

Use of new data sources for measuring international migration



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PREFACE

Migration and other forms of cross-border mobility are issues of high policy importance. Demands for statistics in these areas have further increased in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The statistical community continues to be challenged to capture international migration and cross-border mobility in a way that would meet the growing needs of users.

Measurement of migration and cross-border mobility relies on a variety of sources, such as population and housing censuses, household surveys and administrative records, with each of them having their own strengths and limitations. Integration of data from different sources is often seen as a way to enhance the richness of data and reduce coverage or accuracy problems. Yet, even this would often not capture all dimensions of migration and cross-border mobility. New non-conventional data sources, such as data gathered from the use of mobile telephones, credit cards and social networks — generally known as big and social media data — could be useful for producing migration statistics when used in combination with conventional sources. Notwithstanding the challenges of accessibility, accuracy and access to these new sources, examples are emerging that highlight their potential.

In 2020 the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) set up a task force to review existing experience and plans for using new data sources for measuring international migration in national statistical offices and outside official statistics; analyse the material collected; and compile the examples into a reference tool.

This publication presents the results of the work of the task force, including various national experiences with big data and new data sources collected through two surveys among countries participating in CES. It concludes that national statistical offices have limited experiences in the use of new data sources for migration statistics. However, the potential of new data sources to address emerging migration issues and urgent data needs is promising. Sharing and updating of relevant information and tools will facilitate the use of big data and new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

The publication was endorsed by the 70th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians in 2022.

UNECE is grateful to all the experts who were involved in the preparation of this publication.



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- Introduction, by **Paolo Valente**;
- National experiences about big data and new data sources, by **Cinzia Conti** and **Enrico Tucci**;
- Focus on the United States experience, by **Jason Schachter** and **Angelica Menchaca**;
- Reasons for not using new data sources, by **Paolo Valente**;
- Significant innovations on measuring international migration, by **Pubudu Senanayake** and **Kim Dunstan**;
- A literature reference tool: DIMiS, by **Giampaolo Lanzieri**;
- Conclusions, by **Cinzia Conti** and **Enrico Tucci**.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1. Migration and other forms of cross-border mobility are issues of high policy importance. Demands for statistics in these areas have further increased in light of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) (2018). The statistical community continues to be challenged to capture international migration and cross-border mobility in a way that would meet the growing needs of users.

2. Measurement of migration and cross-border mobility relies on a variety of sources, such as population and housing censuses, household surveys and administrative records, with each of them having their own strengths and limitations. Integration of data from different sources is a way to enhance the richness of data and reduce coverage or accuracy problems. However, even this will often not capture all dimensions of migration and cross-border mobility.

3. New non-conventional data sources, such as data gathered from the use of mobile telephones, credit cards and social networks — generally known as big and social media data — could be useful for producing migration statistics when used in combination with conventional sources. The [UNECE Guidance on data integration for measuring migration](#) proposes further work on utilising the potential of big data, “to share the emerging practices internationally, to support countries’ first steps towards harnessing the potential of such data for producing migration statistics”.

4. Notwithstanding the challenges of accessibility, accuracy and privacy of these new sources, examples have emerged in recent years that highlight their potential. The [2018 UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics](#) illustrated the use of Facebook data for obtaining age profiles of ‘expats’ by origin and the use of geo-tagged tweets for estimating mobility. The [2019 UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics](#) featured an example from official statistics, from the United States Census Bureau, on the use of air passenger data for improving migration estimates. As more examples emerge, they need to be collected and analysed, to support national statistical offices (NSOs) in embarking on the use of new data sources, building on the results of the [UNECE Big Data Projects for Official Statistics](#), and other initiatives that look at the relationship of official data providers with big data owners.

5. In October 2019, the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Bureau reviewed in-depth the statistics on international migration and cross-border mobility, based on a paper by Mexico¹ and a note by UNECE. The Bureau brought up the importance of gathering examples where NSOs are using the new data sources for producing official statistics in this area and pointed at the 2019 UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics as a pertinent forum to discuss this further. It requested the Secretariat and the Steering Group on migration statistics to present to the next Bureau meeting a proposal for further work on the use of new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

1 http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2019/October/02_In-depth_review_on_international_migration_Rev.1.pdf



6. Participants of the 2019 UNECE-Eurostat Work Session on Migration Statistics recognised the need to work towards using new types of data sources, such as mobile devices, social media networks, satellite images and Internet platforms, and to review existing examples of use of new data sources for the benefit of producing official migration statistics. To meet this need and the Bureau's request, the CES Bureau in January 2019 established the Task force on the use of new data sources for measuring international migration and cross-border mobility to review existing experience and plans in NSOs for using new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility, identify relevant examples from outside official statistics, compile the examples into a reference tool and develop a mechanism for updating it with new examples, and analyse the collected material to guide NSOs in the use of the new sources.

1.2 Methodology and content

7. The Task force started its work identifying relevant scientific literature and the information available among its members. To collect information on relevant experiences (in NSOs or outside) on the use of new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility, the Task force carried out between November 2020 and February 2021 an online survey among NSOs in the UNECE region. For the purpose of the survey, new data sources were intended to include:

- a. Big data, which include data sources such as Social Networks (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr etc.), Blogs and comments, Personal documents, Pictures: Instagram, Flickr, Picasa etc., Videos: YouTube etc., Internet searches, Mobile data content: text messages, User-generated maps, E-Mail, Medical records, Commercial transactions, Banking/stock records, E-commerce, Credit cards, Home automation, Weather/pollution sensors, Scientific sensors, Security/surveillance videos/images, Mobile phone location, Cars, Satellite images, Logs, Web logs)
- b. Other data sources such as air passenger information, which are different from conventional sources (sample surveys, censuses, administrative data)

8. Out of the 34 UNECE countries that participated in the survey, only 5 (15 percent) reported that they were aware of a process or a project (whether or not involving the NSO) that uses new data sources, such as big and social media data, for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.
9. The Task force analysed the results of the survey and decided to carry out a follow-up survey to collect from NSOs additional information on:
 - a. whether NSOs make use of new data sources for producing statistics in other statistical fields,
 - b. the main reasons why NSOs do not make use of new data sources for migration statistics,
 - c. whether NSOs are working on any significant innovations on measuring international migration, including new approaches using current sources, or exploring new data sources.
10. The follow-up survey was carried out in March 2021, and 27 countries responded.
11. The results of the two surveys are presented respectively in the sections National experiences with big data and new data sources, Reasons for not using new data sources, and Significant innovations on measuring international migration.
12. In addition to the information provided by NSOs in the surveys, the Task force also collected a large amount of information on different types of research, discussion papers or scientific journals related directly or indirectly to the use of new data sources for measuring international migration and cross-border mobility. The Task force developed a concept for an online reference tool to present this material, with the possibility to update the tool with new examples that would become available in future, as it was requested by the CES Bureau. The synopsis developed by the Task force for the reference tool is presented in “A literature reference tool: DIMiS”.





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2. NATIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH BIG DATA AND NEW DATA SOURCES

13. Based on the two surveys conducted by the Task force, it is evident that NSOs rarely use big data currently to measure international migration. However, some agencies are using new data sources, and others are exploring the use of new data sources.

2.1 Summary of experiences: first survey

14. The one reported project using big data is in Georgia. The project aims to measure human mobility, as part of the deliverables of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics (UN-CEBD).² The task is to estimate population mobility patterns such as internal migrants, international migrants and tourists. The NSO in Georgia (Geostat), the Georgian mobile phone regulator (GNCC) and other members of the task team (ITU, UNSD, Eurostat, Positium, and others) are working together to develop and test methods and methodology to estimate migration and tourism statistics in Georgia with use of mobile phone data. However, the project is yet to produce any official statistics and is currently on hold for technical reasons.

15. One example of using new data sources, rather than big data, is reported by the United States Census Bureau. This project is based on using passenger flight data to adjust net international migration between Puerto Rico and the United States, to include the impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017. The United States Census Bureau has made a concerted effort in recent years to integrate new data sources to improve its method to estimate net migration between the United States and Puerto Rico. These efforts have been motivated by a need to improve the timeliness of migration estimates which have typically relied on large household survey data collected by the Census Bureau. A survey-based methodology works well when migration patterns are consistent over time, but tends to perform less well when migration patterns quickly change, such as due to natural disasters (e.g., hurricanes, global pandemics). To provide more up-to-date and accurate estimates of migration, the Census Bureau has worked to integrate administrative data produced by other agencies with data collected from its surveys, while moving towards a solely administrative data-based method to measure net migration between Puerto Rico and the rest of the world.

16. The impetus for these initial efforts to combine survey and administrative data was a result of the impact Hurricane Maria had in 2017, which caused mass out-migration from Puerto Rico. These macro-data integration methods combined flight data published by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and survey-based estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS) to better measure the effect of this natural disaster for 2018 estimates. Macro-data integration was again used to account for return migration to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria (2019 estimates), as well as adjust for new migration patterns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (2020 estimates). Starting in 2021, the Census Bureau is

2 <https://unstats.un.org/bigdata/blog/2019/mpd-task-team.cshtml>

adopting a method which produces total net migration for Puerto Rico using flight data, but still relies on the ACS and PRCS to develop inflows and outflows by demographic characteristics. This new method is advantageous since it will improve the timeliness of data availability, reduce the need for adjustments, align better with the reference period (year ended 30 June), and will expand the migration data to include international moves to and from Puerto Rico (for details see Example United States experience).

17. Other projects were indicated as examples of the use of big data, but related to internal migration (e.g. Netherlands) or the results are not yet available (e.g. Latvia).

2.2 Summary of experiences: second survey

18. In the follow-up survey, four countries reported that they are exploring the possibility of using new data sources for measuring international migration.

19. Just one project is based on what might properly be called 'big data'. The United Kingdom Office for National Statistics is currently exploring aggregated and anonymised mobile phone data (or crowd movement data) from O2 Motion. These data look at mobile device connections to O2 masts to gain a picture of crowd movement trends around the UK. The data include geographic location (where mobile phones are connected to cell phone towers) at national and local authority granularities and have the potential to help understand patterns of international migration. The plan is to assess what the data say about mobility in and out of the United Kingdom, including aspects such as duration of stay, as part of the work looking for timelier indicators of migration. This project is at a very early stage and there is a wider program of work for international mobility within the United Kingdom's data science campus that is exploring more than this.³ Air passenger information is also used as one of several sources for modelling migration.

20. Other countries are exploring new data sources but not necessarily big data.

21. New Zealand's Stats NZ reported that administrative data (passport information from border-crossings) is used for official measures of international migration. Other data sources – such as mobile phone data – are being explored for studying geographic population distributions within New Zealand, including that of international visitors and residents (including recent migrants).

22. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic does not use big data for measuring migration statistics but are focusing on the innovative use of administrative data. The systematic use of administrative data sources for official migration statistics is described as the main challenge.

23. In the Republic of Moldova, starting in 2018, the National Bureau of Statistics processes large volumes of data on the crossing of the state border by individuals, collected from administrative sources held by the General Inspectorate of Border Police, to estimate international migration by applying the international definition of usual residence. When making the estimate, administrative data are used for 3 consecutive years, i.e. to calculate the status of emigrant or immigrant for a reference year (for example, for the year 2020 data are used for the previous year 2019 and the following year 2021). Final estimates of international migration for the years 2014 - 2019 are currently available. These results are used to estimate the usual resident population in the Republic of Moldova.

³ Data insights from O2 Motion never allow identification or mapping of individuals and operate within strict privacy guidelines. [Using Mobile Phone Data for Enhancing International Passenger Survey Traveller Statistics](#).

24. Statistics Lithuania reported that the application of mathematical methods to new data sources (and big data) could help overcome challenges related to international migration statistics. A concurrent development in Lithuania is the State Data Governance Information System, providing for a common data management platform across agencies and enabling data accessibility for state needs, efficient exchange between institutions, and data sharing with the business and science community. This system will increase the potential for using government information systems, registers, and other sources for international migration statistics.

25. The Italian National Institute of Statistics is also working on the integration of new data sources for migration statistics. In Italy the international migration statistics are based on the migrants' notification to the population register of their arrival or departure. A specific research project aims to make use of the registrations and de-registrations ex-officio to estimate the missing part of these notifications, especially for emigration statistics, as it is well known that emigrants might not communicate their departure. In some cases the de-registration ex-officio is followed after a few months by a registration for reappearance of the same individual. The Italian longitudinal system (ANVIS), based on a micro-demographic accounting, allows identification of these offsetting administrative movements and removes them from the demographic balance. In contrast, it is likely that those who don't reappear have left the country. In some cases (i.e., the time between the deregistration ex-officio and the registration for reappearance is more than one year) there is uncertainty whether the person has left the country and then returned or has always resided in the country during all of the period. To this aim the presence of these individuals is checked against another Integrated Archive of Usual Resident Population that includes and integrates many administrative sources (Labour and Education registers, Tax Returns register, Earnings, Retired, and Non-Pension Benefits registers, Permits to Stay archive). This archive, already used for the assessment of coverage of the census resident population, could be used also to indicate presence in Italy by using individual's "signs of life". That is, checking the hypothesis that the person has left the country by looking at his or her signs of life in the period.

2.3 Example: United States experience

26. This section focuses on the United States Census Bureau's work to incorporate new data sources to measure migration, particularly for estimates of Puerto Rico migration. These new data sources and methodologies have helped to overcome limitations with previous methods dependent on more traditional data sources. By integrating new and old data sources, timelier and more accurate estimates of migration have been produced.

2.3.1 Traditional survey sources

27. The United States Census Bureau produces annual estimates of the population as of 1 July each year. The American Community Survey and Puerto Rican Community Survey (ACS/PRCS) are annual household surveys of the United States population that ask detailed information. The ACS currently surveys about 3.5 million households per year, while the PRCS has a sample of 36,000 Puerto Rican addresses.

28. Estimates of migration flows from Puerto Rico to the United States were based on responses to the ACS residence one-year ago (ROYA) question, which asks where respondents lived one-year before the survey. Conversely, migration flows from the United States to Puerto Rico were derived from the PRCS ROYA question. ACS/PRCS data are collected on a continuous basis throughout the calendar year, though movement could have occurred at any time over a 2-year period, depending on when the respondent was included in the sample and when they actually moved.



2.3.2 Air passenger traffic data as an alternative source

29. In the United States, flight data are compiled from monthly reports filed by over 200 commercial United States and foreign air carriers with the BTS, including both domestic and international flights. Data are reported for all flights (thus no sampling is involved) following federal reporting guidelines which went into effect in October 2002.

30. For Puerto Rico, air passenger traffic (APT) domestic data give monthly information on the number of passengers flying on planes between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States. It should be noted that APT data include information on all travellers without differentiation of passenger type, and thus include tourists and visitors who make up most passengers. Non-migrants are counted on both their in-bound and out-bound flights, while migrants are only counted in one direction – unless leaving temporarily, in which case they would be counted again upon their return.

31. A limitation of this method is that it can only provide a number for “net” migration, with no information on total inflows or outflows, as migrants cannot be distinguished from the total number of passengers entering or leaving Puerto Rico. Another limitation is that no demographic characteristics of migrants are included in the data. Additionally, this method is only applicable to a country or territory without any land borders, such as an island like Puerto Rico, as flights are the main method of arriving or leaving.

32. Monthly tallies of net airline passenger flow movement reflect seasonal variations related to tourism, with greater movement into and out of Puerto Rico in the summer and winter vacation months. Depending on the measurement period (e.g., a calendar year), this could lead to year-to-year fluctuations related to annual tourism trends. For example, a high number of tourists could be counted in December, while the return of these same tourists might happen in January of the following year. Over time, these fluctuations are thought to balance out.



2.3.3 Hurricane Maria

33. In September 2017, Category 5 Hurricane Maria made landfall on Puerto Rico, resulting in extensive damage, loss of human life, and out-migration to the mainland United States. Natural disasters can impact population, namely through the movement of persons from affected areas, as well as through deaths resulting from cataclysmic events. As natural disasters increase in frequency and magnitude, so do the needs for population estimation to accurately measure their impact, often requiring different data sources or implementation of new methods.

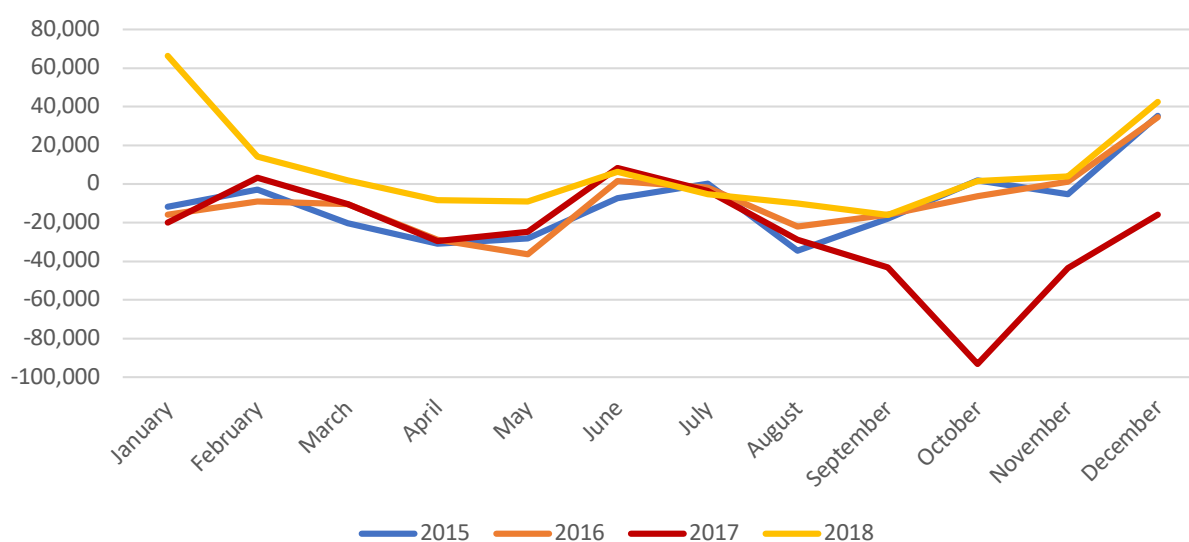
2.3.4 Combining airline traffic data with household surveys

34. The United States Census Bureau initially used APT data, combined with the ACS and PRCS, to measure the impact of Hurricane Maria on migration to/from Puerto Rico. Household sample surveys like the ACS are not designed to pick up sudden mass movements of people, since retrospective survey-based migration data tend to “lag” actual migration events. Surveys do not measure a migration event in real time, but rather measure the event when the migrant is included in the sample. This works well when migration patterns are stable, but when there are large fluctuations in the magnitude of movement, these will not be fully picked up until later (usually in the following survey year). The late timing of Hurricane Maria (late September) in the 2017 ACS survey data collection cycle and the corresponding short period of time to be included in the sample created potential response complications. As a result, it was necessary to look for an alternative data source to measure the impact of Hurricane Maria on migration out of Puerto Rico.

2.3.5 Results

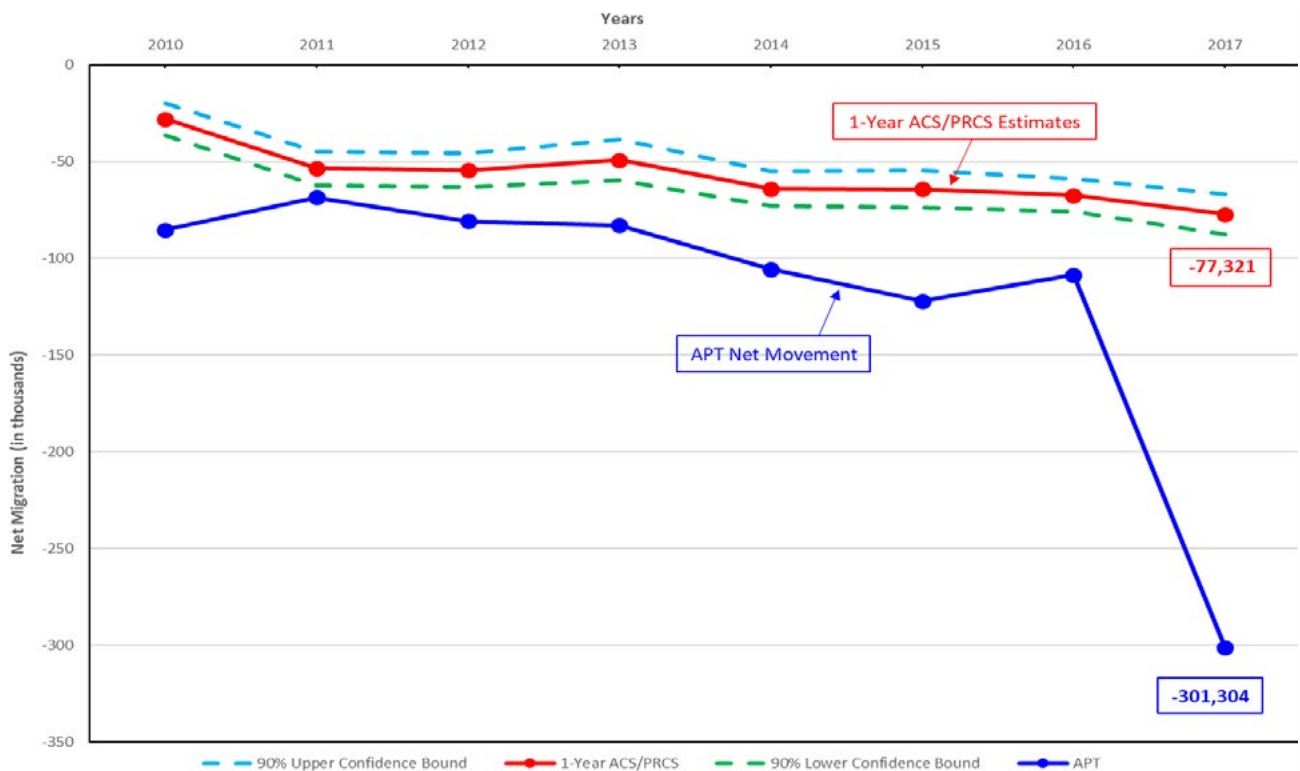
35. APT data showed a large net passenger outflow from Puerto Rico in the latter months of 2017 (September to December), followed by return flows in the early months of 2018 (Figure 1). This return movement to Puerto Rico from the United States dropped over the first quarter of 2018, returning to net outflow by April 2018. Before Hurricane Maria (20 September 2017), net movement between the United States and Puerto Rico followed relatively stable monthly patterns, with more passengers leaving than entering Puerto Rico, except for some summer or winter months (June and December, in particular). This corresponds with seasonal flight patterns, with more tourists coming during summer and winter months, as well as return visits by Puerto Ricans living in the United States during vacation periods.

Figure 1 Puerto Rico monthly net flight passenger movements with the United States, 2015 to 2018



Source: US Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers.

36. The “blended” methodology used for the 2018 estimates assumed that APT data were a better reflection of the true impact of Hurricane Maria on migration patterns than the ACS/PRCS, and that ACS and APT data followed similar historical patterns; thus, this relationship could be used to create a better estimate for the period. ACS and APT data tended to follow similar patterns before 2017, with APT data consistently showing more net out-movement from Puerto Rico than ACS net out-migration (Figure 2).

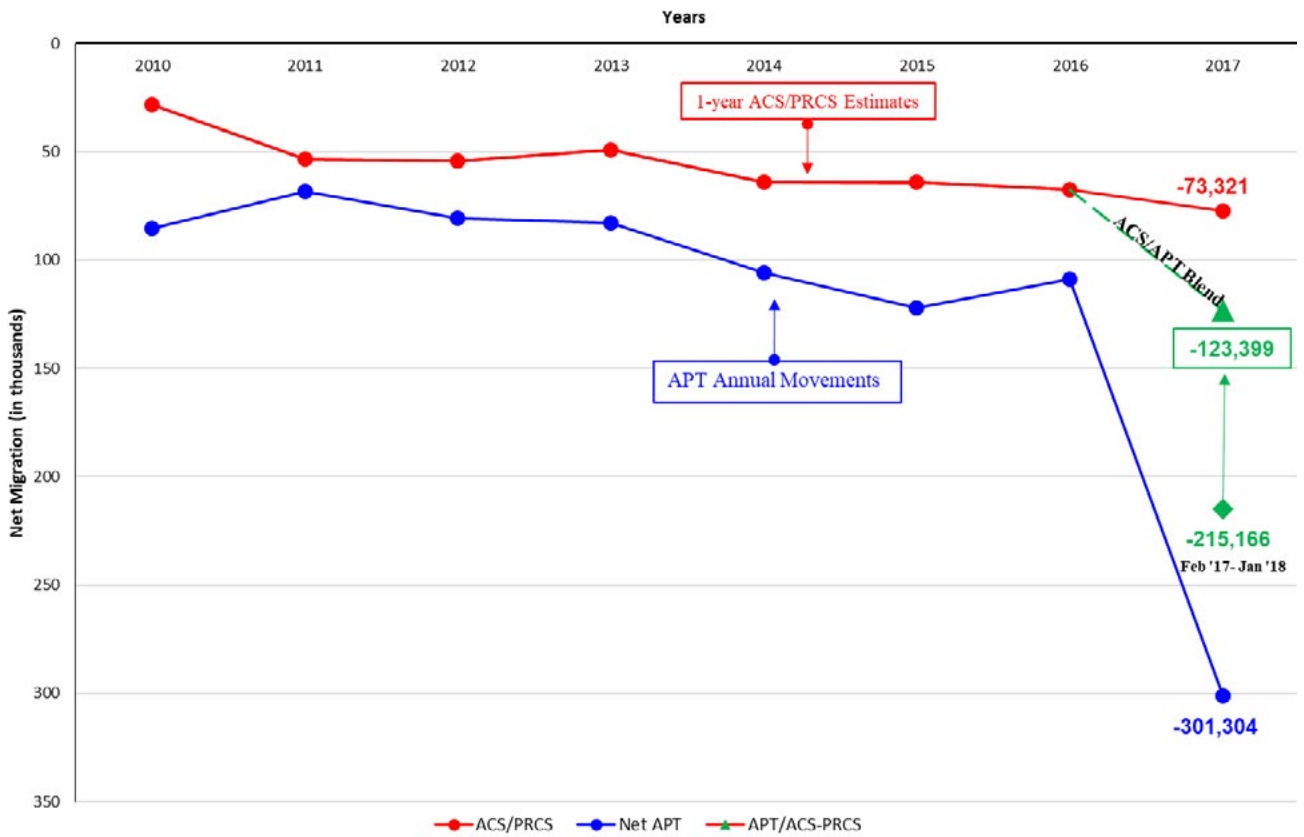
Figure 2 Puerto Rico net migration with the United States, 2010 to 2017

Sources: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey; US Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers.

37. Since previous estimates had been based on the ACS/PRCS, efforts were made to make the two data sources as comparable as possible, compiling monthly flight data for the 2017 calendar year to coincide with the ACS/PRCS estimation period. Flight information was limited to domestic flights between the United States and Puerto Rico, excluding international flights. The method applied a simple ratio, using the ratio of ACS/PRCS-to-APT net migration results over the two years 2015 and 2016. The calculated ratio was applied to the APT Puerto Rico-United States net migration figure measured for calendar year 2017, to remain methodologically consistent with previous ACS/PRCS-based estimates.

38. Since the Census Bureau's 2018 population estimates represent the population on 1 July 2018, return migration to Puerto Rico in early 2018 was also considered. To account for January return migration, the 12-month APT period from February 2017 to January 2018 was used, before applying an adjustment ratio to make the period as ACS-equivalent as possible, while still considering post-Hurricane Maria return migration to Puerto Rico. Shifting the period one month helped account for return migration, yet also kept most months (11 of 12) within the ACS/PRCS-equivalent 2017 calendar year. This modification resulted in an APT-Puerto Rico-United States net migration figure of -215,166, which when adjusted by the APT-ACS ratio yielded a final figure of -123,399 net migration between Puerto Rico and the United States (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Adjusted Puerto Rico net migration with the United States, 2010 to 2017



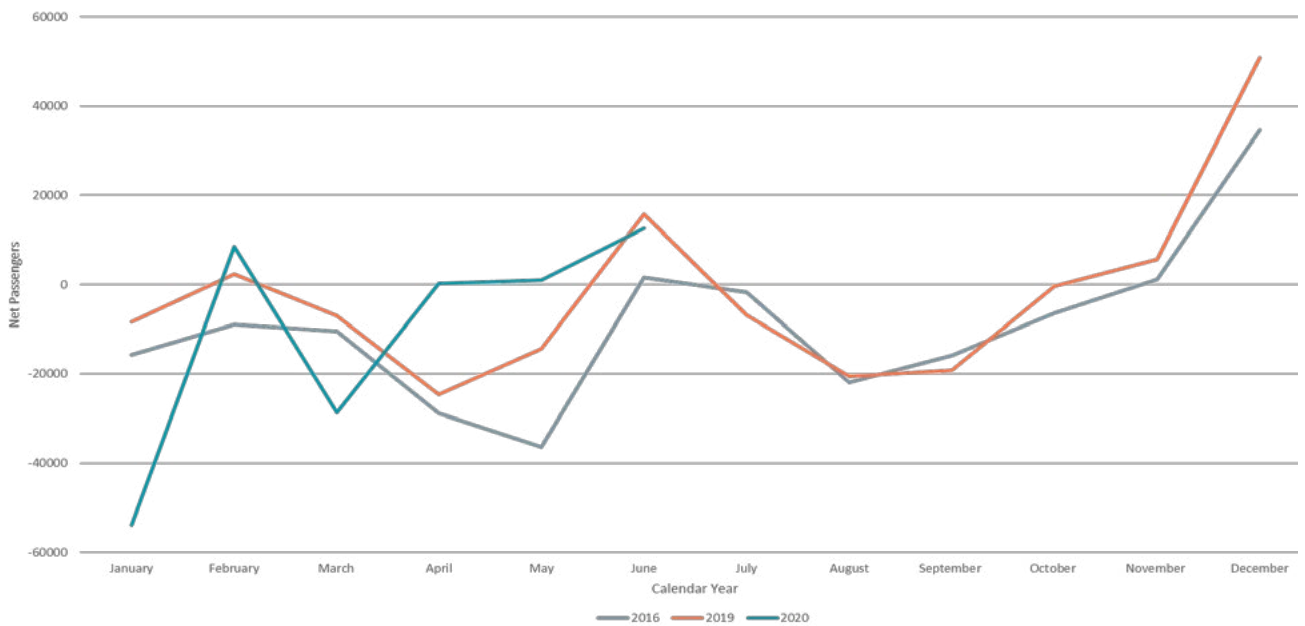
Sources: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey and Puerto Rico Community Survey; US Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers.

2.3.6 COVID-19 adjustment

39. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly impacted movement to and from the United States starting in March 2020. While this had a dramatic impact on international migration flows, it also impacted movement to and from Puerto Rico, particularly towards the beginning of the pandemic. It was anticipated that the 2019 ACS/PRCS (which did not cover the pandemic period) would not be an adequate measure of 2020 Puerto Rico net migration patterns, so APT data were again used to make an adjustment. However, since the start of the pandemic only covered the last third of the estimates year (March-June 2020), the same blended method could not be used as it is based on a full calendar year of APT and ACS/PRCS data. As such, monthly flight data to/from Puerto Rico and the United States were used to make an adjustment to Puerto Rico net migration for the March-June 2020 period.

40. Flight patterns to and from Puerto Rico typically follow consistent patterns (Figure 4). Typically, March through May are net passenger outflow months, while June, the start of the tourist season, is a passenger inflow month. The March 2020 APT data showed a large increase in net passengers to the mainland United States (out of Puerto Rico); April and May showed small positive net gains to Puerto Rico as the number of flights were drastically reduced; and June showed a large positive net gain to Puerto Rico as flights to and from the island increased.

Figure 4 Puerto Rico monthly net flight passenger movements with the United States, 2016, 2019 and 2020



Source: US Bureau of Transportation Statistics Form 41, T100 (International) Segment All Carriers.

41. To calculate the 2020 COVID adjustment factor, using APT data, the net passenger total was calculated for the months of March to June 2020. Next, a ratio was calculated using the historical average net passenger movement for March to June 2010-2019, excluding 2018 (Hurricane Maria), and the March to June 2020 net passenger total. The ACS/PRCS seasonal total was then reduced by multiplying one-third of the 2019 ACS/PRCS annual total by the net passenger movement ratio. For the final estimate, two-thirds of the 2019 ACS/PRCS estimates were applied to the ACS/PRCS reduced seasonal total. The overall impact of the COVID-19 adjustment was reduced net out-migration from Puerto Rico.

4 2017 and 2018 are excluded due to monthly anomalies created by Hurricane Maria.

2.3.7 2021 APT-based method

42. Starting in 2021, the United States Census Bureau used APT data to directly measure net migration to and from Puerto Rico and the rest of the world, although the ACS/PRCS will still be required to estimate inflows, outflows and the demographic characteristics of movers. Moving to a flight-based method to compute net migration will improve the accuracy and recency of net migration estimates for Puerto Rico and reduce the number of future adjustments needed to account for major events impacting migration.

43. There are several inherent limitations with the former methodology that are resolved with a flight-based methodology:

- a. Given that survey data are not produced instantaneously, the timeframe from when the data are collected, processed, and produced is different from the timeframe that is being estimated. Thus, changes in the population are not apparent until the following estimate year.
- b. The methodology only included movement from Puerto Rico to/from the United States with an inaccurate assumption of net zero migration to/from United States Island Areas and foreign countries. The PRCS can measure in-migrants to Puerto Rico from outside the United States but cannot measure out-migrants to abroad.
- c. The period covered by the ACS/PRCS (January-December calendar year) does not align with the estimates year (July-June).
- d. Since 2018, data overrides and projections have been necessary to maintain data accuracy and reliability, which will be less likely in the future.

44. Annual net migration totals will be calculated using in/out passenger flow data for the estimate year (June-July) using APT data: in-bound total passengers to Puerto Rico are subtracted from out-bound total passengers from Puerto Rico to obtain the net migration estimate. This includes international passengers, unlike the “blended method” previously described.

45. Since flight data only give a net flow estimate, and do not include any specific in- or out-migration flows or demographic characteristics, this information will continue to be obtained from the ACS/PRCS. Sex will be tabulated using the one-year PRCS (ROYA) data for migration inflows, and then distributed to single years of age using within-sex proportions from PRCS (ROYA) five-year estimates. This process will be repeated for migration outflows using the ACS (ROYA) one-year estimates for sex and the ACS (ROYA) five-year estimates for age proportions within sex.

46. As previously noted, seasonal variations related to tourism, particularly during the summer and winter months, may lead to trends that require annual fluctuation adjustments. The fluctuation adjustments will be dependent on the measurement period to balance the seasonal inflow and outflow trends.





3. REASONS FOR NOT USING NEW DATA SOURCES

47. Based on the results of the survey, only a small number of countries in the UNECE region currently use or are considering using new data sources, such as big and social media data, for measuring migration and cross-border mobility. Out of 36 countries that responded to the survey, only 5 countries reported on current activities/projects that use new data sources, and 4 more countries are exploring this possibility. So, in total about one quarter of the countries use – or is considering the possible use of - new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

48. Why are most countries not using new data sources for measuring migration and mobility? Do they use new data sources in other statistical fields? What factors can influence – positively or negatively – the use of new data sources for measuring migration and mobility?

3.1 Use of new data sources for producing statistics in other statistical fields

49. The countries that currently are not using new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility were asked in the survey whether new data sources are used by the NSO for producing statistics in other statistical fields. Out of the 24 countries responding to this question, 8 countries (one third) reported using – or testing the use of – new data sources in other statistical fields, while the others replied “no” (9 countries) or “don’t know” (7 countries). Germany reported that new data sources are used for producing experimental statistics in other statistical fields (https://www.destatis.de/EN/Service/EXDAT/_node.html).

50. France and New Zealand reported the use of new data sources to produce statistics on internal migration. In New Zealand, mobile phone data are combined with administrative data on border-crossings to estimate the geographic distribution of international visitors within New Zealand. In addition, integrated administrative data from across a variety of government agencies is used to estimate internal migration. Integrated administrative data are also used to supplement and validate census information, validate official estimates of resident population, and estimate international migration by ethnicity.

51. Four countries reported the use of new data sources to produce statistics on internal mobility and commuting. In Portugal, Facebook’s “Data for Good” Initiative is used to produce population mobility indicators at regional level. In Spain, experimental statistics were produced on commuting through mobile phone data. Switzerland reported a pilot project for collecting data on daily mobility via smartphones: in the framework of a survey, a sample of the participants install an app on their smartphone that collects data on their daily mobility – instead of reporting their moves in a questionnaire. In the United Kingdom, the Data science campus⁵ uses various new data sources, including exploring the use of Facebook data for movements within the country.

5 <https://datasciencecampus.ons.gov.uk/>

52. Six countries reported experiences on the use of new data sources in different areas of economic statistics. In the area of price statistics, Portugal uses web-based data, Lithuania data from supermarkets, and Slovakia both web-scraping and scanner data of retail chains. On tourism statistics, Slovakia uses data from websites of accommodation booking systems, and Spain did some research on the use of credit cards for the estimation of tourism expenditures. On international trade, Portugal reported studies on using internet searches from specific sites to validate statistics on international trade, including on volumes and prices of international trade in electric energy. Portugal also uses the E-invoice system (E-factura) from Tax and Customs Authority for statistics on regional economic activity, and internet searches for online job vacancies and enterprises sites, to produce labour market statistics. Finally, France uses new data sources for statistics on consumption, and the United Kingdom for timelier indicators of the economy.

3.2 Reasons for not using new data sources

53. The 24 countries that do not use new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility were asked in the survey what were the main reasons for that. The survey offered several possible reasons, in addition to allowing a write-in response, and respondents could select up to three reasons (Table 1).

Table 1 Reasons for not using new data sources for international migration statistics

Reasons	Countries (out of 24)
Individual privacy concerns, legal constraints and rules that limit the use of big data and new sources for statistical purposes	12
Already produce high quality statistics about migration through traditional data sources	11
Lack of specialised staff in managing big data	8
Big data are not suitable for official statistical use	6
Lack of agreement among agencies (e.g. NSO and line ministry) and potential providers	3
Lack of funds to access big data	1
Comments and/or other reasons	3

54. The reason mentioned by most countries was **individual privacy concerns, legal constraints and rules that limit the use of big data and new sources for statistical purposes** (12 countries). It would be interesting to have more detailed information on these concerns and issues, and whether they relate to specific data sources. Privacy concerns and legal restrictions may encompass different things (ethical vs. legal reasons). However, unfortunately very limited information was provided by the countries on this. Poland specified that the main obstacle are legal issues, since the use of data from mobile operators would become possible only after the amendment of relevant regulations.

55. Eleven countries replied that they **already produce high quality statistics about migration through traditional data sources**. Several of those countries specified that they use administrative data, and that they consider that new data sources would not give much added value. New Zealand specified that since 2019 (with estimates backdated to 2001) it uses administrative data on travellers crossing the border to estimate international migration with high accuracy and timeliness. New Zealand added that obtaining commercial/non-governmental data sources in a robust and continuous way is generally challenging and does not offer much value above what can be available through an integrated administrative data system.

56. Several countries cited the **lack of specialised staff in managing big data** (8 countries) and the consideration that **big data are not suitable for official statistical use** (6 countries). Some countries provided additional information on the reasons why they consider big data as not suitable for official statistical use. In Slovakia, population and migration statistics are collected by way of exhaustive statistical surveys on population changes (vital events and migration), and administrative data sources are used as supplementing data sources; departments of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic are reporting units for migration statistics. These data sources are a guarantee of the required quality of statistical data. Similarly, in Switzerland, data on international migration flows or the migrant population come mainly from administrative data or survey data that are already available at low cost and of good quality. These data are used for public management and policy-making in the field of migration, and there is no need for more extensive data on population movements. Moreover, Swiss official statistics are mainly focused on the population that is legally and permanently residing in the country. It therefore does not consider populations that are not represented in official registers, such as undocumented migrants or short-term migrants, for whom the use of new data might be more relevant. In Spain, INE worked with mobile phone operators to produce data on commuting (and also, to a lesser extent, on tourism) but no valuable information was produced for migration statistics, and no other suitable big data source was identified. The United Kingdom noted that more assurance is needed on what the new data sources can give for migration statistics. Before using these data in the production of statistics, the data's ability and accuracy to report on migration flows, distinctly from other movements of people, should be verified. In general, with big data it can be difficult to identify migrants or migration within the vast amount of data. For example, with mobile phone data, it is difficult to disentangle movements across borders that are not just visits or short trips.

57. The **lack of agreement among agencies (e.g. NSO and line ministry) and potential providers** was selected as a reason by three countries. In Czechia, migration data are collected from different administrative sources, including the Ministry of the Interior (Foreign Police Service) which is one of the main providers. It was suggested that any initiative to use big data should come from that Ministry, as it would require their modification of the Foreigners' Information System.

58. The **lack of funds to access big data** does not seem to be a major obstacle, as it was cited by only one country.



4. SIGNIFICANT INNOVATIONS ON MEASURING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

59. As detailed in the previous sections, most NSOs that participated in the survey (on the use of alternative data sources in migration statistics) indicated that big data were not currently being used.

60. However, 12 NSOs indicated that they were “working on significant innovations on measuring international migration”, including “new approaches using current sources and/or exploring new data sources”. This section summarises the findings from these responses, split into two themes:

- Changes in data sources from what was being previously used by the NSO.
- New or innovative methodology that NSOs are using on this data, or on their existing data.

4.1 Data-related innovations in measuring international migration

61. Most countries that are exploring data-related innovations were starting to use, extending the use of, or enhancing current estimates using administrative data (also referred to as admin data). Of the respondents mentioned above, eight indicated that they were engaging with administrative data in some way, with different levels of maturity and progress along this path.

62. Three countries indicated that they were using surveying to estimate migration, obtain demographic breakdowns of migration, or for population estimation. In some cases, these were supplementing administrative data driven measures.

4.1.1 Summary of administrative data use

63. Countries are at different levels of maturity in their use of administrative data (Table 2). This section uses country examples based on detailed responses to the survey to highlight different stages of development and the types of approaches that are being explored in the administrative data space.

Table 2 Summary of use and exploration of administrative data for estimating international migration across respondent countries

Maturity of administrative data use	Country	Details of use
Exploration/early development	France	A project is underway to use and merge administrative data for estimating migration.
	Portugal	Exploring administrative data for annual resident population estimates and achieve coherence between migration flows and migrant stocks.
Mature development/pre-production	Armenia	Use of population register with border management data is planned for use in 2022 Census. After census, these sources may be used for migration measurement.
	Hungary	Improving migration statistics based on multiple administrative sources (mainly population and address register, foreign citizens register, social security register).
	Slovakia	2021 Census based on integration of administrative data with additional migration data from statistical surveys.
	United Kingdom	Shifting from survey-based migration statistics to new measures based on administrative data.
	United States	Use of use complete flight data to estimate net migration for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, supplemented by demographic attributes from survey data.
In production	New Zealand	Administrative data are used as the main source for migration estimates, with statistical models used to give early provisional estimates.
	Switzerland	Has very mature and embedded usage of administrative data in the production of statistics. Currently developing the production of longitudinal data on international migration flows based on their already mature register data.

4.1.2 Selected examples on innovations with administrative data

Portugal

64. Statistics Portugal is studying and exploring the use of administrative data in the production of official population statistics, based on a variety of sources including:

- national population civil register
- foreign population register
- education attainment register
- tax register
- social security register
- employment and unemployment registers.

65. These records are being used to construct a resident population database, to be updated annually. In transitioning to the use of administrative data, coherence between migration flows and migrant stocks is a key concern. Comparing the resident population between reference dates can be used to measure migrant stocks, but this does not give the gross migration flows between the reference dates. Statistics Portugal is currently studying methods to overcome the challenges and limitations of the administrative data sources to measure migration flows.

Armenia

66. Armenia is planning to use a Population Register in combination with data from their Border Management Information System, for the 2022 Population Census. For the first time, these administrative data will be combined with a large sample survey (involving 25% of the addresses in the population register). This census approach has the potential to give new measures of migration and mobility. The systems for the combining of administrative data and the survey are in their final stage of development.

United Kingdom

67. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is moving towards an administrative data-based measure of migration, replacing the measures based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which had long-recognised limitations. This has been further accelerated by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the IPS to be suspended by the ONS in 2020, although it has now resumed, focusing on international travellers. The ONS is using a variety of administrative sources, mainly integrated through their Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID)⁶ developed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This gives a single coherent view of interactions across the systems in DWP, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and local authorities via Housing Benefits. These interactions include income support benefits, employment, self-employment, pensions and in-work benefit.

68. Adjustments are made to account for the variety of migrant types that have differing levels of representation across the administrative system. To overcome the lags associated with classifying migration based on this data, the ONS also undertakes modelling to estimate migration flows, discussed in the earlier section National experiences with big data and new data sources.

⁶ RAPID contains a record of everyone who has a National Insurance number. For more detail, see [International migration: developing our approach for producing admin-based migration estimates: Measuring international migration with administrative data](#).

4.1.3 Summary of survey data use

69. Table 3 summarises how survey data are used or explored by the countries who responded.

Table 3 Summary of use and exploration of survey data across respondent countries, by estimated stage of maturity in development and use of administrative data, based on the responses received

Maturity of survey data use	Country	Details of use
Mature development/ pre-production	Armenia	A 25% sample survey will be used to supplement the administrative data based on 2022 Census. (See earlier section Armenia)
	Czechia	Migration data from Labour Force Survey, including date of migration and place of birth of parents.
	United States	Survey provides age-sex attributes of migrant flows for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

4.2 Methodology-related innovations in measuring international migration

70. Some countries also indicated details about methodological developments, independent of data driven innovations, that they were undertaking. Elaboration was given by New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and they will be used as brief examples of different methodological innovations that are taking place.

4.2.1 Selected examples of methodological innovation

New Zealand

71. New Zealand collects arrival and departure information, based on travellers' passports and flights for all passengers. Using these data, it has developed an outcomes-based measure of migration, which classifies immigrants and emigrants based on the amount of time a traveller spends in or out of the country.⁷ In general this requires observations of a travellers' border-crossings for up to 16 months, which necessarily introduces a delay in producing timely finalised estimates of migration. Therefore, Statistics New Zealand uses a predictive machine learning model to give provisional estimates of migration, based on predictively classifying border-crossings.

⁷ Details of the specific classification rules are available at [Migration Data Transformation: The 12/16-month rule](#).

72. The model learns about the features of border crossings that make them more or less likely to be migrant crossings, by looking at millions of historical records. The model looks at “features” in the historical border-crossing data, such as the direction of crossing, and date of the crossing, the amount of time in/out of country, the amount of time that has passed since the border crossing. It also learns about attributes from the passport data, such as the age, sex, and citizenship of travellers, and the broad type of visa they hold. Each of the records also has information on whether a particular crossing was a migrant crossing or not (the outcome). This allows the model to establish links between different combinations of the features above, and the likelihood that a crossing is a migrant crossing. The model uses a technique called gradient boosting to do the learning. This is implemented using a well-established algorithm called “[XGBoost](#)”.

73. This process creates an ensemble of predictors that can be applied to border crossings where the outcome is unknown, based on the features in unknown border crossings. Using the established probabilities, the number of migrant crossings for a particular reference period, aggregated by different attributes, including age, sex, and country of previous residence are estimated.

United Kingdom

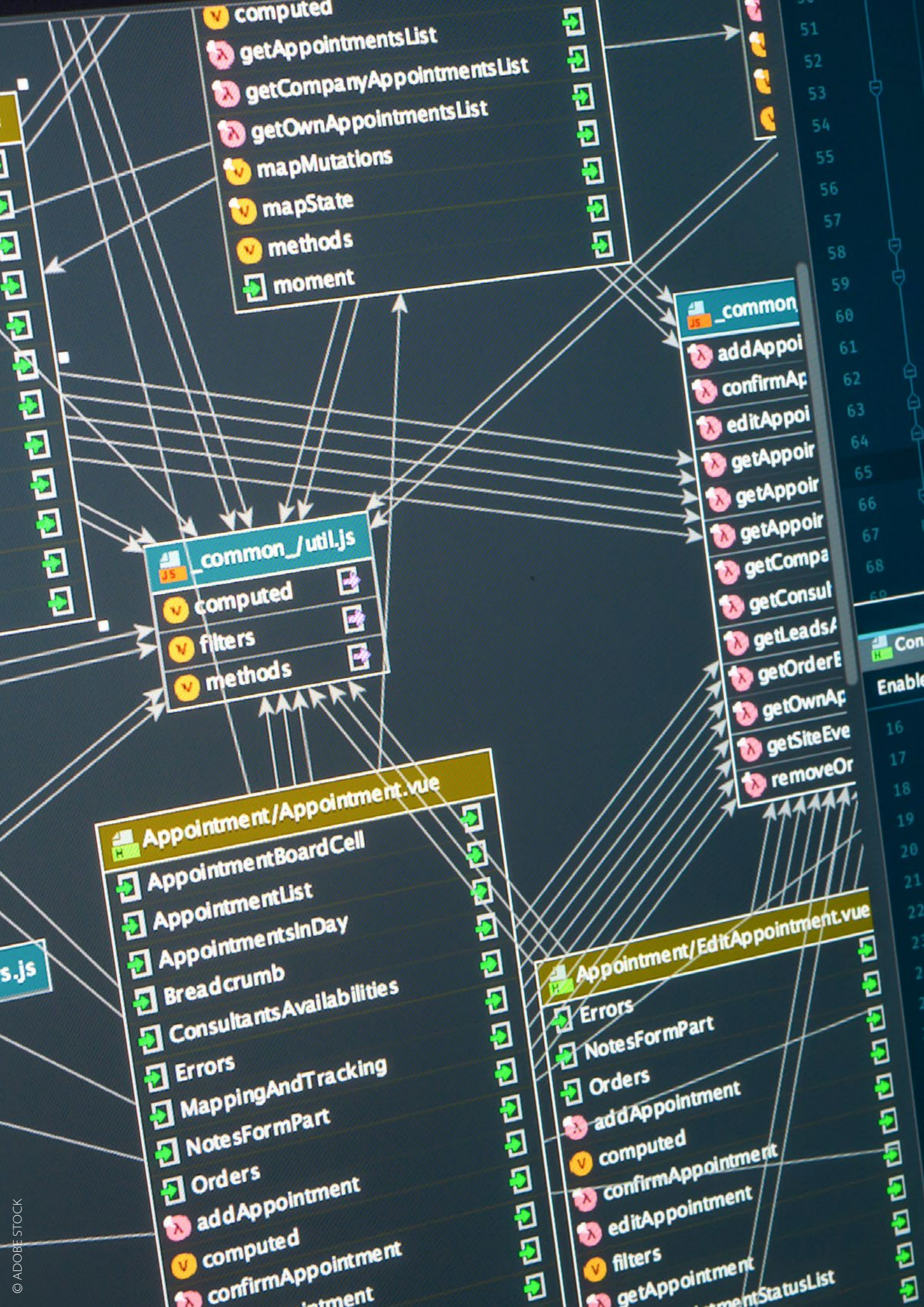
74. As briefly discussed above, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is moving to administrative data for its measurement of migration. Migration is estimated based on indicators of activity within the data. In general, arrivals with 12 months of activity are classified as migrants, although some exceptions and adjustments are required (details are available in footnote 6 above). In addition to the adjustments for coverage and other factors, the ONS is also developing modelling methodology to increase the timeliness of migration estimates, given that, by the current standard definition, a minimum of 12 months must pass for classifications to be available through observing activity in the administrative data for 12 months.⁸ Although the ONS are exploring the use of a broader set of definitions to sit alongside the UN metric. These will aim to provide real-time measures of the population and address increasing user demand for these measures that has intensified during the pandemic.

75. The United Kingdom is exploring the use of state-space models to complement the administrative data driven approach, which may be able to give provisional predicted migration. These models have so far been used to estimate migration up to December 2020.⁹ The intention, as presented in literature published by the ONS, is to explore the use of such models to improve the timeliness of the administrative data driven migration estimates discussed previously.¹⁰

8 Details on the timeliness of the methods and latest developments are available at [International migration statistical design progress report](#)

9 Main findings from the latest modelling estimates are presented in [Long-term international migration, provisional: year ending December 2020](#)

10 Discussion of the implications and limitations of the modelling, and future use, is presented in [Using statistical modelling to estimate UK international migration: Discussion](#).



5. A LITERATURE REFERENCE TOOL: DIMiS

76. There are several papers on migration using innovative data sources, published in the scientific journals or as working papers, of potential interest for official statisticians.¹¹ In order to bridge the gap between research and practice, the Task force selected some of those papers and, with the support of the UNECE Secretariat, developed a database containing references of published works in migration-related matters using innovative methods and/or new data sources. This **Database on Innovations in Migration Statistics (DIMiS)**¹² is meant to raise the awareness about the scientific progress in this domain and to make it easier the access to relevant information for official statisticians and general practitioners interested to the subject. DIMiS aims to cover studies using 'non-traditional' data sources as well as innovative methods applied to 'traditional' data sources, relevant to producing statistics on migration (in its broader meaning).

77. For this initial version of the database, about one hundred papers have been identified, covering topics such as international migration, internal migration, human mobility, population displacement, and population distribution. Of those papers, only those applying to the migration stocks and flows (either international or internal) have been included in this first list. Depending upon the interest of the users, the range of topics can be enlarged or further disaggregated (e.g. distinguishing between flows and stocks, or specific for asylum seekers and refugees, integration of migrants, etc) in future versions of DIMiS.

78. DIMiS is structured according to a set of key variables that can be used as filter(s):

1. **Author(s):** names of the author(s). The first author's name is presented with the surname first, followed by the initial(s) of the first and middle names. For all the other authors, first the initial of the forename and then the full surname is listed. The list of authors is reported entirely and thus not abbreviated with "*et al.*" It is therefore possible either to search for a specific surname, or to sort the articles by first author's name.
2. **Year:** year of publication. When the online publication year is different from the printed publication year, it is preferred the most recent year, as this may correspond to a version including corrigendum. For non-peer-reviewed articles, for instance such as those in SocArXiv (the open archive of the social sciences), it is taken the year of first uploading/dissemination, as the paper may undergo several revisions over time, also after its inclusion in DIMiS.
3. **Title:** title of the article. No uniform style as for the use of capital letters, which mimics the one adopted in the articles.

11 A review of selected scientific works is done in: Bosco, C., Grubanov-Boskovic, S., Iacus, S., Minora, U., Sermi, F. and Spyrtatos, S., Data Innovation in Demography, Migration and Human Mobility, EUR 30907 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-46702-1, doi:10.2760/958409, JRC127369.

12 <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/DIMiS>

4. **Journal:** scientific journal/book/research project/website repository that contains the paper. No uniform style applied.
5. **Abstract:** the published summary of the purpose, method, and outcome of the article – when available.
6. **Topic(s):** the main migration-related aspect discussed in the article/paper. The following categories have been considered for this initial version of the database:
 - a) international migration;
 - b) internal migration;¹³
 - c) human mobility;
 - d) population displacement;
 - e) population mapping/distribution;
 - f) other.

Only the papers whose topic covers the first two categories above are included for now in DIMiS, even though they may cover other topics as well. Multiple topics covered in a single paper are listed sequentially in the field, in accordance with the list above. Therefore, it will not be possible to find papers that are exclusively in any category(-ies) other than a) or b), but it is possible to find papers covering also categories c) and/or further.

7. **Geography:** the country(-ies) covered by the study, with the pertinent sub-national geographic area(s) indicated between parentheses. In the case of purely methodological papers or for review articles exploring the state of play of the scientific literature, this key does not apply and the field is filled with “not applicable”.
8. **Data Sources:** the source of the data used in the article. The following categories have been considered:
 - a) Mobile Network Operator(s) (MNO)
 - b) Social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, LinkedIn)
 - c) Search engines (e.g. Google)
 - d) Web demographics (databases of personal microdata that are available on the World Wide Web)
 - e) Registers (administrative data)
 - f) Survey (e.g. census, household sample)
 - g) Others (such as emails, internet providers, traffic data, satellite images, specific databases).

In general, a data source has its own category when there are at least two articles using that. An article may exploit one or more data sources, which are all reported in this field. To the possible extent, the specific data source is reported between parenthesis (e.g. Facebook within the ‘Social media’ category). Users can then run a query searching for all papers using a category of data source (e.g. MNO), or a specific one (e.g. Twitter).

13 In this publication, migration between USA and Puerto Rico is classified as internal migration.

79. Of the 52 papers included in this initial version of DIMiS, 36 articles are on international migration (alone or covering also other topics), 23 on internal migration (alone or covering also other topics), and 7 papers cover both international and internal migration (see Table 4).

Table 4 Articles in DIMiS by topic

Topic	Number of articles
internal migration	9
internal migration / human mobility	4
internal migration / population displacement	3
international migration	25
international migration / human mobility	1
international migration / internal migration	3
international migration / internal migration / human mobility	4
international migration / population displacement	3
Total	52

80. As for the geography, the United States of America is the prominent country in terms of applications (14 papers), but European countries, and particularly the EU Member States, are well represented. There are also 5 articles with African countries (Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, and Senegal) and 6 papers whose application is on all countries of the world (even if not all results are reported).

Table 5 Articles in DIMiS by geography

Geography	Number of articles
Belgium, France, United States	1
Canada	1
China	2
Estonia	1
EU Member States	2
EU Member States, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom	1
EU Member States, Iraq, Syria	1
EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland	1
EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland, United Kingdom	1
France	1
France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom	1

Table 5 Articles in DIMiS by geography (continued)

Geography	Number of articles
Kenya	1
Namibia	1
OECD Member States	2
Portugal	1
Romania, United Kingdom	1
Rwanda	2
Senegal, United States	1
Switzerland	1
Türkiye	1
United Kingdom	1
United States	4
United States (California, Texas)	1
United States (Puerto Rico)	3
United States (Texas)	2
Venezuela	2
World	6
not applicable	9
Total	52

81. Among the articles listed in DIMiS, the most used data sources are the social media (21 papers), particularly Facebook and Twitter with respectively 6 and 4 scientific papers (see Table 6). Data from Mobile Network Operators are also extensively used (14 articles) but – unlike social media – mostly for internal migration. It is interesting to note that there are also works that use jointly ‘non-traditional’ and ‘traditional’ (e.g. registers and surveys) data sources, or apply innovative methods on the former. The range of ‘non-traditional’ data sources goes well beyond the usual MNOs and social media, as shown also in the category ‘Others’.

82. DIMiS is released in a provisional format open to further improvements and it is accessible at <https://statswiki.unece.org/display/DIMiS>. In particular, as new experiences emerge in future, a mechanism for updating it with additional papers will be needed. Feedback from DIMiS users will be crucial to develop this initial version in a reference tool useful for official statisticians and would-be big data practitioners in general.

Table 6 Articles in DIMiS by data source

Data source	Number of articles
MNO	9
MNO / Social media	4
MNO / Survey (census)	1
Search engine(s)	3
Search engine(s) (Google)	2
Search engine(s) (Google) / Registers (irregular border crossing, asylum applications) / Others (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone)	1
Social media	7
Social media (Facebook)	4
Social media (Facebook, LinkedIn)	1
Social media (Facebook, Twitter)	1
Social media (LinkedIn)	1
Social media (Twitter)	3
Web demographics	2
Registers (irregular border crossing, asylum applications) / Others (Global Database on Events, Language and Tone)	1
Registers / Survey (Labour Force Survey)	1
Survey (Consumer Credit Panel)	1
Others (big data in general)	5
Others (flight passenger data)	1
Others (Microsoft Academic Knowledge Graph)	1
Others (mobile money transfer service)	1
Others (Yahoo! emails)	1
Others (Yahoo! users)	1
Total	52



6. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

83. Experiences of NSOs are **limited in the use** of big data and the material collected for this publication might not be sufficient to provide specific recommendations. However, the **potential of new data sources** to address both persistent and emerging migration issues and urgent data needs is promising. Sharing and updating of relevant **information and tools facilitates the use** of big data and new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

6.1 Limited use so far

84. Many countries face limitations on the use of big data; in particular, many countries reported individual privacy concerns, legal constraints and rules as the reason for not using new data sources. To address this, it is important to consider ethical and privacy issues in the international debate. At the same time, it is important to use methodologies and techniques that maintain the confidentiality of information while enabling statisticians and researchers to utilise the potential of big data. However, using innovative data sources such as social media data and taking care of the individual privacy and the public confidence can be a challenging combination.

85. Many countries currently prefer focusing their efforts on the use of administrative data and the integration of data from different sources, which may be related to difficulties in accessing big data. Administrative data sources could be used further. For example, persons seeking asylum and illegal immigrants may not be counted in official migration statistics, sometimes due to the lack of identification numbers. Tackling these limitations in registration data would improve the quality of migration statistics. Considering administrative data, what is a new data source for one country is sometimes a traditional source for another country. Usability depends on many different aspects such as the specific history of the countries, the legal and institutional frameworks and the available resources.

86. Even in countries that reported several experiences on the use of big data in other statistical sectors (tourism, commuting, economics, etc), the exploitation of big data in the field of measuring migration is still limited. There are many reasons for this. Many countries have a long and shared history of migration statistics, and have often shared using international standards and definitions with international organisations. According to the survey, these countries tend to prefer to strengthen the quality of traditional data rather than explore new data sources which require overcoming multiple administrative and legal obstacles.

6.2 Potential benefits

87. The analysis carried out by the Task force confirms the potential of new data sources for measuring migration, including emerging patterns of migration and cross-border mobility, and for addressing urgent data needs arising from unexpected natural events (pandemics, hurricanes, etc) and geo-political events (wars, persecutions, political crises, etc).

88. Big data and new data sources could help bridge the gap between the need for timely information and the time required by the official statistical collection process. They could therefore play an important role in improving the quality of currently produced statistics. Many countries are moving towards integrated statistical systems, and new data sources could be important resources to be integrated into these systems. It is therefore hoped that in new integrated statistical systems for measuring migration, big data and new data sources will find an appropriate place and can enhance the quality of migration statistics.

6.3 Next steps – maintaining the Database of Innovation in Migration Statistics

89. This publication shows ongoing work on the use of big data and new data sources in NSOs, which are expected to be useful for countries interested to work in this area.

90. The Task force created the Database of Innovation in Migration Statistics (DIMiS) to expand the perspective by including research and studies about migration and big data conducted outside NSOs, such as articles and papers dealing with big data for migration statistics (including international migration, human mobility, internal migration, etc). The Database facilitates exchange of information about projects, data integration, modelling approaches and best practices to enable NSOs to consider research experiences around the world in different fields of migration studies.

91. NSOs and researchers are encouraged to report any new experiences and publications to UNECE so that the Database can be regularly updated. DIMiS is not an exhaustive repository, but it is intended as a first step towards a living repository that should be constantly fed with new experiences to facilitate the sharing of projects based on new data sources.

92. The Database is intended to be flexible. The information included could vary and increase as the experiences become broader and more complex, allowing DIMiS to become a key reference supporting NSOs in the use of new data sources and related method.

Use of new data sources for measuring international migration

Migration and other forms of cross-border mobility are issues of high policy importance. Demands for statistics in these areas have further increased in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The statistical community continues to be challenged to capture international migration and cross-border mobility in a way that would meet the growing needs of users.

Measurement of migration and cross-border mobility relies on a variety of sources, such as population and housing censuses, household surveys and administrative records, with each of them having their own strengths and limitations.

New non-conventional data sources, such as data gathered from the use of mobile telephones, credit cards and social networks — generally known as big and social media data — could be useful for producing migration statistics when used in combination with conventional sources. Notwithstanding the challenges of accessibility, accuracy and access to these new sources, examples are emerging that highlight their potential.

In 2020 the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) set up a task force to review existing experience and plans for using new data sources for measuring international migration in national statistical offices and outside official statistics; analyse the material collected; and compile the examples into a reference tool.

This publication presents the results of the work of the task force, including various national experiences with big data and new data sources collected through two surveys among countries. It concludes that national statistical offices have limited experiences in the use of new data sources for migration statistics. However, the potential of new data sources to address emerging migration issues and urgent data needs is promising. Sharing and updating of relevant information and tools will facilitate the use of big data and new data sources for measuring migration and cross-border mobility.

The publication was endorsed by the 70th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians in 2022.

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