

Measuring global labour migration: Global estimates of international migrant workers¹

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1 Introduction

In every region of the world, globalization has triggered a rise in the mobility of people searching for a better life. Economic migration accounts for the largest segment of the cross-border movement of people today; and the decent work deficits and uneven labour force supply across States are the major causes of the phenomenon.³

This paper discusses the issues that arise in estimating the population of international migrants, especially those in the labour force, the methods and assumptions behind the recent estimates of the migrant worker population published in the report for the 92nd International Labour Conference in 2004, and the challenges and significance of international labour migration data on the global level. The intention is **not** to invent or propose a new methodology to estimate international labour migration. Rather, it is to document how the estimate was produced using currently available information, to stress the importance of international labour migration statistics, and to encourage continued improvement.

2. Global exercises for collection of international labour migration statistics

Populations representing different aspects of international migration usually consist of the following five statistical indicators: (1) Inflow of foreign workers, (2) Outflow of migrant workers, (3) Return flow of migrant workers, (4) Stock of foreign workers, and (5) Stock of migrant workers abroad.⁴ For the ILO report to the 92nd Session of the International

¹The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the International Labour Office.

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³ International Labour Office: *Toward a fair deal for migrant workers in the global economy*, Report VI, Discussion paper for International Labour Conference 92nd Session, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2004a.

⁴ Hoffmann E. and Laurence S.: *Statistics on International Labour Migration, A Review of Sources and Methodological Issues*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1996.

Labour Conference, an estimate of the stock of foreign workers was prepared in order to illustrate the magnitude of labour migration phenomena at global level.

Producing a global estimate of international migrant worker stock may seem as simple a matter as collecting migrant worker stock data from national sources. However, currently there are no complete global datasets of international migrant worker stock, even though some attempts have been made. This is because there are numerous comparability problems in constructing a global estimate from national data sources on international migrant workers, which use different concepts and methods.

For international migration statistics in general, in 2002, the United Nations Population Division released an international migrant stock dataset for the 228 countries constituting the world in the year 2000⁵. Even though the dataset has not attained perfect harmonization in its comparability, it is the only global dataset on international migration stock available and all possible quality control had been applied to harmonize the characteristics of the data, in order to minimize comparability problems across countries.

For the population of migrants in the labour force, there are still no comprehensive global datasets despite ongoing attempts to create a global database on international migrant worker statistics by several international organizations and research institutes. The ILO has been a part of this effort to collect and promote the adoption of data collection methodologies for its member States. A number of years ago, the ILO published a manual on methodologies for labour migration statistics (see Bilsborrow R.E. et al., 1997) and the ILO's International Migration Programme established the International Labour Migration (ILM) database complementing the efforts of other organizations, such as the United Nations Statistical Division, OECD and EUROSTAT. The International Migration Programme has attempted to expand available statistics on labour migration in its database by contributing information from countries outside of the OECD, but it remains limited in its coverage of member States and presently provides data for some 86 countries on 13 labour migration related indicators.⁶ Despite all efforts, the current database coverage remains limited due to poor response. Nonetheless, the improvement of international labour migration statistics is a continuous process. The ILM database is intended to contribute to the continuing efforts of collection and harmonization of global labour migration statistics. The OECD is also continuing to make efforts to collect various types of migration statistics and labour migration statistics; however, it includes only industrialized member countries.

⁵ United Nations Population Division: *International Migration Report 2002*, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, 2002a.

⁶ International Migration Programme, ILO: *The International Labour Migration Database*, ILO, Geneva, 2004.

3 International migration statistics: problems of measurement

The major difficulty faced in estimating global international migration is comparability of data at multiple levels. Efforts to harmonize statistics at the global level have been made, such as the 1976 UN recommendations on international migration statistics and its revision in 1998; however, there still remain numerous problems to be resolved. Globally, international migration is increasingly becoming a significant phenomenon, yet in many countries, international migrants still comprise a tiny fraction of the total population, and often it is not considered worthwhile to allocate special resources and efforts to collect data needed only to allow for international comparability.⁷

These comparability problems are typically the result of the lack of a consensus on the definition of “migrant workers” and differences in national data collection systems on migrant worker statistics between countries. The definition of migrant worker is inconsistent across nations because qualification to be called a migrant worker depends on the social and historical background of each country’s immigration system. Also, global level international migration statistics are based on the compilation of data from national data collection systems. These suffer from a number of comparability problems, as the national data are drawn from different types of statistical or administrative sources.

3.1 Definition of international migrant workers

The primary comparability problem lies with a very fundamental question -- who are considered to be migrant workers and who are not? There is a lack of international consensus on the definition of international migrants. Attempts have been made to draw the definition from legal instruments such as international conventions. For statistical purposes, however, these have not been very useful, owing to the fact that the issues of immigration and emigration are inherently interrelated to individual nations’ fundamental prerogative: who the State would like to define as migrant workers depends on its political and economical agendas,⁸ and therefore efforts to try to single out one global definition simply have not worked.

The definition of a migrant is therefore often determined not by the legal instruments, but by existing data collection systems. At the same time, countries collect types of data that closely meet their national needs and reflect realities, because national data collection exercises are conducted to serve specific domestic social, political and economic needs and to reflect the background of that nation. Each State’s national data collection system collects different types of data and this inevitably leads to differences in the definitions used in obtaining the data collected by each country.

⁷ OECD, (Working Party on Migration): *Another Look at the International Comparability of Migration Statistics*, Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee, OECD, Paris, 2003a.

⁸ Bilsborrow R.E. et al.: *International Migration Statistics, Guidelines for Improving Data Collection Systems*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 1997.

3.1.1 International migrants -- foreigners or foreign-born?

There are several causes contributing to the comparability problems with international migration statistics, such as issues over how to define usual residence and temporary residence or stay. However, one of the major common causes of the comparability trap lies in the notions of “foreigner” and “foreign-born”. When handling international migration data, countries employ either “foreigner” (non-citizen) or “foreign-born” (place of birth) as the determining factor for persons to be considered migrants. Foreign-born data includes all foreign-born individuals in the population, including both naturalized citizens and non-citizens, whereas foreigner data refers to anyone who is a non-citizen and not of national descent (both foreign-born and native-born foreigners who have not been naturalized).

Among OECD countries, some have traditionally focused on producing data that represent foreigners, such as European countries, Japan and the Republic of Korea. However, some other traditionally immigration countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand have focused on producing data on the “foreign-born”.⁹ Like other social indicators, international migration statistics reflect the social and historical background of each country in its development of migration systems and concepts. The ideas of “Jus Soli” (by birth) and “Jus Sanguinis” (by blood) are reflected in States’ citizenship policies as well as in immigration statistics. Under “Jus Soli”, it is traditionally understood that citizenship is based on place of birth, where as the “Jus Sanguinis” context conceptualizes citizenship as based on descent and heritage. For instance, the US, which has the “Jus Soli” citizenship concept, produces international migration statistics based on counting the number of those “foreign-born”, while Germany, which has the “Jus Sanguinis” citizenship concept, produces international migration statistics using data on citizenship or on the “foreigner” concept.¹⁰

3.1.2 Economic activity and international migrants

The second critical layer of the comparability problem in international migrant worker statistics is the issue of economic activity or who among migrants participate in the labour force. This adds another complexity.

The ILO Migrant Workers Conventions Nos. 97 and 143 describe a “migrant worker” or a “migrant for employment” as, *a person who migrates or who has migrated from one country to another with a view to being employed otherwise than on his own account and includes any person regularly admitted as a migrant for employment / migrant worker*. This broadly defines migrant worker as any migrant who is engaged in, or has the intention to engage in, economic activities as a paid employee. This definition therefore covers much more than the conventional and customary forms of labour migration. During the discussion leading to the adoption of the 1949 instruments, it was indicated

⁹ OECD: *Trends in International Migration 2003*, SOPEMI, OECD, Paris, 2004.

¹⁰ Grieco E.: *Defining “Foreign Born” and “Foreigner” in International Migration Statistics*, Migration Information Source, 2002, <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/print.cfm?ID34>.

that the provisions were intended to cover refugees and displaced persons, to the extent that they were workers employed outside of their home countries.¹¹

Certain groups of economically active foreigners and foreign-born persons are often systematically excluded from migrant worker statistics in many countries, as they do not fit into definitions of who the host nations would like to consider as migrant workers. Such types of migrant workers include economically active international students, dependents of migrant workers who are themselves economically active, and trainees who migrate to participate in special international training programmes in such countries as Germany and Japan. One of the most politically contentious questions in defining migrant workers or migrants for employment is whether or not to include economically active refugees and asylum seekers. As pointed out earlier, these groups are not excluded from ILO Conventions. However, in many national sources, they are considered as neither migrant workers nor as migrants for employment, even though these groups of economically active migrants serve the same functions as migrant workers and engage in economic activities just like migrant workers.

These migrants, who are also economically active, are frequently excluded from national statistics simply because of the national data collection systems, with or without host nations' political intentions. Certain sources and data collection methods used for migrant worker statistics do not cover some migrant worker populations included in the Conventions. Sources for national data collection systems will be dealt with in detail in the next section; however to illustrate the extent of this, a few examples will be presented here.

In the case of migrant workers, statistics drawn from such sources as residence permits, immigration visas, and work permits, do not include migrant workers in irregular status, as they are unlikely to be registered officially with the State. Also, international migrants who enter a country legally, yet do not hold specific visas and permits designated by the State specifically for migration for employment, are also likely to be missing from the statistics. These are groups such as student migrants who are economically active and/or trainees. Also, in addition to migrants in irregular status who are economically active without having valid work permits, there are many legal migrants with valid residence permits who work illegally without valid work permits. (See Chart 1.)

Other groups of migrant workers most likely to be missing from migration statistics are project-tied and seasonal migrant workers. It is the nature of their temporary status that they are likely to be omitted from the statistics if they happen not to be in the host countries during the reference periods of national censuses and surveys. Also, they are often not considered as usual residents and therefore they are not included in the counted population of national censuses and surveys.

¹¹ILO: *Migrant Workers, General survey on the reports on the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised) (No. 97), and Recommendation (Revised) (No.86), 1949, and the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention (No. 143), and Recommendation (No. 151), 1975.* ILO, Geneva, 1999.

3.2 National data sources for international migrant worker stock

The possible data sources for international migrant worker stock are (a) estimates based on administrative sources and (b) statistical sources which are derived from respondent based-surveys.

The first option (a) is normally an accumulation of entry and immigration visas, work permits and registration systems such as population registers. Some countries also base their estimations on tax and social security registers and, as supplements, applications for asylum and grants of refugee status, and arrests of clandestine foreign citizens, as ways to capture migrant worker populations frequently missed from other methods mentioned above.¹²

The weakness of the data derived from administrative sources is that they miss certain sections of the migrant worker population because of errors and biases in the measurements.¹³ For instance, in the case of *immigration visas*, migrant workers with expired visas are not counted in the statistics and they are considered either dead or to have left the country. *Work permits* often undercount or overcount the number of international migrant workers unless the nation's administrative offices are centralized and well organized. Renewals of work permits often result in overcounts. On the other hand, those migrant workers who are exempt from obtaining work permits¹⁴ and those without work permits or with expired work permits are often missing from the data, thus resulting in the undercounting. Also, migrant workers' statistics derived from immigration administrative data such as visa and work permits often miss naturalized migrant workers. *Population registers* can be good tools to obtain international migrant data; however, they too suffer from both overcounts and undercounts. International migrant workers who move within host countries may quite possibly be registered multiple times in different locations, while some international migrant workers may well have left the country without withdrawing their registration. Similarly, many international migrant workers with irregular status are unlikely to voluntarily register with population registers. Finally, many countries do not gather information on employment and economic activity through population registers. In these countries, it is not possible to obtain data on who in the workforce are migrants except through labour force surveys and censuses.¹⁵

The other possible source of international migrant worker stock is statistical instruments such as *population censuses* and *sample surveys*, such as household surveys and labour force surveys. Although they are considered the best possible sources for capturing statistics on international migrant worker stock, they may not cover the total population

¹² Hoffmann E. and Laurence S.: *Statistics on International Labour Migration*, op.cit.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Migrant workers from countries participating in common market systems, such as the EU and CARICOM, are exempt from obtaining work permits to work in other countries within the same system.

¹⁵ Bilborrow R.E. et al: *International Migration Statistics*, op.cit.

or sample population.¹⁶ *Population censuses*, because of their comprehensiveness, are the best source of information on international migrants. However, if the international migrant workers are accurately and appropriately recorded or not depends on how the population is counted or defined. In some countries, short-term and project-tied migrant workers are not considered as residents, therefore not counted in the census. It is also quite possible that many international migrants, especially ones with irregular status, are likely to avoid the census or to misreport their status. Another drawback of the census is that in most countries, it takes place only once every ten years and counts only people who are residents of the country or any person who happens to be in the country on the given reference day. *Sample surveys*, such as household surveys and labour force surveys can also be a good source for migrant worker stock, if appropriately designed and implemented. However, irregular migrant workers tend to refuse to participate in these surveys, fearing detection of their irregular status by State authorities. In host nations with a small size of migrant population, household surveys may well fail to capture accurate information on migrant workers because of the sampling limitation (or within reasonable confidence intervals).¹⁷

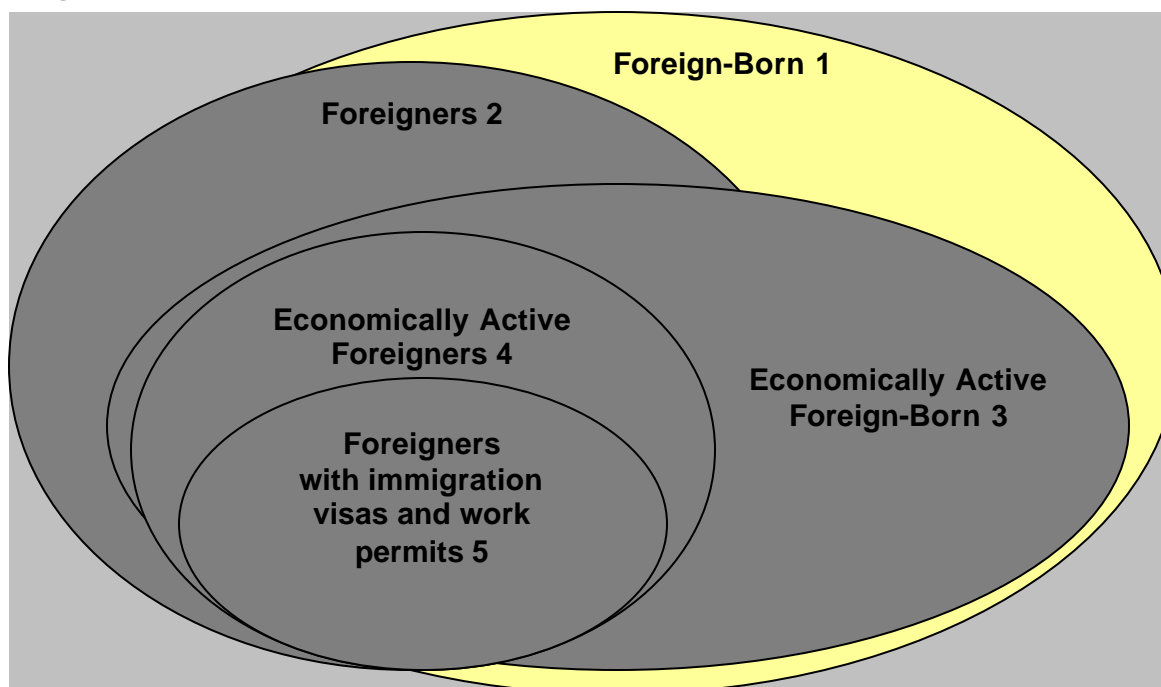
In short, depending on the types of data source used by the country, certain groups of migrant workers fail to be covered by the statistics. Furthermore, sources and methods used to estimate international migrant workers for national data collection exercises generate different definitions and classification systems of migrant workers in the statistics of each country. This, in the end, results in comparability problems in the global data collection of international migrant worker stock statistics.

For such a global estimate of international migrant worker stock, the data from statistical sources such as population census and sample survey are better suited than administrative sources, as statistical sources reflect similar scope and meaning across the nations. In many countries, administrative sources are based on national legislations and immigration systems, where statistical sources are based on universal statistical concepts on economically active foreigners and foreign-born.

¹⁶ Hoffmann E. and Laurence S.: op.cit.

¹⁷ Bilsborrow R.E. et al.: op.cit.

Chart 1: Types of data for international migrant stock and migrant worker stock



Key to Chart 1

	Types of data	Typically included population	Typically excluded population	Common data source
1	Foreign-born	Foreign citizens, Naturalized migrants, Citizens born outside of the country	Foreign citizens who are born in the country	Census, sample survey, population register
2	Foreigners	Foreign citizens, Foreign citizens who are born in the country	Naturalized migrants	Census, sample survey, population register
3	Economically Active Foreign-born	Economically active foreign citizens who are born outside of the country, Economically active naturalized migrants, Economically active citizens who are born outside of the country	Economically active foreign citizens who are born in the country	Census, sample survey
4	Economically Active Foreigners	Economically active foreign citizens, Economically active foreign citizens who are born in the country	Economically active naturalized migrants	Census, sample survey
5	Foreigners with immigration visas and work permits	Economically active foreign citizens with valid immigration visa and work permits, Economically active foreign citizens who are	Economically active foreign citizen without immigration visa and work permit (irregular migrants, non-citizens who are exempt from	Administrative sources, immigration visa and work permit

Types of data	Typically included population	Typically excluded population	Common data source
	born in the country	obtaining visas and permits, students, trainees), Economically active naturalized migrants	

4 Estimating global and regional international labour migration

Given the absence of systems for reliable and cross-country comparable data collection, alternative ways must be used to estimate the global statistics of migrant workers.

There are few global estimates on migrant workers. A previous ILO estimate was prepared in 1996, for the report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (Articles 19, 22, and 35 of the Constitution). (See the table below.)

Table 1 Estimate of the number of non-nationals by major region in 1995, excluding asylum-seekers and refugees (in millions)^{18*}

Region	Economically Active	Dependants	Total
Africa	6-7	12-14	18-21
North America	8	8-10	16-18
Central and South America	3-5	4-7	7-12
South, South-East & East Asia	2-3	3-4	5-7
West Asia (Arab States)	6	2-3	8-9
Europe	11-13	15-17	26-30
Overall totals	36-42	44-55	80-97

*The estimate refers to foreign passport-holders, not to foreign-born persons because the latter include an unknown proportion of naturalized persons who no longer hold the nationality of their country of origin. The figures given here include both regular migrants and migrants whose status may be irregular as regards entry, stay or economic activity.

** The numbers for Western Europe would be about 9 million economically active foreigners along with 13 million dependants.

The estimate prepared in 1996 showed only 36 – 42 million economically active migrants in 1995. However, as noted in the footnote, it was designed to estimate economically active foreigners, not economically active foreign-born workers. In addition, the table does not include figures on economically active refugees.

In making the estimate for 2000, one of the objectives was to include all, or at least most of the migrant workers who are described in ILO Conventions, which, as mentioned above define migrant workers beyond the conventional and customary definition of migration for employment. The other main aim was to achieve the best possible comparability in order to minimize interregional comparability problems.

¹⁸ ILO, 1999: *Migrant Workers*: op.cit.

Table 2 Estimates of International Migrant Workers by Region, 2000¹⁹

Region*	Migrants**		Migrant Workers			
	Including Refugees		Excluding Refugees		Including Refugees	
	Millions	% of total	Millions	% of total	Millions	% of total
Africa	16.3	9	5.4	7	7.1	8
Asia	49.9	29	22.1	27	25.0	29
Europe	56.1	32	27.5	34	28.2	33
Latin America and the Caribbean	5.9	3	2.5	3	2.5	3
North America	40.8	23	20.5	25	20.5	24
Oceania	5.8	3	2.9	4	2.9	3
Total	174.9	100	80.9	100	86.3	100

* Regions as defined by the UN Statistics Division; ** United Nations Population Division estimates of stock of migrants. UNPD 2002: *International Migration 2002*, New York, United Nations.

Source: ILO provisional estimates based on UN estimates of migrant stocks (UNPD, op. cit.) and country-specific economic activity rates (ILO, Bureau of Statistics, 1996. *Economically Active Population*, STAT Working Papers 1996-1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Geneva, ILO), and available country data on economically active foreigners and/or foreign-born persons.

The above estimate prepared in 2004 showed 86.3 million labour migrants (including refugees) in the year 2000.

To obtain the 2000 estimate of international migrant worker stock by region, the following base sources and a number of general rules were followed. Adjustments were then made with the aim of deriving the most appropriate possible estimate to achieve the two aforementioned objectives.

The estimates were derived based on the 2000 dataset of international migrant stock prepared by the United Nations Population Division combined with crude economic activity rates²⁰ of host nations and corresponding rates for foreigners/foreign-born in host nations, and national data on stock of migrant workers. Most of the data provided in this dataset are based on imputations or proxies of the numbers of foreign-born. However, where no other data were available on place of birth, the estimates were based on citizenship.²¹ Of the 228 countries covered, 158 countries (69 per cent of the total) collected information on foreign-born population. 52 countries (23 per cent) collected data based on citizenship and 18 countries (8 per cent) did not have information on either foreign-born or foreigner data.²²

¹⁹ ILO, 2004a: *Towards a fair deal for migrant workers in the global economy*: op.cit.

²⁰ Crude economic activity rates are obtained as the ratios of the total economically active population to the total population of all age groups, including persons who do not belong to the working-age population. Specific economic activity rates (and labour force participation rates) are obtained as the ratios of the economically active population aged 15 years and over to the total population of the corresponding age groups. (ILO: *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, International Labour Office, Geneva.) Economic activity rate includes the self-employed population which is not covered in the ILO Migrant Workers Conventions.

²¹ United Nations Population Division, 2002a: *International Migration Report 2002*: op.cit.

²² United Nations Population Division: *World Migrant Stock: An Attempt to Draw A Global Picture*, Paper prepared in 2002, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, 2002b.

Because the usual data on foreigners are too limited in coverage to capture the actual migrant population as it is defined in international standards, the 2000 ILO estimate included as much foreign-born data as possible.

A general assumption was made that the crude economic activity rate of foreigners would be greater than or at least close to that of nationals and this rate was applied to the migrant stock data. The comparisons between labour force participation of nationals and migrants will be discussed in a later section. Also, actual stock data of migrant workers are used only in the case of countries with data produced from national sources that allow global comparability. The actual stock data of migrant workers from national sources mainly emanate from countries that collect technically reliable economically active foreign-born data.

For countries that are known to have received especially large numbers of foreign workers, such as countries in the Gulf region, economic activity rates of foreigners or foreign-born where available, as well as the estimated regional average, were applied. For some OECD nations that are also known to have high labour force participation of migrant workers, actual migrant worker stock data where available were employed.

To achieve global comparability, the other rule applied for the estimate was to use data on economically active foreign-born for estimating the “international migrant worker stock” whenever available. Thus for countries which have data on economically-active “foreigners” but not on economically-active “foreign-born”, the estimate was derived by applying crude national economic activity rate to the stock of foreign-born except where the reported number of economically active foreigners is greater. In the latter case the larger estimates were used.

4.1 Why use national crude economic activity rates? Comparing the labour force participation of nationals and international migrants

Most non-industrialized countries do not produce data on the economic activity of international migrants.²³ In OECD countries in which data on labour force participation rates of international migrants are available, female migrants generally have significantly lower labour force participation rates than female nationals. For men, labour force participation rates of nationals and migrants are mixed: in some countries, migrants have higher rates, and in other countries, nationals have higher rates. As for both genders combined, international migrants have slightly lower labour force participation rates than nationals for the working age population (15 to 64 years old) in most OECD countries.

²³ The term “economic activity rate” is used interchangeably with “labour force participation rate” in this paper in line with the publication source of the data used in making the estimates.

Table 3 Labour force participation rate of nationals and foreigners by sex in selected OECD countries, 2001-2002 average²⁴

	Men		Women	
	National	Foreigners	National	Foreigners
Austria	78.7	84.6	63.2	63.1
Belgium	72.8	71.2	56.2	42.7
Czech Rep.	78.5	84.1	62.8	61.6
France	75.2	76.1	63.4	48.4
Germany	78.9	77.6	65.2	51.5
Greece	75.8	89.4	49.1	57.8
Hungary	67.5	77.3	52.4	53.1
Ireland	78.8	77.3	56.7	56.4
Luxembourg	73.0	81.8	48.4	59.1
Netherlands	85.3	68.9	68.1	52.1
Spain	78.3	88.3	51.2	63.8
Sweden	80.5	71.0	76.9	60.4
Switzerland	88.8	89.6	74.1	71.2
United Kingdom	82.7	76.4	68.7	56.3
Australia* (2001)	81.7	77.8	67.6	59.3
Canada* (2001)	73.9	68.7	62.3	54.6
United States* (2001)	82.0	86.5	72.2	62.6

15-64 years old with the exception of Canada (15 and over) and the United States (16 to 64 years old).

*National to foreign-born figure

However, the proportion of migrants in the labour force is higher than or equal to their proportion of the total population, except for the Netherlands and Scandinavia.²⁵ This is explained by the fact that migrant populations tend to be over represented in the working age population (15-64 years old)²⁶ (see Chart 2) and as a result, unlike age-specific economic activity rates,²⁷ migrants' crude economic activity rates tend to be equal to or only slightly higher than those of nationals.

²⁴ OECD, 2004: *Trends in International Migration 2003*: op.cit.

²⁵ *ibid.*

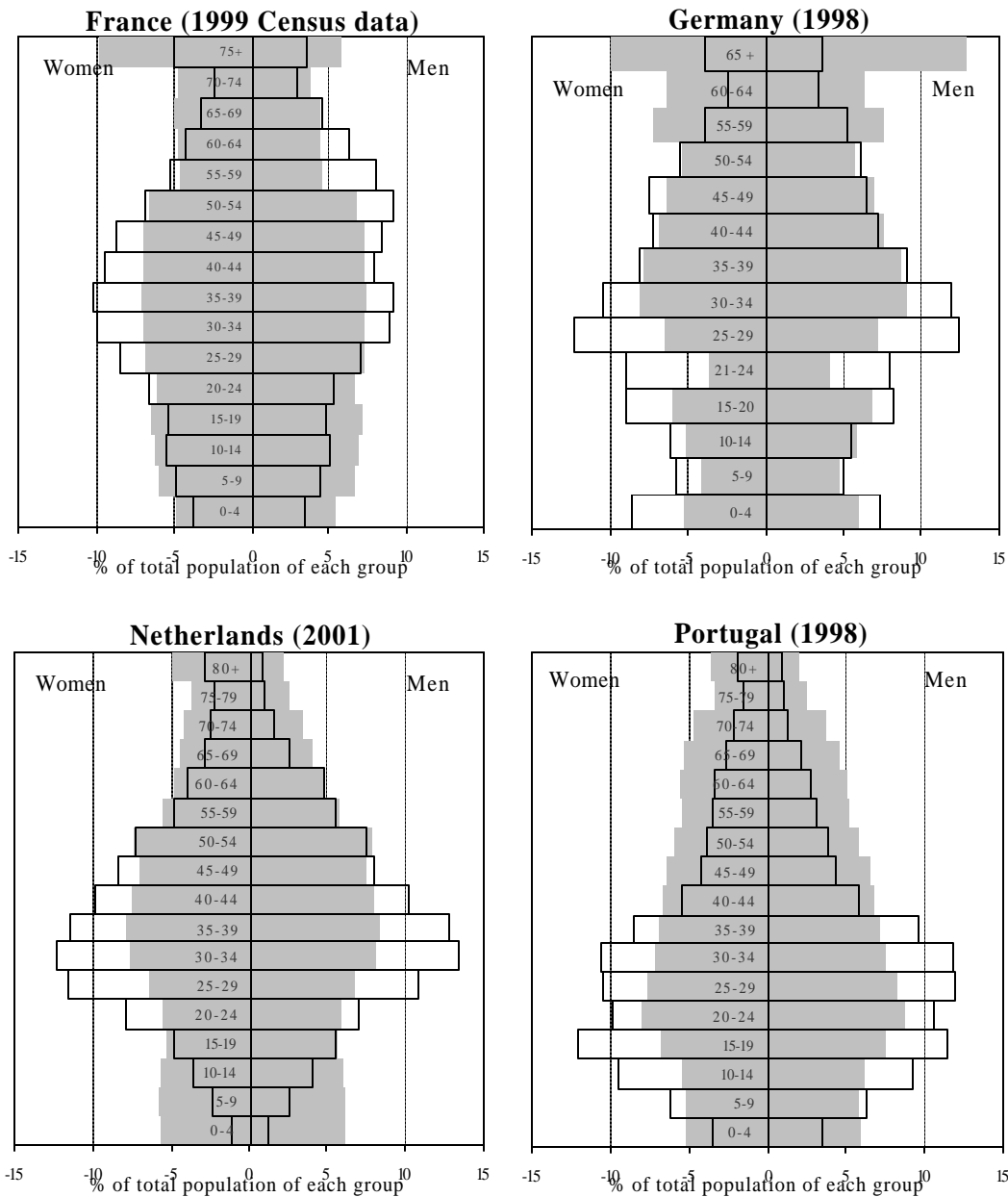
²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Working age population is normally defined as 15-64 years old.

Chart 2 Foreign and national populations by age groups and by sex, latest available year (Percentage of total foreign or national population)²⁸

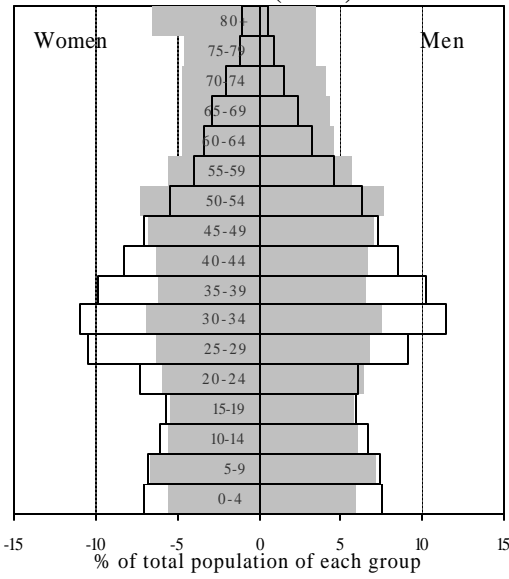
■ Nationals

□ Foreigners

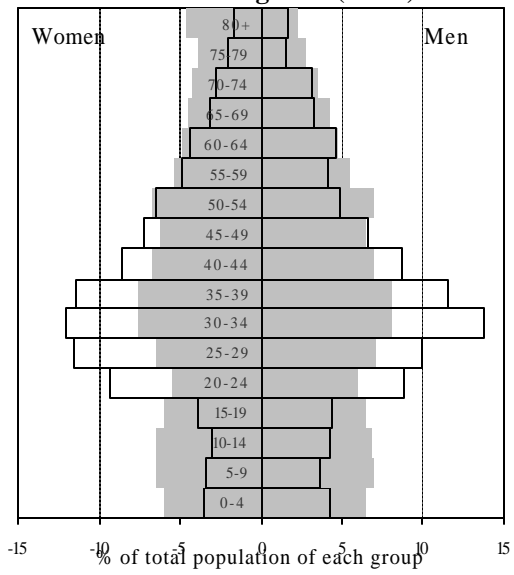


²⁸ OECD: *Trends in International Migration 2002*, SOPEMI, OECD, Paris, 2003b. Copyright OECD, 2003.

Sweden (1998)

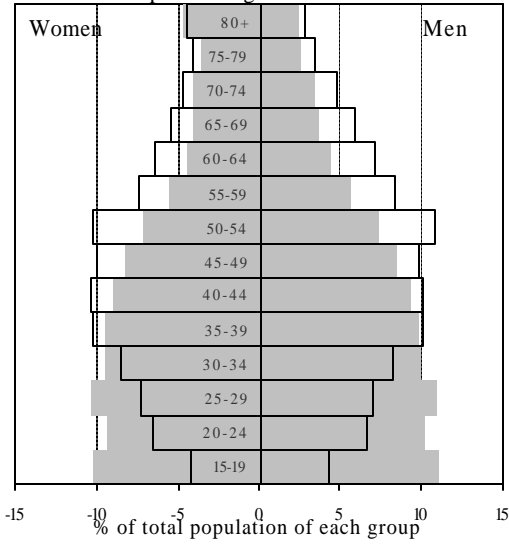


United Kingdom (1999)



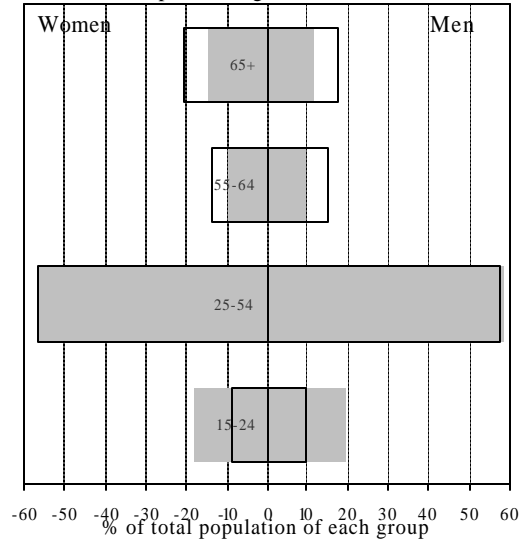
Australia (2000)

Population aged 15 and over

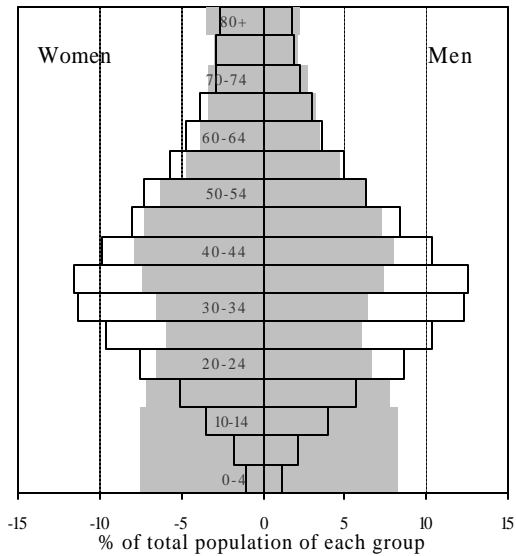


Canada (1996)

Population aged 15 and over



United States (2001)



Note: Foreign born and native populations for Australia, Canada and the United States. Foreigners in the Netherlands are defined as foreign born with one parent at least who was born abroad.

Sources: New Cronos database (Eurostat) for European countries except for France (1999 Census data published by INSEE; Labour force surveys, figures compiled by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and by the US Bureau of the Census; 1996 Census data from Statistics Canada.²⁹

4.2 Comparisons with international migrant worker stock data from national collection systems and crude national economic activity rates applied to UN Population Division international migrant stock data

This section compares two kinds of data: the numbers arrived at by applying the crude national economic activity rate to international migrant stock data collected by the UN Population Division (1) and the other is the international migrant worker data from national data collection systems reported by the OECD (2). It is impossible to assess the quality of the estimate and the method applied to produce the estimate, as there are no other reliable global estimates for international migrant workers. However, this section attempts to show how the figures derived by the method used for the estimate (1) are similar to actual migrant worker stock data collected (2) in the case where both statistics are based on the same matching definition of migrants: foreigner or foreign-born, years when data are derived, and sources of data. Although most OECD countries produce economic activity rates of foreigners or foreign-born, the economic activity rates of nationals are used in this table for the purpose of empirical testing. Also, only OECD countries' data are used in this section because reliable international migrant worker

²⁹ibid.

stock data from national data collection systems are mostly only available in these countries.³⁰

Most of the estimates derived from applying crude national economic activity rates to international migrant stock data collected by the UN Population Division (1) are generally higher than those based on data from national data collection systems (2). This is most likely due to the fact that international migrant stock data collected by the UN Population Division are mostly “foreign-born” data, whereas international migrant worker stock data from national data collection systems are mostly based on “foreigner” data. Also, national data on international migrant worker stock (2) mostly come from administrative sources such as work permits, while international migrant stock data are mostly collected through statistical sources such as censuses and sample surveys. As mentioned earlier, statistical sources are more comprehensive in capturing migrant populations than administrative sources.

There are some exceptions such as Belgium, Italy, Japan, Germany, and Luxembourg. Their national data on international migrants in the work force (2) show larger numbers than those derived by applying crude national economic activity rates to international migrant stock data (1). Italy, Germany, and Luxembourg are known to have large proportions of economic migrants in their labour force.

Japan’s number of working foreigners reported from its national data collection system is much lower than its “foreigner” stock derived by applying to the national economic activity rate. This is because “foreigner” stock data from the UN Population Division are census data which include the permanent resident Korean descendent population, who were born in Japan and have lived there for generations as foreigners. Koreans who are permanent residents in Japan as well as all other foreign permanent residents are excluded from the data presented in (2) which is derived from immigration authority administrative records.

For these special cases, some adjustments were made by utilizing national stock data on international migrant workers data (2) in the published global estimate.

³⁰ OECD country data are used as they are more accessible and collected through a correspondent data collection system which allows better quality controlled data. Also, as described earlier, these OECD countries tend to invest more effort and resources on such data as economic migrant stock.

Table 4 Comparison of (1) Crude national economic activity rates applied to international migrant stocks 2000, and (2) The year 2000 national stock data of international migrant workers (in thousands)

Country	1) Crude National Economic Activity rate times International Migrant Stock *Including Refugees	UNPOP migrant data Note		2) OECD Data	OECD data Note
Australia	2,372 *2,401	Foreign-born	>	2,365	Foreign-born, Labour Force Survey data
Austria	347 *354	Foreigners	>	346	1999 data Foreigners
Belgium	358 *366	Foreigners	<	386	1999 data, Foreigners, Estimates based on salaried workers, unemployed, and self employed workers data
Canada	3,064 *3,133	Foreign-born	>	2,839	1996 data, Foreign-born, Census
Czech Republic	132 *132	Foreigners, Imputed data	>	104	Foreigners, Work Permits data
Denmark	128 *167	Foreign-born	>	97	Foreigners, Population Registers data
Finland	61 *68	Foreign-born	>	37	1999 data, Foreigners
France	2,788 *2,848	Foreign-born	>	1578	Foreigners, Work Permits data (including foreigners exempt from obtaining work permits after two years)
Germany	3,206 *3,657	Foreigners	<	3,456	Foreigners, Micro Census data
Hungary	140 *142	Foreign-born	>	35	Foreigners, Number of valid work permit data
Ireland	130 *132	Foreign-born	>	64	Foreigners, Labour Force Survey data
Italy	726 *729	Foreign-born	<	851	Foreigners, Number of valid work permit data, EU citizens excluded
Japan	870 *872	Foreigners	>	155	Foreigners, Permanent residents and their dependent are excluded
Luxembourg	69 *69	Foreigners	<	153	Foreigners, Number of valid work permits, include cross-border workers

Country	1) Crude National Economic Activity rate <i>times International Migrant Stock</i> *Including Refugees	UNPOP migrant data Note		2) OECD Data	OECD data Note
Netherlands	665 *733	Foreign-born	>	235	1998 data, Foreigners, excludes self-employed, family workers, and unemployed. Cross-border workers included.
Norway	130 *155	Foreign-born	>	111	Foreigners, Population register data, excluding unemployed and self employed.
Portugal	118 *118	Foreign-born	>	100	Foreigners, workers who hold valid residence permits
Republic of Korea	305 *305	Foreign-born	>	123	Foreigners, Registered foreign workers, short-term workers excluded (less than 3 months)
Slovak Republic	17 *18	Imputed	>	4	1999 data, Foreigners, valid work permits
Spain	553 *556	Foreign-born	>	200	1999 data, Foreigners, Number of valid residence permit, including unemployed, EU workers
Sweden	452 *537	Foreign-born	>	222	Foreigners, LFS data
Switzerland	938 *969	Foreign-born	>	717	Foreigners
United Kingdom	1,957 *2,017	Foreign-born	>	1,229	Foreigners, Unemployed not included, LFS
United States of America	17,723 *17,984	Foreign-born	>	17,400	Foreign-born, Foreign-born with American parents are not included.

Source: United Nations Population Division, 2002a: *International Migration Report 2002*, op.cit., ILO, Bureau of Statistics: *Economically Active Population*, STAT Working Papers 1996-1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Geneva, ILO, 1996., and OECD, 2003b: *Trends in International Migration 2002*, op.cit.

5 Towards improvement of international migrant worker statistics

Quantitative information, especially simple and fundamental data such as stock of international migrant workers at the global and regional levels and by economic development group, provides the essential basis not only for policy making, intergovernmental consultations, and technical cooperation activities.

The Committee on Migrant Workers of the 92nd International Labour Conference issued a “Resolution concerning a fair deal for migrant workers in a global economy.” This consists of a plan of action which will be carried out by the ILO and its tripartite constituents and includes *“improving the information and knowledge base on global trends in labour migration, condition of migrant workers, and effective measures to protect their rights”*.³¹

To obtain sound international labour migration data, existing problems with global-level international migration statistics, such as comparability problems, need to be dealt with. In most cases, comparability problems of global-level labour migration statistics are the result of obstacles in logistics and coordination. Labour emigration and immigration are handled by several different governmental ministerial and agency players in most nations, and this is certainly the case for labour migration statistics. Ministries of Labour, Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Immigration agencies, Overseas Employment Management agencies, and the National Statistical offices are normally involved – quite possibly all of them could be involved to some degree or another. This makes it difficult to identify the ministries that are most suited to being responsible for labour migration data.

Generally speaking, the National Statistical Office is responsible for census and household surveys, the Ministry of the Interior and/or Justice is responsible for population registers and resident permits, the Ministry of Labour is responsible for labour force surveys and work permits, the Immigration agency, often established under the Ministry of Labour is responsible for work permits, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for immigration visas.

In countries where strong statistical sources such as national census and sample surveys are available, it is often simply a matter of analyzing and tabulating these sources to obtain pertinent statistics. In countries with weak or inadequate statistical sources, administrative records such as population registers, immigration visas and work permits available at the relevant ministries should be orderly compiled.

³¹ ILO: *International Labour Conference Provisional Report 22, 92nd Session, Geneva 2004*, ILC22-PR22-269-En.doc, ILO, Geneva, 2004b.

Although there are general rules, each country adopts its own system of dealing with migrant worker affairs and data; and these different arrangements across nations often hinder getting appropriate data from the relevant ministry or agency for global data collection exercises. It is most important to be able to identify the best available sources for international comparability in each country, to identify the ministry or ministries ultimately responsible for these sources and to formally designate them as correspondents for future global data collection exercises.

The harmonization efforts to achieve the comparability of data at a global level are arduous. Also, considering the obstacles involved, it is conceivable that these benefits are not of sufficient interest for countries with a small migrant worker stock to devote special efforts - particularly those countries whose resources are already limited. However, many nations, including a number of middle to low income countries, are becoming migrant worker sending, receiving, or transitional countries and solid internationally comparable quantitative information on international labour migration is more critically important than ever before, to allow the making of sound policy decisions.

The development and promotion of general guidelines, and technical assistance for the effective and efficient collection of international labour migration statistics – in terms of both substance and cost - are therefore crucial. Such guidelines and technical assistance may include the establishing of a common clear international definition of international migrant workers for statistical purposes; encouraging the inclusion of questions on labour migration in national censuses and sample surveys, such as household surveys and labour force surveys; the tabulation and analysis of international labour migration data from datasets; and identifying the best ways to use administrative data in countries without strong statistical sources.³² In addition to such efforts as the ILM (International Labour Migration) database, the ILO has provided technical assistance to improve migration statistics in various parts of the world³³, including the training seminar on “Improving Methods of Collecting Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe” held in Warsaw, Poland in 1999.³⁴ Such regional consultations and training workshops, sharing experiences and knowledge among countries and institutions, can be effective tools for improving labour migration statistics at the global level.

Finally, in addition to the above-mentioned efforts should be paid to the following issues. One is the collection of data on the characteristics of international migrant workers, such as nationality, birthplace, age, sex, educational backgrounds, residence, and the sectors in which they work. Descriptive quantitative information allows policy and immigration

³² Procedural and inherent weaknesses of administrative registration can be overcome by developing and using appropriate methodological countermeasures. (E. Hoffmann, 1995, “We must use administrative data for official statistics – but how should we use them?”, in *Statistical Journal of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*, Vol. 12, Number 1, pp. 41-48.)

³³ Wickramasekara P. and Hoffmann E.: *ILO Activities on International Migration Statistics*, Paper prepared in July 2002 for United Nations Population Division Coordination Meeting on International Migration, ILO, Geneva, 2002.

³⁴ ILO: *Improving Methods of Collecting Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe: Report of the Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics, Warsaw, Poland, 30 June – 2 July 1999*, ILO, Geneva, 2000.

administration systems to gain a comprehensive picture of the significance of the international migration phenomenon.

The other concerns migrant workers in irregular status, especially those in the informal sector, as they are among the most vulnerable categories of international migrant workers. There have been many attempts to estimate quantitative information on migrant workers in irregular status, mainly using statistical sources such as national censuses and sample surveys, which cover all migrant workers in the enumerated population, regularization drives, and administrative records. However, they cannot provide reliable estimates of migrant workers in irregular status. Because of their irregular status, migrant workers in irregular status tend to concentrate in informal sectors, a propensity which places them in a particularly vulnerable situation as well as making them a difficult population to identify. There is also believed to be a large population of migrant workers in irregular status in low to middle-income countries, which imposes major constraints on allocating resources to identify quantitative information, not only on regular, but also on irregular migrant workers. Considering these irregular migrant workers' vulnerabilities, special consideration and effort are needed to find ways in which to better obtain and identify both the qualitative and quantitative information necessary to enable sound and effective national and international policy and to provide assistance to administrative actions to protect them.

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