National policy recommendations on the enhancement of migration data for Hungary

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2014

Jointly for our common future

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Suggested citation: Hungarian Central Statistical Office – Hungarian Demographic Research Institute – Municipality of Pécs (2014): National Policy recommendations for the enhancement of migration data for Hungary. Developed within the project 'SEEMIG Managing Migration and Its Effects – Transnational Actions Towards Evidence Based Strategies'.
http://www.seemig.eu/downloads/outputs/SEEMIGPolicyRecommendationsHungary.pdf

BACKGROUND

Due to the competition in the world economy and current demographic processes, the role of international migration as a source of labour force and human capital is increasing. More and more regions and people become involved in the global systems of migration. Thus it is of crucial importance for every national government and system of governance to get a relatively precise and reliable picture (despite the methodological difficulties of measuring migration) on how their country and groups of inhabitants integrate into global networks, and how negative consequences thereof could be reduced, and positive consequences strengthened. These questions, together with a lack of reliable data, add up as an urgent issue which needs actions to be taken – otherwise our country cannot proceed neither with policymaking on human capital, labour market and population, nor with building national level strategies. There is a real danger that later on we cannot cope with those relations of dependency (also highlighted by the SEEMIG project) that have evolved within the region and in Europe, and which are already causing significant social tensions both on the migrant-sending and on the migrant-receiving side.

THE SEEMIG PROJECT

SEEMIG (www.seemig.eu) is a strategic project of the European Union (EU) South East Europe Programme (http://www.southeast-europe.net) which has been realized with the co-financing of the European Union and Hungary. The SEEMIG project – in which 18 partner institutions from 8 countries have participated – has observed the longer-term processes of migration, human resources and demography in South Eastern Europe from the point of view of labour markets and national and regional economies. The project has been giving a broad support to the public sector in conceiving and elaborating policies and strategies which are based on high-quality databases and empirical foundations. The Lead Partner of the project has been the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

The Hungarian partners of the project have performed a long term historical analysis, monitored and reviewed the international, national and local data systems which are generating the necessary data for the statistics on migration, labour market and human capital. They have also carried out a survey for measuring outmigration, set up local/national and comparative transnational databanks. Following the expert assessment of the data systems, the Hungarian partners of the project - the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the Demographic Research Institute and the Municipality of Pécs – together with external experts, prepared an Action Plan of concrete steps and then a national strategy which serve as the direct basis for set of recommendations for reforming the above mentioned data systems.

For a complete list of downloadable SEEMIG outputs and for further information see http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below contain a complex set of goals which reveals the opportunities for migration data collection, data use and strategy building on a local and on a national level. The SEEMIG expert group believes that the development of statistical systems on migration (and related demographic, human capital and labour mobility) data can happen only as an outcome of a coordinated set of actions on different levels. Without this complex set of actions, migration statistics will remain highly deficient and it will not provide a satisfactory base of evidence for decision makers. It is also important to stress that national recommendations cannot be separated from transnational activities and efforts to observe various forms of international migration

Based on the evaluation of the current situation, listed in the previous section, the SEEMIG expert group, together with the stakeholders involved in its work, found the following suggestions and policy recommendations to be followed in order to improve the Hungarian data system on migration:

1. **A permanent governmental committee** should be set up, containing various relevant branches of public administration, experts and civic groups. It should coordinate the constant supervision of the diverse administrative and non-administrative registers, statistical surveys and other, migration-related datasets. The committee can also publish a basic national level analysis of migration and social/economic development, based on longer-term processes. The committee would work according to on a regularly updated work plan which coordinates the statistical data requirements and the development steps of the integrated data system. The activities of this governmental committee, however complex and diversified they might be, can only be successful if they fit and build into Hungary's international relations. In other words, they must observe the direction of global actions of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Eurostat and the World Bank, which are increasing their efforts in order to create and develop better global data systems and methods of estimation. The better use of these data systems and their incorporation into Hungarian data systems is our country's basic interest.

   This strategic goal is the most essential one as without this there is no hope to solve the integration of the data system, to carry out the development of large scale surveys, to finance the development of national and transnational databanks. The major risk here is not being able to gain major and affirmative political will to counterbalance partial interests of the various administrative organizations. The approach of the United Nations, which stresses the developmental perspective with regard to migration, is a great international support and Hungary has been active in these UN activities. In the short run this solves some of the key issues of coordination, the databank will guide the review of the data system and the publication will inform the public and the academia why these reform steps are necessary. This will lead better based decision making, the negative consequences of intensifying migratory processes can be partially counterbalanced and the positive ones can be further utilized.

2. **Integration of the administrative data systems** will allow the statistical system to provide data quickly enough for feeding into relevant policy questions. The introduction of a unique statistical identifier (PIN) is especially urgent, as it would – under a technical framework which ensures data protection – connect data from different registers. In order to achieve this, the public administration system should be prepared for introducing and using such a complex system. At the European level, steps need to be taken in order to systematically follow emigration through deregistration from the data systems.

   In the short run integrating the administrative data systems will provide a more complete picture of the composition of migrant groups and will show the links to demographic and social characteristics. In the long run it would be possible to follow complete migration careers and to provide decision makers with a quick and reliable picture about the social, demographic and human capital composition of immigrant and potential emigrant groups, which is not possible now. This process is full of risks and it is important to proceed following comparable existing international examples. The governmental committee described in point 1 should have the political mandate to coordinate the process of integrating the administrative data systems. At the European level Eurostat fully supports the integration of the data systems. The issue related to data protection can be solved via the use of a

statistical PIN. This is a long process and it should be done step by step in parallel to the other reforms.

Very importantly, the technical part of the integration of the data systems should run parallel with two other developmental actions. First, public administration should be trained and prepared for using these systems appropriately. Second, the harmonization of concepts and definitions is necessary on the European level via introducing harmonized address registration which could follow migration regardless of legal statuses and entitlements.

3. **The development of different surveys (Labour Force Survey other surveys)** and census in terms of enhancing the sample size and resolving language problems is an indispensable step to overcome the existing problems of data production. It is necessary to design and implement innovative modules, partly developed already by the SEEMIG project, because without such surveys the composition of migrant groups, their migration strategies and the attitudes of the local population cannot be revealed. The SEEMIG team suggests that the measuring of emigrant composition should be based on the Labour Force Survey, while the volume of emigration should be measured by an on-the-spot survey based on the address registry, and the data stemming from these two sources should be linked based on a plausible methodology, and analysed together later on.

This is a strategic goal which can be flexibly planned and may lead to results step by step. Some of the mechanic parts can be solved in the short run, while others need longer preparation. Very importantly, such surveys can be used and should be used before the integration of the data system is completed, while afterwards the integration might solve some of the fundamental issues. This goal contains a huge financial and sustainability risk, which can only be counterbalanced if additional funds are provided, or with the active involvement of the Hungarian government.

4. **The development of a transnational databank** is crucial to set an example for national and local migration and development databanks. Having a transnational database helps to avoid the pitfall to look at only national processes concerning transnational phenomena. It provides better understanding of long term processes in a transnational framework and it allows formulating transnational policies and transnational cooperation programs most importantly among relevant statistical offices.

The transnational database has the short term effect of helping research and policy making in gaining transnational character. In the longer run Hungary can gain a leading role in developing some of the regional policies regarding the development of migration statistics.

One of the risks associated to developing a 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.

Besides databases on the transnational level, initiatives to set up local databases should also be supported, providing technical assistance and sufficient funds.

5. **The further development of estimates is** another way of gaining better information on migration, demographic and labour market processes. The Hungarian SEEMIG expert team and the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, together with its longer term partners, can take a leading role to implement this goal. This is a low budget solution to solve some of the

problems related to migration statistics, which can provide results even in the shorter run. Therefore this goal can be pursued in parallel to other strategic goals.

The main risk is that estimates are hardly accepted by national statistical offices. Still, as the major global actors like United Nations, World Bank and OECD are all promoting this process, it is time to start changing perspectives even within the statistical offices and start implementing this strategic goal also at the national level.

It has to be mentioned that a regular, bilateral exchange of information is necessary with the Statistical Offices of the main migration partner countries. In the case of emigration, the data on migrants with Hungarian citizenship, address registration and/or place of birth can be the base, or at least an important contribution to the estimates of the volume of emigration. In order to achieve this, Hungarian SEEMIG partners suggest that a transnational memorandum should be signed on facilitating data exchange and creating a joint database.