Transnational policy recommendations on the enhancement of migration data in South-East Europe

based on findings of the SEEMIG project

2014

Jointly for our common future

The transnational policy recommendations were developed in the framework of SEEMIG – Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE – Transnational Actions towards Evidence-based Strategies. SEEMIG is a strategic project funded by the European Union's South-East Europe Programme.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The SEEMIG Project

SEEMIG was a Danube[1] project funded by the European Union's *South-East Europe Programme[2]* between the years 2012-2014. The project focussed on longer-term migratory, human capital and demographic processes in South-East Europe as well as their effects on labour markets and national and regional economies. The project empowered public administrations to develop and implement policies and strategies by using enhanced datasets and empirical evidence. By these means, the project provided broad support to the public sector in their conceiving and elaborating of policies and strategies based on high-quality databases and empirical knowledge.
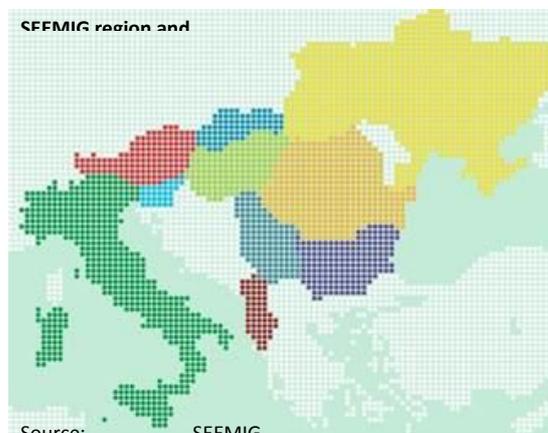
Partnership

SEEMIG was managed by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office and carried out by a wide network of partners − including 18 research institutes, universities, statistical offices and local government bodies from eight countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia), − that was supported by observers from three further countries (Albania, Georgia and Ukraine).

Project outputs

Project activities concentrated on the analysis of socio-economic and demographic trends processes in SEE as well as on the situation of migration data systems; the main project outputs include:

- National Strategies and Policy Recommendations for the enhancement of migration data
- Migration Future Scenarios in SEEMIG countries – Findings of a Foresight Exercise
- Surveying emigration – report on the two stages of the pilot study in Hungary and Serbia
- Analysis of existing migratory data production systems and data sources
- Dynamic historical analysis of migratory, labour market and human capital processes
- Comparative analysis of existing major population projections in SEEMIG countries
- Conceptual framework for modelling longer term migratory, labour market and human capital processes
- Data requirement paper for measuring longer term migratory, labour market and human capital processes
- Net Migration and Historical Development in Southeastern Europe since 1950

All outputs are available at http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs.

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[1] http://www.danube-region.eu/
[2] http://www.southeast-europe.net/en/

1.2 Policy context

In the context of current trends in competition in the world economy and demographic processes, the role of international migration as a source of labour and human capital has been increasing. Under the conditions of centralised fiscal policies, especially in the Eurozone countries, international migration may be expected to increase competition and balance labour costs. Ever more regions and people have become involved in global migration systems, but the modes of integration and related developmental trajectories and consequences vary even within South-East Europe (SEE). It is thus of crucial importance for every system of governance to obtain a relatively precise and reliable picture of how their country and groups of inhabitants integrate into global networks, as well as how negative effects could be reduced and positive consequences strengthened. With international migration being the main driver of population development, there is an increasing need for comprehensive and comparable migration statistics for evidence-based policymaking.

Despite growing (policy) attention given to international migration and attempts to standardise and harmonise migration-related data collection in recent decades, accurate and reliable migration data are still scarce. Inconsistencies in data collection and measurement prevail, especially in the South-East European region.[3] Against this background, the present transnational policy document points to the opportunities for data collection, data use and strategy building in the field of international migration in this region. The transnational policy recommendations have been developed within the *SEEMIG* project *(Managing Migration and its Effects in South-East Europe – Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies)*[4]. The SEEMIG expert group and the stakeholders involved believe that the development of statistical systems focussed on international migration (and the related demographic, human capital and labour mobility data) can be realised only as an outcome of a coordinated set of actions on different levels. Without this complex set of actions, the migration statistics in the region will remain deficient and will not provide a satisfactory base of evidence for decision-makers.

1.3 SEEMIG policy recommendations

The purpose of the SEEMIG transnational policy recommendations regarding migration data is to help decision-makers understand the policy actions that are necessary for reforming the data systems related to international migration in the South-East European region. They are also intended to streamline national sectorial policies and EU/regional programming until 2020. The recommendations target national policymakers and statistical offices in the SEE region (also those not directly involved in SEEMIG), as well as national policymakers of European countries outside the SEE region and EU level policymakers. They might be of further interest to other stakeholders, including practitioners and researchers.

The recommendations have been developed by the Hungarian Statistical Office, the Department of Geography and Regional Research of the University of Vienna and the Local School of Development of the University of Trento in close cooperation with the SEEMIG project partnership. The recommendations are based on SEEMIG results regarding longer-term migratory processes, reviews of migration data systems and pilot emigrant surveys. They also draw from information gathered in consultative participatory stakeholder meetings in all partner countries. Detailed recommendations on migration data development for the national and sub-national levels in the SEEMIG region are available on the project website.

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[3] Detailed research on the availability and comparability of migration data in the SEEMIG countries was performed in the framework of Work Package 4. The country reports and the summary report are available at the SEEMIG website www.seemig.eu.

[4] www.seemig.eu.

1.4 Policy areas

The SEEMIG transnational policy recommendations on migration data relate to four main policy areas that have been identified throughout the project activities:

- ❖ **Policy Area 1: Harmonisation of data collection and exchange,**
- ❖ **Policy Area 2: Enhancement of data collection methodologies,**
- ❖ **Policy Area 3: Increase in transnational partnerships and cooperation,**
- ❖ **Policy Area 4: Improvement of data collection and data use on the local level.**

It is seen as essential that national and EU/regional programming and funding opportunities are directed towards activities in related fields. Specific policy recommendations for the identified policy areas are listed in the following overview.

Policy Area	Policy Recommendations
Policy Area 1: Harmonisation of data collection and exchange	- Harmonisation of definitions and methods in the European Union and relevant international bodies - Continued mainstreaming of migration data - Harmonisation of address registration within the European Union
Policy Area 2: Enhancement of data collection methodologies	- Improvement and integration of administrative data systems - Improvement of data collection on the regional level - Improvement of methods to estimate migration flow and stock data out of global migration flow and stock data and transnational use of big data - Further development of the LFS-battery to collect detailed information about an extended sample of migrants as piloted in the SEEMIG project
Policy Area 3: Increase in transnational partnerships and cooperation	- Establishment of transnational dialogue between local and national governments and relevant stakeholders in migrant sending and receiving areas - Creation of a transnational monitoring committee - Collection and exchange of data (especially on commuting) via Memoranda of Understanding and increased cooperation between National Statistical Offices in the European Union - Improvement of transnational databases and maintenance of the SEEMIG transnational database
Policy Area 4: Improvement of data collection and data use on the local level	- Enhancement of institutional capacity of local public administrations on data management a as well as new forms of multi-institutional cooperation - Launch of local surveys on migrant groups, local communities and vulnerable groups (especially young people) on a transnational level

2. TRANSNATIONAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. Policy Area 1: Harmonisation of data collection and exchange

2.1.1. *Harmonisation of definitions and methods in the European Union and relevant international bodies*

Despite the growing attempts to standardise and harmonise migration-related data collection in recent decades by international bodies, comparable migration data are still scarce. As a consequence of nationally based methodologies, an unsatisfying situation has developed in which countries organise their migration statistics in very different ways, also as concerns concepts and definitions. Consequently, as there is no consensus on the basic concepts of migration, the resulting data are neither comparable across national borders nor over time. In order to exhaustively grasp the full dimension of the transnational phenomenon of international migration, however, definitions and categories in data systems need to be comparable. As national conceptualisations are often long-established and have evolved over the course of time, often in very different contexts, the harmonisation of definitions will take continued efforts by statistical offices (and policymaking bodies as well) through exchange and transnational dialogue.

There is a need to harmonise definitions of migration in the relevant registries of the European Union Member States, most importantly in address registration, and also in surveys conducted in these countries. These definitions should be related to already existing UN/Eurostat definitions. There is also a need to agree on the definition of repeated shorter-term migratory moves in order to cover current changes in the nature of migration. These harmonised definitions should be elaborated in close cooperation with regional and global institutions (such as Eurostat, the United Nations, the International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration) and other major migratory partner countries.

2.1.2. *Continued mainstreaming of migration data*

While international migration used to be mainly seen as an integral part of population statistics and was later taken up by internal affairs statistics, topics like immigrant policies and integration of the migrant population are cross-sectional. Consequently, migration issues are increasingly taken into account in a wider range of public policy areas, including health, education and social policy. In recent years, efforts (also under the coordination of Eurostat) have been made to gather information on migrants across all areas of statistics. While better statistics on the number of immigrants is available, richer information on the socio-economic situation and composition of migrants is still needed, including the level of education, labour force participation and language skills through the means of broader inclusion of the indicator 'country of birth'.

The introduction of the question on 'country of birth' – in addition to 'citizenship' – into registries and large-scale surveys of various types would also allow a better international comparison, prevent the problem of variations in naturalisation processes and clarify the social composition of migrant groups. Most importantly, educational, labour market and other social characteristics of registered migrants could be identified and compared to those of non-migrant groups. This would promote quick analyses aimed at identifying problems related to migration and development.

2.1.3. Harmonisation of address registration within the European Union

Due to legal and administrative disharmonies within the European Union there is a need for steps toward a more unified system of address registration – based on a harmonised definition on migration – to be applied for all foreign citizens (including EU citizens). The key aim of such an initiative would be to disclose where individuals are residing physically for a longer period of time. This would prevent their parallel registration in more than one country. While national governments have the right to introduce, operate and change such registries, EU level recommendations should help them in establishing a unified system that includes the transnational needs of migration statistics.

This would allow comparable mirror statistics on the one hand, and the maintenance of member states' right to require periodical reconfirmation of address without violating the right of free movement on the other. Beyond making the data on flows and stocks of migrants more accurate and providing basic information on the composition of migrant groups, this process would allow clarification of controversies over the actual resident population and related social rights. The key challenge is a lack of such administrative system appropriate address registration n some countries. SEEMIG is convinced that even a gradual move towards such a solution would result in a great improvement in migration statistics.

2.2. Policy Area 2: Enhancement of data collection methodologies

2.2.1. Improvement and integration of administrative data systems

Without integrating the administrative data systems, statistical services will not be able to provide data with appropriate details quickly enough to be incorporated into relevant policymaking. While some countries in the region (Austria and Slovenia) have already introduced it, the introduction of a unique statistical identifier (PIN) in the remaining countries is especially urgent, as it would – under a technical framework that ensures data protection – link data from different registers. In order to achieve this, the public administrations system should be prepared to introduce and use such a complex system. Steps also need to be taken at the European level in order to systematically follow emigration through deregistration from data systems. This would make it possible to undertake less costly and more frequent analyses and, most importantly, it would provide better data on the demographic and social composition of the registered migrant population. Data protection has to be guaranteed on a sufficient level so that individual data are not traceable beyond statistical purposes. The key agents of such changes should be national governments, but EU recommendations should also be prepared based on the experience of countries that have already introduced such changes.

Although the most effective way of linking data is through PIN, the use of a general national PIN system may raise public concerns about data protection. However, a limited version of PIN would be satisfying as a matter of migration statistics that cannot be used beyond statistical purposes. Furthermore, the introduction of an international statistical PIN would allow migrants to be traced across borders, which would improve the quality of migration data.

2.2.2. Improvement of data collection on the regional level

A main characteristic of the SEE region is the existence of large-scale disparities; population growth within the region is concentrated in capitals and large cities as well as in the more Western and economically prosperous countries. However, the majority of regions in the SEEMIG countries have shown population decline in the past decade and demographic prognoses show that this trend will continue. Such regions are mainly concentrated in the Eastern and South-Eastern parts of the

SEEMIG area, but are to be found throughout all SEEMIG countries. Demographic and economic polarisations as well as persisting regional specificities are the main factors that will continue to shape the development of SEEMIG regions, also in the future. For this purpose, differentiated data for the regional level – amongst others and particularly as regards (net) migration trends – are important. The availability of such data on the regional level yet is still scarce. For this reason, there is a great need to enhance the collection of regional-level data.

2.2.3. *Improvement of methods to estimate migration flow and stock data and use of "big data" on the transnational level*

The data on migrant stocks is widely captured in population censuses. Nevertheless, there is a need for flow data, since the stock data is cumulative and thus cannot capture recent trends. New approaches use available stock data for estimating bilateral flow data. For instance, the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital[5] used the UN population stock data to approximate global international migration flows over five-year periods between 1990 and 2010. This new dataset provides a comprehensive overview of global bilateral flows between world regions and countries. However, it proved to be unreliable when looking at specific flows, especially when it comes to smaller numbers – that is, less populous countries, countries with rather small migrant population stocks or smaller flows in general. Furthermore, the Wittgenstein Centre's dataset does not measure events, but rather transitions between two points in time.

Using stock data to derive country-level flow data is still a promising approach, especially for countries without an established population register that captures both population stock and flow data. However, in many countries the collection of data needs to be improved to ensure that the necessary level of accuracy is guaranteed. Countries need to adopt international standards and definitions of international migration, such as those proposed by the United Nations. Another possible approach could be to make some simple census tabulations universal, particularly the tabulation of residents by place of birth and, for the foreign-born, by year of entry. This would facilitate a variety of indirect estimates of trends and patterns of international migration. Other new approaches using "big data" – for instance the data from social media – are still at an early stage of development. It remains to be seen whether the selection bias can be overcome that is currently inherent in datasets derived from Twitter or other social media sources.

Due to the inherent and unavoidable pitfalls of migratory statistical systems, SEEMIG has reviewed relevant estimates based on previous projects and has followed new attempts such as MIMOSA[6] and the Wittgenstein method. The SEEMIG expert team was among the first that actually utilised such estimates – thanks to the organisation of various debates on the value of estimates (including the already described Wittgenstein method) – and considers that estimates are the way to be further developed. SEEMIG estimates have also improved population forecasts based on combining population movement and changes of census stock data leading to estimates based on longer-term trends for formulating more realistic hypotheses on migration.

This work should be further enhanced by academic communities, statistical offices and international bodies. The aim of improving and checking estimates should be incorporated into various research and policy calls of international and national funding agencies that are supporting the understanding and managing of migration. The use of such estimates should be promoted by putting it on the agenda of international organisations of statistical offices in order to enhance comparable data series on various aspects of migratory and related human capital and labour market processes.

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[5] http://www.global-migration.info/
[6] http://www.cefmr.pan.pl/projects/mimosa.html

2.2.4. Emigrant surveys based on SEEMIG pilot methodology

Potentials of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) should be further utilised to improve emigration statistics. The launch of a new, regular (preferably yearly) emigration battery based on the SEEMIG methodology[7] and attached to LFS should be considered and applied in countries with a significant level of emigration. In this battery, in addition to collecting data about (emigrant) members of households living abroad within the target group of LFS, the same set of data should also be gathered on a carefully designed extension to this group. In the SEEMIG pilot study, data collected about migrants who are current members of sample-member households in the LFS (and thus form part of the LFS target group) was extended with the same set of data about former household members and also siblings of household members living abroad at the time of the survey. A sample large enough of for meaningful statistical analysis can thus be achieved even in countries with medium level emigration. A harmonised and streamlined version of the method piloted in the SEEMIG project could serve as a basis for producing reliable estimates on the size of emigration as well as on the composition of the emigrant population in the emigration countries across Europe in a comparable manner.

2.3. Policy Area 3: Increase in transnational partnerships and cooperation

2.3.1. Establishment of transnational dialogue between migrant sending and receiving areas

Migration represents a significant link between sending and receiving communities on the local, national and even regional level. While often solely the interests of receiving communities are regarded, there is an urgent need to enhance dialogues between the relevant policymakers in both communities to make migratory linkages an opportunity instead of a challenge. Sending communities, for instance, could gain insight into the problems that arise when vulnerable migrant groups leave their territory. On the other hand, receiving communities would understand disadvantages that might arise from out-migration in the communities of origin, including asymmetric dependency relations between the communities united by ties of migration.

Such transnational dialogues would be helpful in the specification of migration management policies at the local, national and regional level, and would make it possible to build synergies and cooperation in order to smooth EU-level developmental differences and improve regional, national and local developmental policies. This dialogue could also lead to the better articulation of interests and data problems concerning linkages between migrant-sending and migrant-receiving communities.

2.3.2. Creation of a transnational monitoring committee

In South-East Europe, a region which has been highly interlinked through migratory processes in the past and is expected to remain interlinked in the future, transnational cooperation is important in order to adequately manage the implications of demographic change and to assure growth and cohesion in the area. To assure that evidence-based policies are implemented in this regard, reliable, comparable and up-to-date data are needed. 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 evidence on

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[7] http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs-pilot-report

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.

2.3.3. *Collection and exchange of data (especially on commuting) via Memoranda of Understanding and increased cooperation between National Statistical Offices in the region*

In areas where freedom of movement is guaranteed, such as in the European Union, weekly and monthly mobility – and daily cross-border mobility in particular – is an increasingly widespread phenomenon. To capture these new realities of migration, the systematic collection of data on (daily cross-border) labour mobility is needed in EU Member States as well as their non-EU neighbouring countries. It should be in the interest of all EU Member States that the reporting on cross-border migration is made uniform in terms of methodology applied, in order to have comparable data. Increased partnerships for the exchange of data between statistical offices via Memoranda of understandings are needed. Data should preferably be centralised in a central database hosted by Eurostat.

2.3.4. *Improvement of transnational databases and maintenance of the SEEMIG transnational database*

Easily accessible, up-to-date and comparable transnational datasets on migration, labour market and human capital are essential in order to assure that transnational policymaking is based on evidence. For this reason, international organisations such as the UN, the OECD, Eurostat and the World Bank have increased their efforts in recent years to create new and develop better global data systems and methods of estimation. However, these assembled national data often still lack comparability or do not allow for regional specificities to be incorporated. Thus, continued efforts for the harmonisation of the collection of national data and for building partnerships between statistical offices and international organisations seem essential.

As regards specifically national and regional level analyses in the SEE region, a regional database that brings together and integrates datasets appears crucial for the eased use of policymakers. The SEEMIG Transnational Database, as a pilot activity, offers an important information source 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. For this purpose, SEEMIG proposes better coordinated transnational actions including a memorandum on SEE level cooperation and the above-proposed committee.

2.4. Policy area 4: Improvement of data collection and data use on the local level

2.4.1. *Enhancement of institutional capacity of local public administrations on data management as well as new forms of multi-institutional cooperation*

As legal requirements regarding immigration and residence are mostly regulated on the national level, much policy attention is paid to the international migration on the national level. Related to this, migration and integration statistics are also mainly developed to feed policy needs on the national level. However, implications of migration – particularly those concerning migrant integration and those related to out-migration - are dealt with mainly on the local level. A closer look

also reveals that the migration picture and related challenges, particularly in the SEE area, look very different on the national, regional and local level. While immigration towards the capital and large cities, as well as in the economically prosperous countries, prevails, a majority of municipalities are faced with a shrinking and ageing population and an emigration trend. Local governments need to be able to respond to these specific local situations based on clear and local specific evidence.

However, local public administrations lack fundamental professional capacities in collecting relevant data on development and migration. In this context, further improvement of local level data is of utmost importance for local, regional, national and transnational analyses of developments related to migration, demographic characteristics of the population and human capital. The SEEMIG project has for this purpose created several types of local databases. It is of public interest that databases of this kind are created elsewhere as well, preferably under statistical and expert supervision and coordination provided by partners like those in the SEEMIG project. A further good practice which was identified relates to partnerships between national statistical institutes, research organisations and local administrations. Such composition of partners is recommended in order to overcome some of the capacity gaps in the local public administrations though providing relevant expertise. Such partnerships established at the local level should be promoted by national and EU-level funding and policymaking agencies.

2.4.2. Launch of local surveys on migrant groups, local communities and on vulnerable groups (especially young people) on the transnational level

Migration entails various effects on the local, national and transnational level. While migration destination areas face different types of immigration in terms of form (labour, irregular or asylum) or origin (European/non-European) to which they need to appropriately respond, the challenges of sending areas relate to human capital and the change in their demographic picture. Both sets of challenges need to be tackled in a balanced way. To understand current migration patterns and to pave the way for policy action, both the amount and quality of statistical data at the local level need to be improved, along with cross-sectional analysis methods of integrating migration, labour force and family aspects. This has to be done from a migrant sending and receiving country perspective in order to support their social policies, labour market policies and local development strategies.

For this purpose, surveys on emigration and emigrants are also needed. Subjective indicators of well-being should be integrated into the evidence base in order to better understand societal factors influencing migration along with economic ones. In the sending areas, there is also a need for data on remittances and returnees as the basis for proper analyses of the role of both financial and social remittances on the socio-economic development at the local level. The database for forecasting the potential migration and adequate planning of services of general interest at the local level is needed both in sending and receiving areas. Further topics of interest in receiving areas include discrimination of migrants and irregular migration.

Currently, young people are the most involved in and affected by intensifying migratory flows. During the financial and economic crisis, they proved to be the most vulnerable group that experienced a dramatically different situation regarding access to the labour market and family formation compared to previous generations. However, even for all young groups, the combination of life strategies for migration, family formation, labour market access and education seem to be a huge challenge. This causes societal challenges that local municipalities are not prepared to handle. Local surveys on strategies of the young population concerning migration, family formation and labour market integration therefore appear pertinent.