National policy recommendations on the enhancement of migration data in Austria

based on findings of the SEEMIG stakeholder events

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Jointly for our common future

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1. INTRODUCTION

After being a country of emigration for a number of decades, Austria gradually developed into a country of immigration in the period after the *Second World War*. While part of the population growth since the 1950s resulted from birth balance, the major part can be ascribed to international migration: in total, the population of Austria increased by approximately 904,000 persons as a result of immigration from 1961 to 2011. As a result, on 1 January 2013, a share of 18 per cent of the population (1,518,234) was of foreign origin, i.e. they had a foreign nationality or had been born abroad. As a mature immigration country, Austria has been relying on foreign labour to fill shortages for several decades and projections suggest that this will continue. Following the results of the current national population projections of *Statistik Austria*,[1] the population of Austria will increase in the future faster than predicted. This is especially a consequence of the high attractiveness of Austria as destination for immigration, which is expected to remain in the future. As such, the population grew during the year 2013 through migration gains by 56,000 persons. With a continued development, Austria will hold in the yearly average of 2025 for the first time more than 9 million inhabitants.

As immigration represents a main component of the demographic development of Austria and will remain an important aspect for the country's population development in the future, underpinning and justifying effective policy measures in the areas of international migration and immigrant policies based on statistical and scientific evidence is vital. In this context, the importance of data on international migration and the requirements regarding their quality and reliability have remarkably increased. For this purpose, the data production system on migration in Austria underwent major changes in the recent past, mainly due to a distinct shift towards register-based data production. As such, increased efforts have been made that migration data in Austria generally adheres to international and European standards. For national purposes, even some more detailed statistical concepts are applied aiming at enhanced mirroring realities on migration, e.g. a three-month minimum duration of stay concept for defining usual resident population or the differentiation between long-term and short-term migration. Hence, particularly in comparison to other countries participating in the SEEMIG project, a broad range of migration data is available in Austria.

Despite the considerable efforts to improve and broaden data collection on migration in Austria in the recent years, several shortcomings remain. Furthermore, new challenges arise from the increased use of administrative data and particularly the introduction of a register based census. SEEMIG experts acknowledged the utmost importance of ensuring the continuing relevance of migration statistics in order to provide evidence for political decision making and underlined that currently and in the future requests for new or improved migration statistics will continue growing. In this context, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity for reaction and adaptation. Based on the future policy areas raised in the previous section, the inputs of the experts and the stakeholders involved in the Austrian SEEMIG activities together with the analyses carried out by the UNIVIE team, the following components of the Austrian data system were seen to be of major importance for further development.

1.1. Introducing SEEMIG

SEEMIG (Managing Migration and its Effects in South East-Europe: Transnational Actions Towards Evidence Based Strategies) (www.seemig.eu) was a transnational cooperation project implemented in the framework of the European Union (EU) programme 'South-East Europe' (http://www.southeast-europe.net) in the years 2012-2014. In order to facilitate evidence-based

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[1] For further information see http://www.statistik.at/web_en/dynamic/statistics/population/079721.

policy-making on the national, regional and local levels, and focusing on data availability and data enhancement, the main objective of the SEEMIG was to better understand and address the longer-term migratory-, human capital- and demographic processes in the South-East European (SEE) area as well as their effects on labour markets and national/regional economies. It also strengthened capacities of local and regional authorities to better collect and utilise statistical data in their planning and sectorial policies, and to introduce evidence-based policy making and implementation.

1.2.   Introducing the policy recommendations

This document recapitulates policy recommendations regarding migration data enhancement in Austria presented in the Austrian SEEMIG National Strategy for enhancing migration data production and utilization.[2] The policy recommendations have been elaborated by the Department of Geography and Regional Research within the project SEEMIG. To assure a participatory approach when elaborating the policy recommendations, a foresight exercise and a master class with the local and national level policy makers and other stakeholders were organised. These discussions served as an important basis for the elaboration of the final text of the strategy and policy recommendations. In the sections that follow, main policy areas related to national data collection and utilization improvements as well as key actions aimed to address these policy areas are indicated.

2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following policy recommendations are based on the SEEMIG *Action Plan to improve and enhance the migratory data production system and data sources in Austria* and the Austrian *SEEMIG National Strategy for enhancing migration data production and utilization*.[3] The recommendations are grouped by policy areas which they relate to: 1) continued integration and enhancement of administrative data systems, 2) further enhancement of data collection and indicators, 3) increase in longitudinal data collection, 4) increased awareness and inter-institutional coordination and 5) increased regional and transnational cooperation.

2.1. Policy Area 1 - Continued integration and enhancement of administrative data systems

While important steps have been undertaken in the recent past in this area in line with EU recommendations, it is recommended that the **integration and enhancement of administrative data systems should be continued** in the future, as this will allow the statistical system to provide data quickly and timely enough to feed into relevant policy questions. For instance, it is suggested that the population register and the unemployment register should be combined. In order to allow for such integration, it is also necessary that **definitions between different registers are further harmonised**, such as the definition of 'migration'.

To counteract the risks that variables that were formerly available in the traditional census are no longer collected via the register-based census, it is proposed that the population register should be enhanced through the **introduction of new variables,** such as the 'position in the household' and the 'relationship with others' in the same dwelling. Potential risks in this regard include data protection legislation, which might hinder initiatives in this field as well as a lack of funding.

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[2] For further information see http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs.

[3] For further information see http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs.

2.2. Policy Area 2 - Further enhancement of data collection and indicators

Beyond broadening information in administrative registers, it is important that accompanying sample surveys are carried out that collect information that is not available from the census itself. In the short term, these steps will help to improve the coverage of migration data in administrative registers, while in the long-term, a better understanding of the dynamics of migrant integration and immigrant policies will be achieved.

Furthermore indicators on migration and integration need to be broadened. 'Citizenship' and 'country of birth' are the central and predominantly collected characteristics for tracing migratory patterns and developments. While **'citizenship'** is included in most data sources as described above, the second is still only given fragmentarily. It would be desirable to continuously collect data on **'country of birth'** in order to enhance the consistency and comparability among the different datasets and to identify the 'population of foreign origin' by combining both characteristics. As a next step, it would constitute a major enrichment to also include the variable **'country of birth of parents'**, as has been done for the LFS since 2008. This would allow for more multi-facetted analyses of migratory patterns and processes by differentiating 'migration background' along the first generation and second generation, even if statistical analyses along those aspects can also be seen in an ambivalent light (*Do foreign origins necessarily mean social exclusion and disadvantages or may social background, agency, material and immaterial resources be more decisive?*). Apart from 'citizenship' and 'country of birth', it is recommended that the variable **'country of education'** is included in a broader range of data sources.

A further important indicator identified through the SEEMIG project was **'qualifications gained abroad'**. The monitoring of this indicator would be pertinent in order to allow for an overall assessment of the human capital balance of migration inflows and outflows, including brain loss. While in the future, the qualifications of migrants who are registered as unemployed at the *Labour Market Service* will be captured in more detail according to one common definition, it is important to collect this indicator beyond the group of formerly unemployed migrants. Beyond this, it was seen as desirable by the experts that this indicator also be recorded in the *Central Register of Residents* via the collection of information on educational attainment at the time of registration at municipal offices upon settlement.

Other important indicators include the variable **'colloquial language'**. While this indicator was included in the *Population Census* until 2001, respective data is currently being gathered through registration at schools and kindergarten. Based on the assessments of teachers/directors via the interrogation of the individual child, the quality of the data collected in this way was disputed by the SEEMIG stakeholders. The absence of commonly binding definitions is a further challenge. For instance, a clear distinction of 'colloquial language' and 'family language' is frequently not given and should be overcome. It is therefore proposed that discussions be continued between relevant institutions on how to more accurately gather data about 'colloquial language'.

2.3. Policy Area 3 - Increase in longitudinal data collection

SEEMIG as well as earlier research projects have criticised the limited availability of longitudinal data, which could only be responded to by setting up a longitudinal database on the basis of existing registers, which would use the population register as the core reference register or by introducing a panel survey. As the scope of information in administrative registers is inherently limited and surveys make it possible to generate information that is not easily available from register, it is suggested that both options should be pursued in combination. Two thematic areas of concern are proposed: (1) a **panel survey on newly arrived migrants and asylum-seekers** to capture the dynamics of their integration (into the labour market, language, political participation) in the first few years after their

arrival, and (2) the **extension of register-data to measure inter-generational mobility** of the first and second generation of immigrants.

2.4. Policy Area 4 - Increased awareness and inter-institutional coordination

Following the Work programme of the Austrian Federal Government for the period 2013 – 2018, a *Holistic Strategy on Migration* will be developed during the next two years. It is recommended that this strategy should comprise the proposal of the establishment of a **permanent Sub-Committee on Migration Statistics** to coordinate the constant supervision of the diverse administrative and non-administrative registers, statistical surveys and other datasets in the area of migration and migrant integration. The committee should be composed of all relevant administrations in the field of migration data collection and representatives of the federal provinces as well as representatives from the local level. The committee would work (1) according to on a **holistic strategy on migration and integration statistics** which itself is based on the *Holistic Strategy on Migration*, and (2) on a commonly defined work plan to coordinate the statistical data requirements and the development steps of the integrated data system. The activities of this committee should correspond with global actions of international organisations such as the UN, the OECD, Eurostat and the *World Bank*. The committee would help to establish a consolidated and proper exchange mechanism among all actors, statistics providers and statistic users, as well as to counterbalance partial interests of the various administrative organisations and further raise awareness on the importance of statistics in the area of migration.

2.5. Policy Area 5 - Increased regional and transnational cooperation

Transnational cooperation and the management of implications of demographic change for the growth and cohesion in the South-East European or Danube region, a region which has been highly interlinked through migratory processes in the past and is expected to remain interlinked in the future, are important. To assure evidence-based transnational policymaking, easily accessible, up-to-date and comparable transnational datasets on migration, the labour market and human capital are essential.

A **transnational monitoring committee** composed of a multi-disciplinary group of experts from all countries in the region representing research institutes and statistical offices, which regularly meets, continuously observes migration processes and provides a transnational framework for better cooperation in the region could improve further evidence on migration and related processes in the region. Such a monitoring committee could be the first step towards better and coordinated management of international migration within the region.

Furthermore, while some international institutions, including *Eurostat*, the *OECD* and the *World Bank*, have made significant progress in providing and enhancing transnational datasets in the area, as regards specifically national and regional level analyses in the SEE region, a **regional database** that brings together and integrates datasets is vital for policymakers. The SEEMIG Transnational Database, as a pilot activity, offers an important source of information on data regarding the recent past since 2001. Fed by national data from participating countries, it creates an opportunity for transnational, national and local policymakers to analyse in-depth migration processes in the region as well as their effects on the labour market and human capital. Its maintenance beyond the project life span is considered to be of significant national and transnational interest for the South-East European region. One of the risks associated with maintaining this transnational database is the lack of interest from the national level institutions in maintaining transnational cooperation. However, taking an active role in looking for further funding could overcome such a risk. For this purpose, it is proposed to better coordinate transnational actions via a memorandum on SEE level cooperation.