National policy recommendations on the enhancement of migration data for Slovenia

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Jointly for our common future

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1. INTRODUCTION

Slovenia is a country of immigration, but current key problems and challenges related to the country's migration dynamics include emigration of the highly skilled and increased daily cross-border migration of labour (henceforth: cross-border commuting) between Slovenia and its neighbouring countries (Italy and Austria in particular) due to the unfavourable economic situation. Pronounced emigration of Slovene nationals has been observed since 2008. The immediate effect of emigration is currently not significant and emigration is somewhat desirable, especially in the case of high number of young graduates who cannot find suitable employment, but the loss of human capital is expected to have negative consequences on the future country development and economic growth in the long run. While reliable statistical data on immigration is readily available, emigration and cross-border commuting statistics remain deficient. A satisfactory base of evidence on these processes for the purpose of policymaking is therefore required by the state and in particular the border municipalities, which are currently basing planning of infrastructure and public services on mere speculations about their population dynamics.

1.1. Introducing SEEMIG

SEEMIG (Managing Migration and its Effects in South East-Europe: Transnational Actions Towards Evidence Based Strategies) (www.seemig.eu) is 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 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 Slovenia presented in the Slovenian SEEMIG National Strategy for enhancing migration data production and utilization.[1] The policy recommendations have been elaborated by the Institute for Economic Research and the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts. To assure a participatory approach when elaborating the policy recommendations, a foresight exercise and a focus group 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 tex of the strategy and policy recommendations.

In the following section the main policy areas related to national data collection and utilization improvements, as well as key actions aimed to address these policy areas and the role of different stakeholders involved in this process, are indicated. Each action is justified and its short-term and long-term outcomes/impact clarified. Challenges (potential risks) related to the implementation of these actions have been foreseen and solutions to overcome those risks suggested.

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

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 Slovenia* and the Slovenian *SEEMIG National Strategy for enhancing migration data production and utilization*.[2] The recommendations are grouped by policy areas which they relate to: 1) the improvement of data and knowledge on emigrants, and 2) the increase in transnational cooperation concerning data on migration. Key issues/challenges to be handled by recommended activities in policy area 1 are: the non-registration of emigration from Slovenia, lack of reliable and in-depth knowledge on emigrants and their reasons for emigration, and lack of reliable and in-depth knowledge on possible emigration and possible reasons for it. In policy area 2, the key identified issues/challenges include a lack of comprehensive data on cross-border commuting and insufficient availability of comparable migration data in the SEE region.

2.1 Improvement of data and knowledge on emigrants

Data on migration flows from Slovenia do not include unregistered emigration of Slovenian citizens and foreigners with permanent residence in Slovenia (mostly labour migrants) to abroad. Consequently, the data on the emigrant stock is not complete and the number of foreigners in Slovenia is over-estimated. A lack of in-depth knowledge on the numbers and situation of emigrated Slovenian citizens prevents any proper policy making aimed at re-attracting these emigrants and designing of effective measures that would result in a return migration. In order to design appropriate activities/measures that may reduce the reasons for emigration (of labour, in particular) policy makers need to get insight into the situation of persons who intend/plan to emigrate and their reasons for leaving the country.

1. *Improvement of data on the emigrant stock*

    In order to improve migration flows statistics, deregistration has to be stimulated, and emigrated but non-deregistered Slovenian citizens and foreigners have to be identified. Some possible solutions for preventing non-registration of emigration are: lowering of property tax and/or utility charges for non-residents; awareness-rising initiatives regarding deregistration; detection of persons to whom official mail could not be delivered; checking of persons who receive Slovenian pensions or other social benefits in another countries, or those residents who are not using health and educational services in Slovenia, but would be expected to do so; and, finally, deleting of persons from the Central Population Register at a certain age threshold. This means that intervention is needed at both the national and local levels, with stakeholders including the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Finance, local authorities, Postal Service of Slovenia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, Institute of Pension and Disability Insurance of Slovenia, and Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. The proposed activities would require some initial and continuous investment/costs, which is not expected to be a major problem. Both short-term and long-term outcomes would be evident in the improvement in the Central Population Register, a more realistic estimate of the stock of emigrants, savings in social transfers but somewhat less income and property tax collected, and better matching of international migration data. The potential risk associated with these recommendations may result from national and local authorities not being sufficiently interested in the adoption of relevant regulations. Such a situation may be overcome by informing stakeholders (policy makers in particular) about the importance of realistic statistical data on the population.

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2. *Increase in in-depth knowledge on the emigrated Slovenian citizens and their reasons for emigration*

A survey on the characteristics of emigrated Slovenian citizens and their reasons for emigration is needed. It could cover as many emigrants as possible or focus on specific groups, for example, former registered unemployed persons or former EURES job-seekers. Such a survey could be conducted either by the Employment Service of the Republic of Slovenia (ESRS), or a research institute or other organisations with adequate references to which the ESRS data would be made available. A follow-up survey on the emigration of researchers (brain drain), conducted by the Institute for Economic Research in 2010, would be also useful.

Based on the new knowledge, actions and measures could be initiated in the short term that could result in return migration (particularly labour migrants whose expertise and skills are needed in Slovenia). Some potential/planned labour emigration might be prevented, too. In the long term, appropriate activities and measures may be expected to result in a substantial return migration as well as prevention of a considerable proportion of potential labour emigration. A possible lack of the Government's sufficient interest has been identified as a potential risk, which indicates that research is needed that would prove the benefits of a survey on emigrants and their reasons for emigration.

3. *Increase in in-depth knowledge on the reasons for possible emigration*

Research (preferably a focused one) is needed to identify people's intentions/plans to emigrate from Slovenia. One option is to implement a specific Labour Force Survey (LFS) module on emigration. Another option is to add questions to the LFS. Possible additional question could be: "Have you ever thought of looking for a job in another country?", "In which country?", "Are you currently looking for a job abroad?", "In which country?", "What is the reason?", etc. The stakeholders would be those involved in the LFS: the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and possibly also of other countries that conduct the LFS, and Eurostat. Questions regarding possible emigration and reasons for it can be alternatively added to the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey, conducted by the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre. It would also be possible to conduct a national survey on the intentions to emigrate, among the economically active population or only among unemployed persons. In this case, the stakeholders could include a research institute or other organisation with adequate references and the Employment Service of Slovenia.

If – based on the new knowledge – appropriate short term and long term actions/measures are adopted, a certain proportion of potential labour emigration might be prevented: some in the short run and considerable in the long run.

A possible decision at the Eurostat level that such LFS module or additional questions in the LFS are not needed represents a risk. Also, the willingness of interviewees to participate in field surveys has been decreasing lately in Slovenia, and the length of the questionnaire influences the willingness to participate heavily, which should be considered as a risk factor associated with a longer LFS questionnaire. In order to prevent a further decline in response rates, research is needed that proves and highlights the benefits resulting from additional/knew knowledge on potential emigration.

2.2 Increase in transnational cooperation concerning data on migration

There is a lack of comprehensive data on cross-border commuting (not only in Slovenia but in most other countriesas well). Slovenia disposes of data on daily cross-border immigration of labour, while daily cross-border emigration of labour from Slovenia is not comprehensively registered. There is only a voluntary non-systematic bilateral exchange of data with the

Employment Services of neighbouring countries. A systematic and methodologically uniform collection of data on cross-border commuting is needed in all EU Member States and their non-EU neighbouring countries.

The international exchange of data on migration, demography and labour market and the maintenance of transnational databases are of a high importance for the local, regional and national planning, policy- and strategy making, and comparative research. The transnational database resulting from the SEEMIG project is an excellent starting point for the construction of long time series of selected indicators. Richer data would enable a more comprehensive evaluation of migratory and demographic processes, as well as of the closely related processes in the domains of human capital and labour market.

1. *Enhanced collection of data on cross-border commuting*

   There is a need of systematic collection and exchange of data on cross-border commuting between countries. This need would be best met through a central database at Eurostat. Relevant regulation should be adopted at the EU level and then extended though bilateral agreements between the EU and individual neighbouring countries. An initiative may come from an Employment Service or Statistical Office of any of the countries involved and interested in such data. A periodical in-depth analysis of these data would be welcome and useful, too. A less satisfactory alternative would be a national or international survey on cross-border commuting. We recommend registers to be set up for that purpose rather than conducting a survey because: 1) it is not realistic to expect that a longitudinal survey would be set up, and 2) a full coverage of the phenomenon can only be achieved through the exchange of relevant information based on the employment registers of neighbouring countries. Along with the number of cross-border commuters, at least the basic demographic data should be reported as well (the municipality of residence, sex, education, profession, etc.).

   Intervention is needed at the national, bilateral and transnational levels. Stakeholders to be involved are the Employment Services of Slovenia, EU Member States and EU neighbouring states, Statistical Offices of the Republic of Slovenia and other EU Member States (and possibly EU neighbouring countries) and Eurostat. Governments and Ministries of Labour of Slovenia, other EU Member States and EU neighbouring states would need to be the political level endorsers. The recommended cooperation and activities would result in reliable and comprehensive data on cross-border commuting from and to EU Member States and from the EU Member States to their non-EU bordering countries. Lack of initiative, non-readiness at the EU level to adopt a relevant regulation, non-readiness of Eurostat to engage and non-readiness of some Employment Services to participate are potential risks. These risks may be overcome by political will and pressure.

2. *Increase in availability of comparable migration data in the SEE region*

   It would be reasonable and useful to maintain the SEEMIG transnational databases beyond the SEEMIG project's lifespan. In Slovenia, this task could be entrusted to a public institute that would cooperate with the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and the Ministry of the Interior.

   In the short term, an improved regional migration data (quality and comparable data) would be available and accessible for policy making and research. The benefits would increase in the long term due to relatively long time series of data. A lack of initiative and non-readiness of countries to participate represent a risk that would be overcome by the EU financing of a consortium that would regularly update the SEEMIG database.