International Forum
on Migration Statistics
IFMS 2023
24-26 January • Santiago, Chile

Summary and conclusions

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3rd International Forum on Migration Statistics

The third edition of the International Forum on Migration Statistics (IFMS) was held in Santiago, Chile, in January 2023. The event gathered around 640 producers and users of statistics on international migration from 113 countries, who joined the three-day Forum either in person or virtually to discuss ways to improve the collection, analysis and use of data in order to improve understanding of migration patterns and trends worldwide and to guide the formulation and implementation of migration policies. Across its six plenary and 24 parallel sessions, the Forum participants highlighted key challenges and innovative approaches for improving the quality and availability of migration data to better support evidence-based policymaking.

The key themes explored during plenary sessions of the Forum include paths to strengthen migration data for the follow-up of relevant global agreements; data on migrants in vulnerable situations; impact of COVID-19 on data on migrants and migration; new approaches, methodologies, and innovations in migration data; strengthening statistical capacities and financing; and data communication, visualization and their utilization for evidence-based planning.

IFMS 2023 THEMES

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Key themes explored during the Forum

Strengthening migration data for the follow-up and review of global agreements

Strengthening data on migrants in vulnerable situations
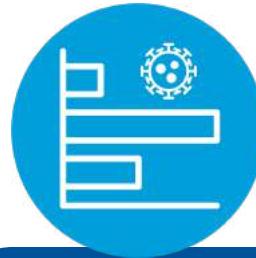
Impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and other shocks on data on migrants and migration

New approaches, methodologies and innovations in migration data

Strengthening statistical capacities and financing

Data communication, visualization and public opinion

Progress has been made in collecting, analysing, and disseminating data on international migration and on migrants' contributions and vulnerabilities, but persistent data gaps remain a challenge.

A poster exhibition included studies that showcased data gaps in international labour migration, illustrated the usefulness of non-traditional data sources for supplementing migration statistics, explored available data on population movements linked to the war in Ukraine, documented the integration of refugees in host countries, and highlighted the increasing inequality between countries when it comes to the mobility of their nationals across borders. In addition, a workshop on "Mining migration trajectories with the software R" focused on the measurement of migration trajectories and on ways to describe and visualize them. Through hands-on exercises, participants from national statistical offices (NSOs) and other government agencies analysed data to understand complex patterns of repeat and circular migration and to uncover the dynamics of migrant stocks and flows across countries and regions over time.

Discussions at the Forum highlighted the role of the Forum in strengthening collaboration and facilitating networking across national and international statistical offices, other government agencies, international organizations, academia, civil society and the private sector to improve the availability and quality of migration statistics. Participants welcomed the **progress made since the first IFMS held in Paris in 2018**.

Forum participants acknowledged that, since the first IFMS in 2018, there has been a broad consensus on the need for data to monitor progress in implementing global agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. While these processes have strengthened initiatives to produce better data on migration and migrants, the third IFMS in 2023 showed that **many gaps remain**. It was noted that a lack of information on the **characteristics and lived experience of migrants**, including for migrants who are women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, irregular migrants, victims of trafficking and indigenous populations, limited the ability to design policies to address migrants' needs and protect their rights.

It was recognized that the **COVID-19 pandemic** posed many challenges for National Statistical Offices (NSOs), particularly by necessitating the postponement of population and housing censuses and gravely impacting other systems of data collection. Nonetheless, the pandemic also provided an opportunity for exploring **new tools and data sources**, improving **data linkages and integration**, strengthening or setting up **partnerships to close data gaps**, and producing **more thoroughly disaggregated data** to inform targeted policies and programmes. In particular, the pandemic also provided an impetus for enhancing information on health status and health vulnerabilities of migrants. The third IFMS portrayed the leading role of NSOs in innovating and exploring new methodologies.

Challenges in gathering data **faced by countries of migration origin** were recognized, in light of global recommendations that emphasize data collection in the countries where migrants reside, rather than in the countries they left. More generally, the Forum identified the need for more and better information on migration journeys.

The adoption of a **human rights approach** was highlighted as essential in the collection, compilation, production, analysis, use, and communication of data on migration and migrants. [1]

Participants at the Forum argued for the centrality of gender data to ensure migration policies are gender sensitive. The significance of understanding demographic characteristics – in particular **age and sex** as key determinants of migration – was stressed in order to design effective operational and policy responses.

Discussions at the Forum highlighted the benefits of using all types of available data to produce international migration statistics, acknowledging their strengths and limitations. For instance, the combination of population census data with administrative data, or register-based censuses, have the potential to support policies that better identify relevant migrant populations.

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[1] See the guidelines developed by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Human Rights Indicators: A Guide to Measurement and Implementation", 2012, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Human_rights_indicators_en.pdf

Moving forward towards more robust, reliable, timely, and internationally comparable data and statistics on migration and migrants

Forum participants highlighted the benefits of integrating various government data sources to improve migration statistics, while emphasizing the challenges in linking data and evaluating and ensuring their quality. It was emphasized that **strong collaboration** across countries and **data sharing** within National Statistical Systems (NSS) is vital to establish integrated migration data systems based on harmonized concepts and processes.

Participants at the Forum agreed that statistical data was a crucial tool for combatting misinformation and misconception about migration and migrants and to highlighting migrants' positive contributions to origin and destination countries. The importance of focusing on **education and inter-active communication** both to inform the public and to guide policymaking was highlighted.

Participants welcomed the active engagement of sub-regional economic bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Africa and the Central American Integration System (SICA, for its acronym in Spanish) in the Americas, in fostering the inclusion of statistics on internally displaced persons and refugees into the wider migration data landscape.

Discussions at the Forum called on NSOs to continue leveraging **traditional data sources** for the production of international migration statistics and ensuring that **upcoming censuses** collect data on migration and migrants, in line with international statistical recommendations. Furthermore, participants acknowledged and welcomed the increased interest of NSOs to move towards **register-based censuses**.

Further **innovation and experimentation** were encouraged, such as the use of big data and other non-traditional data sources to measure migration flows and other indicators. While the previous editions of the Forum had highlighted the potential of big data, the third IFMS drew attention to pilot projects that already show results -for example, new and replicable techniques for estimating and forecasting internal and cross-border mobility and displacement, and estimating the number of deaths among migrants in transit.

Ongoing work of the international community to set **statistical standards** to support the production and harmonization of international migration statistics was welcomed. NSOs and their partners were encouraged to adopt the UN revised conceptual framework and statistical definitions concerning international migration and mobility, as well as the statistical framework on human trafficking and the recommendations for statistics on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and statelessness. In addition, participants welcomed the set of indicators to monitor migration policy areas recently identified by the UN Expert Group on Migration Statistics. The set of indicators was subsequently endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission at its 54th session in March 2023, as a critical resource for monitoring migration national priorities and global commitments and processes.

Forum participants highlighted the importance of integrating the regular production of **SDG indicator 10.7.1 on migrant recruitment costs** as part of official statistics and of disaggregating the indicator by sex, migration corridor, industry and occupation skill level. While the third IFMS echoed concerns from the first two editions regarding the continued lack of disaggregation of certain kinds of basic data, it also showcased successful initiatives to collect data on specific groups, including on refugees and undocumented migrants.

The need for an environment that enables and promotes collaboration around international migration statistics was re-emphasized. This reinforced the message from the second IFMS to go beyond previous calls for capacity building and strengthen networks between data producers and peer-to-peer collaboration. Forum participants underlined the importance of **providing a communication channel** for them to keep in touch, continuing exchange of experiences and peer-to-peer learning between successive editions of the Forum.

At the **national level**, adopting strong **legal frameworks**, formulating **national strategies** for the development of migration data and statistics, and the establishment of working groups on migration data were mentioned as key elements for a sustained improvement in the availability and quality of migration data. **Investment** in data systems and corresponding human resources are required to produce quality migration data that address policy needs in a sustainable manner.

Disseminating data widely across general audiences, opinion leaders, and policy makers, including by using interactive websites and toolkits, was singled out as a powerful tool to counter xenophobic narratives and inform the public about migrants' contributions to countries of origin and destination alike. Mixed modes of data presentation, combining stories about individual migrants with aggregated data on migration patterns and trends, were recommended.

The next International Forum on Migration Statistics will be organized in 2025 by OECD, in collaboration with IOM and DESA.

Key messages about advances in migration statistics

Progress has been made in collecting, analysing, and disseminating data on international migration and on migrants' contributions and vulnerabilities, but persistent data gaps remain a challenge.

1   The pandemic provided an opportunity for **exploring new tools and data sources**, improving **data linkages and integration**, establishing or strengthening partnerships.

2   **Collaboration** across countries and **data sharing** within national statistical systems is recognized as vital to ensure well-integrated data systems based on harmonized concepts and processes.

3   The significance of understanding demographic characteristics - in particular **age and sex** - as key determinants of migration in order to design effective operational and policy responses.

4   A **human rights approach** is highlighted as essential during the collection, compilation, production, dissemination, analysis, use and communication of data on migration and migrants.

5   The benefits of using **all types of available data** to produce international statistics on migration and migrants are highlighted, acknowledging their various strengths and limitations.

Key actions to further improve migration data

Moving forward towards more robust, reliable, timely and internationally comparable data and statistics on migration and migrants

1 Continue leveraging **traditional data sources** for the production of international migration statistics while moving towards **register-based censuses**.

2 Further **innovate and experiment** with non-traditional data sources, including "big data", for measuring migration stocks and flows and other indicators.

3 Adopt **statistical standards** to support the production and harmonization of international migration statistics, in particular the UN revised conceptual framework and its statistical definitions of international migration and mobility.

4 Adopt strong **legal frameworks**, formulate **national strategies** for the development of data and statistics on migration and migrants, and to **invest** in data systems and human resources.

5 **Disseminate data widely** among general audiences, opinion leaders and policy makers to counter xenophobic narratives and inform about migrants' contributions to both origin and destination countries.

Thematic evolution of the IFMS

What is new since the first IFMS in 2018?

✓ The Forum's **brand** is recognized and well-established: its role is to strengthen collaboration for improved data on migration and migrants.

✓ The COVID-19 pandemic was a huge challenge but also an **opportunity to explore** new data tools and solutions that will continue to be useful.

✓ Innovations and use of non-traditional data sources by **government institutions** rather than researchers alone.

✓ More countries are moving towards **administrative registers** as a source for deriving population and migration statistics.

✓ More initiatives to collect relevant data on **specific groups**, including on refugees and undocumented migrants.

✓ New **statistical standards** since IFMS 2020: on international migration; on IDPs and statelessness; on human trafficking.

✓ Greater awareness of a **human rights** approach to data.

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