

SURVEYS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION: ISSUES AND TIPS

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A. INTRODUCTION: WHY USE SURVEYS

Most countries collect information on international migration using traditional data collection systems, such as population censuses, continuous population registers, and border or admission statistics. These systems provide data on the number of international migrants, and occasionally on certain limited characteristics of the migrants, such as age and sex, and also country of birth or previous residence (if immigrant) or country of destination (if emigrant). However, none of these systems can collect the type of detailed data necessary for characterizing international migration in more depth or for studying either the determinants of international migration or its consequences for migrants and their households. Only a household survey can provide such data. In a household survey it is also possible to recruit and train highly qualified interviewers.

Apart from the lack of detail, existing national statistical systems also cannot collect information on the situation of migrants prior to migration, which is vital for investigating either the determinants or consequences of migration (Bilsborrow et al., 1997). A population census, for example, enumerates the population living in households at the time of the census. Accordingly, censuses usually do not collect information about emigrants, since they are not present at the time of enumeration.

Because of the limitations of censuses and other national data collection systems for collecting data on international migrants, specialized surveys of international migration constitute an invaluable complement to those systems. Surveys can involve the use of questionnaires that are long enough to collect data to identify international migrants on the basis of place of birth, country of citizenship or previous place of residence if different from the place of residence at the time of the survey. They can also collect detailed data on the situation of the migrant and the migrant's household before and after migration, permitting the study of the determinants or consequences of international migration (op. cit.). It is also easier to include specific questions in surveys enquiring about emigrants from the household—those who have left to live in another country—as well as about former emigrants who have returned.

Since traditional national data collection systems gather data on the number of international migrants, and surveys can provide detail on their

should not include persons who are not of interest. Thus for a survey on international migration, the first challenge is the preparation of a complete list of international migrants.

C. WHAT KIND OF SURVEY IS NEEDED?

The least expensive option is to use, when possible, data from an existing household survey. While most surveys in most countries are too small to provide data on an adequate number of recent migrants, there are exceptions, the most common being labour force surveys. They have the advantages of usually being carried out more or less regularly, even in many developing countries; implemented by national statistical offices; based on large sample sizes (50,000 to 100,000 households or more), and using questionnaires that already include useful information for studying migration, including demographic characteristics, marital status, employment and wages, etc. Thus adding questions to the labour force surveys to identify immigrants or emigrants can be done parsimoniously.

While labour force surveys can often provide some basic information about migrants, the migration-specific questions that can be added are limited, restricting what can be learned about the determinants or consequences of international migration. Moreover, in many countries there is no recent, large-scale labour force survey.

Alternatively, a specialized household international migration survey can be designed to efficiently collect data on a sample of migrants and appropriate non-migrants, using specialized sampling methods such as stratification, oversampling of areas with high proportions of migrants of interest, and two-phase sampling of households (Bilborrow et al., 1997).

D. WHO SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE SURVEY? THE ISSUE OF APPROPRIATE COMPARISON GROUPS TO STUDY THE DETERMINANTS OF MIGRATION

Migration can be viewed as a social experiment, in which people, by moving in a particular fashion are subjected to a “treatment”. In order to study the effects of this “treatment” on them and their households, it is necessary to compare immigrants with an appropriate group of persons who are not subjected to the “treatment”.

The appropriate comparison group for studying the determinants of migration is other persons and households that were “at risk” of migration but who did not (e)migrate. This group must have lived in the same area as the emigrants during the same ti aneratio 0 TD.0019 aln2e()TJ2oeio 0 TDote sar

surveyed in the destination country with data on non-emigrant households remaining in the origin in a survey in the country of origin.

The above approach is ideal since it obtains data directly from the persons making the decision, to migrate or not to migrate. But it involves a higher data collection cost as a survey

country of origin to collect data on the status of non-migrants (a) at the mean time of emigration of the immigrants for whom data are collected in the destination country survey, and (b) at the time of the survey. The difference in their situation at time (a) and time (b) shows the extent to which they improved their situation (or not) by remaining in the origin country.

For the migrants, viewed as immigrants in the destination country or emigrants in the origin country, the change in their situation following migration is, similarly, the difference between their situation (i) at the time of emigration, in the origin country, and (ii) their situation at the time of the survey, when they are interviewed in the destination country. Then the proper assessment of the extent to which migrants benefited from international migration is to compare the difference between (ii) and (i) and that between (b) and (a). If the former, say, positive change is greater than the latter, it can be said that the migrants benefited from migration.

This requires two surveys in two countries, one on immigrants in the destination country, and the other on non-migrants in the origin country. It should be stressed that the collection of data on non-migrants in the destination country is not useful for a proper evaluation of the consequences of migration. However, it is useful for studying integration, as indicated above.

The advantage of the two-country approach above for analyzing the consequences of migration is that data are collected directly from the relevant persons themselves and may hence be presumed to be of adequate quality. Thus, for example, the immigrant provides not only his or her current information but also retrospective information on his or her other situation in the country of origin prior to departing. The discussion here applies equally to the situation of immigrant households observed in destination countries and non-migrant households observed at the place of origin.

A less costly but less satisfactory data collection approach is to carry out a survey only in the origin country, in which a proxy respondent in households with an emigrant is asked about (i) and (ii), that is, about the situation of the emigrant in the origin country just prior to migration and the situation at the time of the survey in the country of destination. This is less satisfactory since the proxy respondent may not have accurate information on the current situation of the emigrant in the destination country. This is especially true the more years that have elapsed since the emigrant has been in the origin household—another reason for focusing on recent migration.

The above discussion is limited to only two countries, that is, specifying what countries should be used for studying the determinants of a particular migration flow from a single country of origin to a single country of destination. Evidently, such an approach is more useful if such a migration flow is a major outflow from the origin country and a major inflow in the country of destination. However, in many if not most situations, those emigrating from a country have several major countries of destination. Similarly, most immigrants to a country of destination usually come from several countries of origin. Therefore, the ideal approach would be to conduct linked surveys of migrants and non-migrants in both countries of origin and destination, in particular, those linked in a migration system (Kritz and Zlotnik, 1992).

F. EXAMPLES

There are very few examples of such origin-destination linked country surveys to investigate

near future, given the attention for international migration movements and their potential role in socio-economic development of low-income countries.

One interesting example of a multiple-country survey project linking countries of origin and destination is the push-pull project of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (NIDI) and Eurostat in 1997-1998, which examined the processes and determinants of migration flows from selected countries of Africa and the Middle East to the European Union (Schoorl et al., 2000). Surveys were carried out in Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey, as countries of origin, and in Italy and Spain as countries of destination. Common methodologies were used, in terms of sample design and questionnaires, with sample sizes being generally between 1,000 to 2,000 households. Migrants were defined as persons leaving or arriving in the 10 years prior to the survey.

In origin countries, any household reporting an emigrant in the past ten years was considered a migrant household, regardless of destination. But only two immigrant flows were covered in the surveys in the two destination countries, those from Morocco and Senegal in Spain, and those from Egypt and Ghana in Italy. Thus to study the determinants or consequences of migration from Morocco to Spain, data are available from the survey in Spain on immigrants from Morocco, which may be compared with (pooled together, for statistical analysis of determinants of consequences) non-immigrants interviewed in Morocco, the country of origin. The same is true for Senegalese immigrants in Spain, who may be compared with non-migrants in Senegal. And a similar situation exists for Italy, where migrants from Egypt and Ghana may be combined with non-migrants interviewed in those countries, respectively, for analysis.

G. CONCLUSION

The field of migration is still in its infancy, partly due to the lack of adequate data sets for investigating either the determinants or consequences of migration, especially international migration. Data collection in more than one country is strongly recommended but more expensive and complex to coordinate, so almost all research to date is based on less than satisfactory data sets from only one country. In addition, existing studies rarely focus on migrants who move as both individuals and households, and almost never collect data at the correct times, which involves additional cha

REFERENCES