries described in this book into four groups based on their histories and migration regimes:

1. post-colonial countries: Belgium, France and the UK, which received immigrants from their (former) colonies;
2. guestworker receiving countries: Austria, Germany and Switzerland, which actively recruited workers in Southern and South-Eastern Europe;
3. post-communist countries: Poland, Hungary and Romania, where emigration and more recently immigration have (re-)gained importance after the fall of the Iron Curtain; and
4. new immigrant receiving countries: Greece, Portugal and Turkey, which used to be major sending countries of labour migrants but have recently also become receiving countries of migration.

These groups should, however, not be understood as strict categorisations. Thus, both Belgium and France received immigrants from their (former) colonies but also actively recruited workers in Eastern Europe in the interwar period and in Southern Europe after the Second World War. In fact, in Belgium this form of migration is numerically more important, which partly explains why Belgium also shares some statistical traditions with the Central European countries. On the other hand, a large majority of the immigrants in Portugal originate from former Portuguese colonies. As a consequence, some traits of the Portuguese statistics bear close resemblances to those in the post-colonial countries. Notwithstanding these overlaps, the four groups of countries described above share some basic characteristics in conceptualising and measuring international migration, which we will further discuss in the concluding chapter of this volume.