



WORKING GROUP ON THE METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY OF
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Introductory paper for the meeting,
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The Council's proposal.

Early this year I was informed by the Secretary General of the IUSSP, Mr. Massimo Livi Bacci (14 January), that the Council had discussed at length the possible role of the Union in the study of international migration. It was felt that this general area of research was not receiving adequate priority from scholars and research institutions. It was agreed by the Council that more attention could be given to the following two general topics (I quote from Livi Bacci's letter):

"The first concerns the improvement of the techniques for indirect measurement of migration. These techniques are based on the combined use of census data and vital statistics; or on appropriate combinations of life tables, fertility estimates and census data, etc. An inventory of the existing approaches; an evaluation of the possibility of concrete application of these techniques; a discussion of the new ways for improving the methodology, with particular attention to populations with limited and incomplete data, are probably among the topics that require attention."

"The second topic is perhaps more general in nature, concerning new systems of data collection in order to measure the intensity and the characteristics of migratory flows. During the last 50 years or so, the traditional systems of data collection (mainly statistics of arrivals and departures) have practically collapsed owing also to the multiplication of the means of transportation and to the general increase of mobility. New techniques for the collection of the necessary information are therefore needed (border sample surveys; household surveys; special questions at the Census, etc.) in order to evaluate the size and the composition of arriving and departing flows. It would be very interesting to give some attention to the awkward problem of estimating the size of illegal migration."

"The Council has also discussed the steps that the Union might take in order to work in this area. There was some reservation as to the idea of setting up a formal scientific Committee, because it is desirable to explore the feasibility and the implications of new research programs before committing resources to a long term project. It was therefore suggested that an ad hoc working party be constituted with the following assignments:

(i) discuss topics one and two as above defined; explore the existing methodology; discuss the possible improvements; suggest new research areas;

(ii) make proposals as to the further activity by the Union in this field."

I was invited to act as the convenor of the working group. As for the place and time of the first meeting of the group, Helsinki, after the Union's conference, were suggested.

My reaction to the proposal

One of the first points that I made in my reply (14 February) to Livi Bacci was my surprise at being proposed to head a group to study international migration, since I have no previous experience of working on this subject. My only interest in the matter derives from the fact that, in order to assess the demographic situation in most of the countries of Latin America, it is essential to be able to estimate international migratory flows. In the same letter I put forward a work plan, realizing however, that my proposals were more limited than the terms of reference intended by the Council at the time of setting up the Working Group. In the relevant part of the letter, I pointed out:

"We are interested in measuring international migration, in broad terms (by sex and broad age groups, if possible by period of occurrence) because this is necessary, in many underdeveloped countries, to establish levels and trends of demographic variables."

"This has to be done using census information. In a typical underdeveloped country, with no reliable vital statistics, it is illusory to think that registration of annual immigrants or emigrants is feasible in the near future."

"To obtain adequate information on migrants from a census the questions, both on immigration or emigration, should in most cases be put to the total population, not to a sample. (Numbers involved may be too small relative to the population size of the country of destination, but relatively too important to the country of origin. Emigration, though important in a country as a whole, may not exceed a small proportion of the total population)."

"It is the appropriate time to look for a set of census questions to measure migration since, if we act quickly, our findings might be taken into account by countries taking censuses in or after 1980."

"It goes without saying that the census questions must be extremely simple."

"With regard to immigration some action from the Union might be useful: to recommend the basic questions (country of birth, year of arrival) and some appropriate tabulations. The effort, however, would not be experimental. With respect to emigration, instead, the work to be undertaken is mainly exploratory: new questions in the census schedules, new tabulations, new methods to analyse the data. I think that the Working Group should concentrate in the latter, the more challenging subject. It should act quickly and produce some solution to the problem by 1980."

"Three stages can be envisaged:

- in 1978 to think on appropriate census questions to measure emigration and on the analysis the collected information should be put through.
- in 1978-1979 to try to have the selected questions incorporated in pilot censuses or surveys (the idea being to include the said questions in the forms of field operations that are going to be taken anyway, not to conduct special censuses or surveys. The field work should not demand any financial support from the Union),
- in 1980 to analyze the results and draw conclusions."

"The composition of the group, having in mind the work program mentioned above, should include demographers able to suggest new questions and methods to measure emigration and who, in addition, be connected with statistical offices, carrying out surveys or taking pilot censuses in 1978 or 1979."

My letter ended stating that my "proposed work program might be considered too limited by some. It is just an effort to serve underdeveloped countries in solving problems related to measuring emigration."

Further exchange of letters

Effectively, Livi Bacci replied to me (21 March) stating that the Working Group "should not restrict to the discussion of the specific question of analyzing migration from Census data. The Council felt that one of the major and widening gaps in our knowledge of population is that of migration and that part of our activity may be usefully directed to further research in this area. The convening of an ad hoc working party is therefore the first step in this direction and, in a logical sequence, the same should:

- (i) appraise the general problem of the insufficiency of statistics on migration;
- (ii) propose improvements in methodology and new technical approaches;
- (iii) make proposals to the Council for further activity."

"Now what you have in mind concerning new Census questions; their empirical test in field surveys and their introduction in the Censuses of the '80's; the interpretation and the analysis of the results, is probably the best way to approach point (ii). But in order to make recommendations to

the Council for future action, I think that the general problem has to be discussed as well, and alternative methodologies explored."

My answer to that letter (dated 6 April) was that I did not feel qualified to head a group to deal with the general problem of international migration, though I was willing to collaborate with a Working Group, headed by somebody else, in the limited field of looking for a way to estimate international migration through simple census questions.

Later on, I received a letter from the Executive Secretary, Mr. Bruno Remiche (dated 2 May) stating that my original proposal had been approved. As the work program proposed by me would deal with underdeveloped countries, an expert would be invited to join the group to take charge of the developed areas.

In my reply to that letter (12 May) I restated the main objectives of the Working Group: "to explore what questions in a census or survey schedule would permit a country, usually a developing country, to derive estimates on size and composition (by age and sex) of the persons who have emigrated. The group will meet in 1978 to discuss plans, will promote pilot censuses or surveys during 1978 and 1979 to test the questions, will analyze the results of these experiments and will meet again in 1980 to examine the results of the whole exercise. Depending on whether or not the results are successful the findings might be useful to whatever action the Union may take later on in the general field of international migration."

Points to be examined in the meeting

The purpose of the above summary of the correspondence between the Union's officials and myself is to inform the members of the Working Group of the different views concerning the Working Group's objectives. Although my proposed work program has been accepted, it is clear that the Council is expecting from the Working Group more than what I have proposed. A first point to examine carefully in the Helsinki meeting should be how to direct our efforts towards approaching the general objectives the Council has set. The participation in the Working Group of an expert who will be especially concerned with the Council's viewpoint ensures that the matter will be duly examined. We should keep in mind during the meeting that one of the objectives of the Working Group is to make suggestions to the Council regarding future activities of the Union in the field of international migrations.

With reference to the more concrete program of activities of the Working Group in the immediate future I propose to consider how to measure immigration and emigration, successively, on the basis of information collected in a census.

Regarding immigration it will be proper to establish whether all members of the Working Group agree that it is adequate to obtain basic data on immigration to a country through the inclusion of two simple questions in the census forms, namely, country of birth and year of arrival to the country where the person is enumerated. If we agree on that point the discussion may be oriented to the ways and means the Union might use in order to promote the inclusion of said questions in the forthcoming census forms.

The information on immigration mentioned above if collected in all countries of destination is useful, of course, to measure emigration from a country. The Working Group may examine the possibility of interchanging information on international migrants, collected in the country of arrival, either bilaterally or multilaterally, i.e. providing the information to an international data bank. The possibilities of dealing either with individual information or tabulated data may also be examined by the Working Group.

A serious limitation to measure international migration when based on information gathered at the country of arrival is that illegal migration is grossly underestimated. In countries of immigration facing the problem of estimating illegal migration, efforts are being made to try to solve the problem. The procedures utilized are still on an experimental stage. It will be interesting to the Working Group to learn about these efforts and, maybe, to comment on the methods that are being tested or to suggest alternative procedures.

Another obstacle to study international migration, on the basis of information on immigrants collected in the country of arrival, is that data of interest for a country of origin are not available from all countries of destination, at the right moment.

For those reasons, defects of information on illegal migration and unavailability of data from all countries of destination, the idea of trying to obtain information on international emigration from a census taken in the country of origin is attractive. Illegal migrations, that are very difficult to estimate in the country of destination -this country being, usually, the only country where the migrant is illegal- could presumably be registered without any particular obstacle in the country of origin. When investigating emigration in the country of origin all destinations could be taken care of. The main concern of the Working Group should be, to my judge-

ment, to try to measure emigration by means of a few simple census questions. Our task should be to discover through which questions, simple questions that may be included in a census form, it is possible to obtain basic information that would permit to derive reasonable estimates about the size and a few characteristics (sex, age) of emigrants.

To visualize such procedure it may be convenient to bear in mind:

- (a) that the questions should be probably addressed to the whole population, not to a sample, since emigration usually represents a small proportion of the population of a country and affects it with a very uneven distribution.
- (b) that the questions should be very simple, easy to interpret by the population and the enumerators; they should be as simple as the universally recommended census questions (such as sex, age, etc.).

The work of CELADE in this field

CELADE has been active in trying to measure international migrations in Latin American countries. The exploitation of the possibilities provided by information on immigration was initiated around 1970; the idea to explore procedures aimed at measuring emigration is just starting.

With regard to immigration it has encouraged statistical offices of the countries in the region to include the two above mentioned questions. CELADE's data bank has received basic census information, usually samples, or tabulations, of persons born in Latin American countries enumerated in censuses of countries different from the country of birth. This project, named IMMLA (Investigación de la Migración Internacional en Latinoamérica) initiated around 1970, has permitted to advance in the knowledge of the size and compo-

sition of international migrations. It is a permanent project that will keep on increasing its value by the addition of information to be collected in future censuses. A Boletín Demográfico published in mid-1977 presented a summary of the information collected by IMILA up to that date.

With regard to emigration CELADE is experimenting the value of two census questions to derive estimates on the subject. These questions are: residence of surviving children (three categories: in the country, abroad, in an unknown place) and residence of mothers, when alive (the same categories). Both questions are supplementary to questions that are included in census forms in developing countries, i.e. number of surviving children, put to all women over 15, and maternal orphanhood, put to everybody. It is expected to have the results of the first field operations in the near future. The information has been, or is presently being, collected in Talca (Chile), Misiones (Argentina) and Costa Rica; it is planned to extend the test to surveys or pilot censuses in Colombia, Peru and Nicaragua.

Agenda for the meeting of the Working Group in Helsinki.
(2-4 September 1979).

Taking into account the points considered above the following agenda is proposed for the first meeting of the Working Group.

- (a) to establish the objectives of the Working Group or the methodology to study international migration. We should keep in mind that the Working Group should make suggestions to the Council regarding the future activities of the Union in the field of international migrations.

- (b) to consider the measure of immigration by means of census information. Recommended questions. Interchange of information among countries. The problem of illegal migration. Procedures being tested to estimate it.
- (c) to examine the possibility of estimating emigration by means of census information. Suggestions on questions, tabulations and analysis of the collected information. Possibilities of testing the procedures in surveys or pilot censuses, during 1978 and 1979.
- (d) work program for the members of the Working Group. Plans for a second meeting, tentatively scheduled for 1980, second quarter.