



UNITED NATIONS



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

Expert Group Meeting on Migration Data Collection,
Management and Sharing in the Caribbean
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REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON MIGRATION DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND SHARING IN THE CARIBBEAN

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REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON MIGRATION DATA COLLECTION, MANAGEMENT AND SHARING IN THE CARIBBEAN

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), secretariat of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), convened a one-day Expert Group Meeting on Migration Data Collection, Management and Sharing in the Caribbean, 9 November 2007, in Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands.

The following governments and organizations were represented: The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Netherlands Antilles, Turks and Caicos Islands and Trinidad and Tobago, the Danish Immigration Service, ECLAC, IOM, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and as an observer, the United States Department of State. The list of participants is attached at Annex 1.

Agenda item 1: Opening session

Ms. Berta Fernandez of the IOM and Ms. Karoline Schmid of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat welcomed participants to the expert group meeting. Given the fact that almost all Caribbean countries are source, transition and receiving countries for migrants, both officials emphasized the need to enhance knowledge about these flows in order to improve migration management at the national and regional levels. In addition, increased production of migration data and the development of data sharing and dissemination systems was urgently needed to inform global forums on migratory movements in this part of the world. These would facilitate the identification of trends and the generation of forecasts to support programmes and policies to respond to the challenges posed by migration to the region. Further, a better informed public debate would contribute to the reduction of discrimination and marginalization of migrants. They highlighted the fact that any informed debate and all decision-making needed to be supported by empirical evidence and socio-economic analysis, and that understanding immigration and emigration trends was crucial to the social and economic future of each country and the region as a whole.

The organizers emphasized that the main purposes of the meeting were to exchange best practices in the area of migration data management and data sharing in the Caribbean; to provide an introduction into successful approaches applied in other parts of the world; and to look into future possible ways of increased data sharing in the region.

Agenda item 2: Migration trends in the Caribbean

The representative of the IOM made a presentation on *Migration data – global experiences and Caribbean vision* and made reference to discussions at past IOM/Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) regional seminars on migration, *Mixed Migratory Flows in the Caribbean*, convened prior to this expert group meeting that had also concluded with the request for more, timely and quality data on migration in this region. Such data would be of utmost importance for national and regional planning processes. Further, better information on migratory flows for the region would also allow for a more informed debate on the costs and benefits of migration for a nation's economy in an effort to counter misunderstanding and discrimination directed towards migrants.

It was felt that there was great potential for the production of quality data in the Caribbean. Apart from the basic information on entries and departures, modern border control systems could be put in place to provide more detailed and sophisticated information, individual as well as aggregated, that would be of significance to a wide range of government departments, such as trade and investment, health, security, immigration, customs, police service, tourism, labour and education. In advising the governments of the region on ways of responding to migration patterns, IOM sought to shed light on existing gaps in the current data, on the one hand, and the capacity of currently available systems to manipulate data and bridge these data gaps, on the other hand. Government officials and other organizations represented at the meeting were invited to become more proactive in addressing and meeting the future data needs of the region. Action was also needed by universities and other institutions in the area of data collection and analysis methodology in order to examine correlations between, inter alia, inflows and outflows of migrants, and economic growth patterns and migration.

A fundamental challenge faced by IOM as it worked with countries all over the world to better manage and share their migration data was that national migration data, if at all available, were either dispersed among a variety of institutions within the country and/or not comparable with statistics of other countries. A major reason for this problem was that governments often lacked the resources (financial and human) to develop effective data management systems. In order to help the Caribbean overcome these problems, IOM continued to assist immigration departments in building institutional capacity to monitor migration flows and to produce accurate data and statistics for evidence-based policy formulation.

The presenter also provided a brief introduction into two databases managed by IOM, Mosaic and the Migrant Management Operational System Application (MIMOSA). Mosaic contained migration statistics dating back to 1992 and included information on migrants' and refugees' nationality, sex, age, family composition, and the origin/destination of each movement done by IOM. All of IOM's databases were currently integrated into a single database, MIMOSA that would eventually be consolidated in an online accessible central data repository.

In addition, IOM has been involved in and helped to develop data-sharing mechanisms among States, especially within the context of regional consultative processes. For instance, at

the regional level, under the Regional Conference on Migration (RCM), also known as the Puebla Process, IOM assisted in launching SIEMCA - or as it is now called SIEMMES, - a statistical information system to monitor the magnitude and characteristics of migration among and through Central American countries and Mexico. The system is fed with information from three basic sources: entry and departure records, population census and surveys. By cooperating with national migration and statistics directorates, the project synchronizes migration-related information from the various statistical sources, for example, by using a standardized entry and departure card in all Central America countries, as well as incorporating questions to identify immigrants and emigration in the national population censuses. The results are published on the website (<http://163.178.140.43/>).

The representative of the ECLAC/CDCC secretariat made a presentation on *Migration data collection, management and sharing in the Caribbean*, which contained a description of and general remarks on the issue of migration in the Caribbean, an identification of the sources of migration data, the statistical infrastructure in the Caribbean within which migration data are collected and administered, current regional and global initiatives to harmonize data management and enhance data sharing and the identification of systematic measures for timely production of reliable data. In general, the Caribbean experienced diverse flows of intraregional, interregional and international migration, both formal and informal. Each country was affected as a source, transit or destination country, or a combination of these, and in all cases there were opportunities for temporary, circular and permanent mobility. As with other countries and regions experiencing such widespread and varied flows of migrants, the Caribbean was faced with the challenges of brain-drain, undocumented migrants and labor migration, among others.

With respect to migration data, to date there were no clear definitions or regionally established data collection mechanisms and, as such, data from different sources at the national, regional and international levels were incompatible and the current stock of data incomplete or inadequate. The main sources for migration data were population censuses and surveys along with numerous administrative records (cross-border movements, arrivals and departures at national ports; passenger statistics; statistics of visas, work permits and passport applications; population registers and frontier control data). Within the Caribbean, however, the national central statistical offices (CSOs) lacked the infrastructure, human capacity and financial resources needed for an efficient migration data collection and management system. In most cases, the CSOs were not national authorities (and therefore held limited institutional power), and often operated within outdated regulatory frameworks.

This presentation also made reference to a small survey undertaken by ECLAC in 2006 amongst officials from regional CSOs who had attended a training workshop at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in 2006, to get a clearer understanding of migration data collection systems currently existing in the Caribbean. In terms of institution(s) responsible for migration collection, all respondents indicated that their country had at least one national body charged with this function; in most cases the immigration department, and in others, the CSO, ministry of labour or tourist board. Key statistics collected consisted of visitor arrivals/departures, visas issued, deportees, tourists and tourist revenues. The use of these data ranged from the production of aggregate data, population estimates and projections, to managing borders, strategic planning

and policy development, and the formulation of legislative changes. In most countries, the CSO appeared to be responsible for the compilation and publication of such data. National, regional and international data and information sharing were very limited, and while some countries had in place a mechanism for sharing its migration data, none of the respondents could provide details on how it worked.

In spite of the small scale of this survey, the results still attest to the fact that migration data were being collected throughout the Caribbean and there appeared to be some mechanisms in place for their dissemination. However, there was a lack of knowledge of the availability of such data, limited awareness of potential data sources at the national level and inadequate monitoring and management of relevant systems and structures. Although regional and global initiatives were already underway to improve harmonization of data and enhance data collection and sharing mechanisms, it was felt that in order for the region to move forward in producing timely, reliable and systematically collected data on migration, and work towards solving issues of border security, brain drain and labour policies, among others, there would need to be enhanced technical coordination and cooperation at the national, regional and international level; capacity-building at the national and regional level; strengthening of already existing institutional mechanisms and targeted enhancement and development of information technology (IT) systems.

Discussion

Country representatives were advised that it was not necessary to wait until a perfectly constructed and operational system was put in place before attempting to collect and enter, process and share data. Experience in other parts of the world had demonstrated that countries with well-functioning data sharing mechanisms often started with a minimum amount of information in a less than perfect system, and eventually progressed to a well-defined and more sophisticated structure. Countries were also reminded of the fact that in many instances information was collected but not processed, as for example was the case with immigration and departure cards.

While some countries reported using whatever migration data was collected to inform decision-making and policy formulation, it was acknowledged that these reporting systems lacked the structure and resources necessary for adequate and coherent sustainable policy development and implementation.

Agenda Item 3: Data sharing mechanism: a generic model

The Consultant, made a presentation on *Migration Data Collection and Sharing* and underlined the need for empirical data for evidence-based policies and programmes on migration. In spite of this fact, many countries still performed their policy planning with little or no access to hardcore statistics. In order to enhance the national and regional dialogue on this issue, a suitable platform for communication between users and producers of such information would need to be established. Essentially, any effective data collection, management and sharing system should be guided by the following principles:

- (a) It should be based on well-known and well-accepted principles and formats;
- (b) Data collection should be based on a minimum set of simple, reliable and timely data;
- (c) Data sharing should be based on a fast and reliable mechanism among core institutions dealing with migration.

The approach to implementing such a system would rely on ownership and practical coordination at the national level, capacity-building at all levels and connecting data to legal and policy issues.

He explained that, in general, referring to data in the context of the following presentations and discussions would mainly be focusing on aggregate data, not the individual data related to individual persons.

The presentation provided a summary of the main features of the General Data Sharing Mechanism Model (DSM), as it was currently in use in other parts of the world:

The DSM builds on two pillars, the national approach and the regional approach. Both pillars are equally important and are to be developed in parallel.

National approach

With capacity-building being the main focus, these were the main steps followed by the participating countries to initiate the process:

- Identify national demand for migration-related data;
- Define a minimum set of 5 – 10 overall migration indicators;
- Establish and provide support to a national network;
- Identify areas for potential training;
- Reinforcing training capacity through direct exposure to other national approaches;
- Provide pilot infrastructures if there were none in place.

Regional approach

Participating countries found that cross-border data sharing would enhance the empirical data basis in both sending and receiving countries, and would allow for joint comparative analysis of the information available. Based on the experience with the DSM in other parts of the world, the following activities had been found vital for their success:

- Organizing thematic and technical regional workshops;
- Outlining and further finalizing agreed-upon statistical indicators;
- Providing follow-up regional training and sharing best practices;
- Providing training through a “toolkit” of self-teaching training modules;
- Enhancing and maintaining whatever data sharing system was put in place.

The last part of the presentation provided details of the DSM that are summarized below:

I: Principles

- Sharing of minimum set of data;
- Data ownership by the institution compiling the data;
- No duplication of data (have only one institution responsible for exchanging and validating the data according to the agreed exchange format);
- Data shared electronically by institutions in the network;
- Data sharing driven by the network and gradually expanded in terms of the network, the frequency and the indicators shared (according to needs of users).

II: Practical functioning

- Data shared electronically according to agreed upon frequency;
- Data shared using a common and recognized template;
- The mechanism can be hosted by a chosen international organization;
- The DSM will service the needs of the institutions and parties involved in the project, and will be used for requests, queries and consultations in and among countries participating in the mechanism.

III: Working format

- Informality – the sharing of data is based on mutual trust and a common need for sharing the agreed upon data. The mechanism does not involve a formal institutional framework among institutions and stakeholders of the project.
- Transparency – common formats and definitions are applied for all indicators shared among institutions and stakeholders of the project.
- Effectiveness – the sharing of data is based on electronic communication with emphasis on an easy and direct way of communicating. The sharing of data is based on rapid exchange of the agreed format.

The presentation ended by emphasizing the fact that the introduction of a DSM at the national as well as regional level would not require a fully established and institutionalized mechanism, but that it would be advisable to initiate such a process based on data and already existing infrastructure. “There is always enough to start with, it’s about getting started”.

Agenda item 4: Country reports

Barbados

A border control system had been in place and the collected information would be shared routinely with various Government agencies and the national CSO. However, it was recognized that the present approach to data collection, sharing and management could be improved and streamlined in order to enhance the quality and timeliness of the data provided. Also, the country had undertaken efforts to collaborate with the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM) in establishing a system to monitor migratory flows from and to the country. It was admitted, however, that this effort was still at its initial stage and would need to be strengthened to benefit this and other countries in the Caribbean.

Belize

The major source of information on migration in the country was census data collected every 10 years. In addition, data from the immigration department were collected and annually published. In order to modernize migration data collection and management instruments, the country was presently establishing a more efficient border management and information system. Being a member of the RCM, Belize has benefited from a regional project on transnational digital government funded by the Organisation of American States (OAS). The purpose of this effort was to strengthen collaboration among government officials from various departments, such as the CSO, the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance and academia in the area of migration data. However, it was expressed that additional technical assistance would be required in order to strengthen the already existing mechanisms at the national level. Further, it was reported that the country was in the process of constructing a data sharing system linking the Immigration Department of Belize with the Office of Narcotics and Drug Control of the Dominican Republic. It was hoped that by 2008 the system would be fully operational.

Cayman Islands

The national statistics office was in the process of modernizing their statistical programmes. Migration data needed by the Government of the Cayman Islands were already routinely collected by several agencies. However, assistance would be needed in the area of data management to enhance timeliness of data processing and sharing with other government counterparts in the country.

Jamaica

The Passport Immigration and Citizenship Agency routinely collected and shared a vast amount of data and related information with tourism agencies and the national statistics office. However, it was reported that more advanced IT systems would be needed to improve collaboration among various agencies and institutions and to increase efficiency of joint planning processes.

With respect to the establishment of a data sharing mechanism at the regional level, it was felt that countries needed to find a balance to satisfy both, national and international reporting needs. The country seems to dispose of a well-established data sharing infrastructure with the United States and Canada that provides, on a regular basis, records on visa applications and migrant flows which serve as a basis for the preparation of national population estimates and projections. Statistics on deportees were collected directly from the Ministry of National Security and other data on returning residents were received from the Customs Department.

In general, the need to deal with data security issues along with standardization of data and streamlining classifications of migrants was expressed.

Netherlands Antilles

Based on the experience of considerable undocumented migration flows into the country, improved and standardized systems to provide timely migration data were needed. This is of particular importance, bearing in mind the fact that the country is composed of five islands that are administered by their own island governments. While data seemed to be collected, there was a considerable need to enhance the inter-island information flow and to establish a system to integrate data from various sources available. Of particular importance was the need for demographic information on migrants, such as gender and age, to allow addressing the social and health care needs of the migrants and their dependants.

Trinidad and Tobago

The country reported that various government bodies, such as the Ministry of Labour, the CSO of the Ministry of Planning and Development, and the Ministry of National Security were involved to varying extents in data and information gathering on migrants. At present, the Immigration Department was in the process of implementing an integrated border management and control system that would also facilitate data sharing across agencies, institutions and ministries. The research unit of the department is in charge of data compilation. Information on undocumented migrants would be available through the investigations unit of the same department which had a close working relationship with the police and other security agencies.

Discussing a regional mechanism, it was recommended that collaboration be done with CARICOM and that there was a need to work with already established CARICOM bodies, such as the Council for Ministers of National Security and Law Enforcement and other subcommittees that either directly or indirectly dealt with various aspects of migration. The representative of

Trinidad and Tobago expressed a need to first strengthen data sharing among already existing national systems before consideration could be given to moving on to regional or even global levels.

Discussion

Countries inquired if the establishment of a regional mechanism would require functional national mechanisms in the participating countries. While this would be ideal, it was suggested that based on the experiences in other parts of the world, both processes could evolve side by side and that a preliminary regional system could be established with national processes at any level. Reference was made to a recently published manual by IOM (IOM, *Sharing Data: Where To Start. An Emerging Approach To Migration Data Management*, 2007¹) which, among other issues, provided practical step-by-step guidance on how to proceed with the formation of such a regional instrument.

Lessons Learnt from Existing Data Sharing Mechanisms

This presentation was made by the Consultant, who shared lessons learned from existing data sharing mechanisms and gave a practical demonstration of the DSM as it was currently used by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Some of the most important lessons learned included the following:

(a) The establishment of a national DSM needed to take into consideration the respective country's specific realities and requirements. However, it was noted, while differences at the national level would exist, participating countries had experienced much commonality in this respect.

(b) The technicalities of any DSM at the national and/or regional level would need to reflect the different perspectives of each country concerning core statistics, definitions and classifications in use and would need to function within already existing legal provisions in the area of statistics and data sharing.

(c) Countries also reported having benefited from their access to regional and global data on migration and thus were in a position to better monitor and analyze trends and to arrive at a common understanding with neighboring countries across their region and beyond.

(d) The practical experience with the DSM had proven the fact that it would be advisable to begin with a simple and feasible approach that could be more fine-tuned over time. It would also be advisable to publish only officially approved data in order to avoid confusion

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http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/Sharing_Data_Where_to_start_final.pdf

and misunderstandings. In case no national data would be available, it was recommended using statistics provided by regional and international agencies.

(e) Critical for the success of any DSM, be it at the national or regional level, was a country-driven, steady and continuous process, possibly guided by a national and/or regional focal point to facilitate cooperation and decision-making on issues such as data input, accessibility of data, data security and other related matters.

(f) Any DSM should be kept flexible to allow for simple adjustments and fine-tuning of its features and it should also serve as a platform to share information on matters of concern for all partners involved.

(g) With respect to financial support for such a mechanism, participating countries and other bodies needed to commit to long-term support to the process.

(h) The system must have clearly defined and feasible objectives, and the degree of formality of data sharing must be decided on beforehand by the participating bodies at the national and/or regional level.

Discussion

Participants agreed that it was important to cooperate, but emphasized at the same time the importance for each country to identify its own priorities and to agree upon desired levels of data and information sharing within and across national borders. Being reminded of the high volume of migration from, to and through the region, participants recognized the need to exchange and share migration-related data and information amongst each other to be better able to manage and control these cross-border flows. Finally, some participants also expressed concern that apart from, in some instances, limitations in terms of human resources, technical capacities and financial means, lack of political will would also inhibit progress in this regard.

Agenda item 5: The way forward for the Caribbean

The officials present recommended the following way forward:

(a) Being aware of the fact that migration has been a reality in the Caribbean over the past decades, the region recognizes the need for instruments that would allow for enhanced monitoring, managing and control of such flows.

(b) Coherent, timely and quality data at the national and regional levels would provide the region with a tool to manage and control migratory flows from, to and through the region in a beneficial way for all parties concerned.

(c) Statistics on migrants and their dependants are necessary to formulate policies and programmes to adequately address the needs of the States sufficiently and in a timely manner.

(d) A number of countries in the Caribbean are currently engaged in initiatives to overhaul and modernize data collection management infrastructure at national CSOs and immigration departments, thus making the introduction of a DSM a timely effort, both at the national and regional levels.

(e) Other countries are engaged in increased research on migration within and outside the region and thus would very much welcome further discussions on a common way to share and exchange migration-related data and information.

(f) In recognition of the fact that CARICOM has already initiated a process to map inter- and intraregional migratory flows in a more standardized manner, all countries present committed their support to any such initiative with the involvement of CARICOM. Representatives suggested that the international organizations present should discuss the development of a regional DSM with the CARICOM Task Force on Migration.

**Agenda item 6:
Closure of the Meeting**

The organizers of the meeting, IOM and ECLAC, jointly thanked participants for their active participation and valuable contributions to the discussions and expressed their commitment to support the Caribbean in this process. Special gratitude was also conveyed to the Consultant for facilitating the seminar, and to IOM administrative staff for their efficient technical and logistical support. The UNICEF representative also expressed her appreciation for the workshop and welcomed the opportunity to collaborate closely with IOM and ECLAC to support the Caribbean countries in their efforts to strengthen migration data collection, management and sharing mechanisms. The IOM Regional Representative for Central America complimented the organizers and participants on their fruitful dialogue. Finally, the representative of the host country appreciated the usefulness of the meeting and reiterated her Government's commitment to this regional consultative process.

Annex 1**PROGRAMME**

8:30 – 9:00	Registration
9:00 – 9:15	Opening session IOM and ECLAC
9:30 – 10:00	<i>Migration Trends in the Caribbean</i> Berta Fernandez, IOM and Karoline Schmid, ECLAC Discussion
10:15 – 11:00	<i>Data Sharing Mechanism – a Generic Model</i> Claus Folden, Danish Immigration Service Discussion
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 – 12:30	Country reports Discussion
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:00	Lessons learnt from existing data sharing mechanisms Claus Folden, Danish Immigration Service
15:00 – 16:30	The way forward for the Caribbean - Conclusions
16:30	Closure of the meeting

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