

## KEY READINGS

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# 27 Migration

## Stocks and Flows

*Definition: 'Stocks' and 'flows' are basic demographic concepts used to analyse and understand migration processes in a country or region. Migration stocks are the numbers of migrants living in a country or region at a given point in time. Migration flows are the number of migrants entering or leaving a country or region during a specific period of time.*

The concepts of migration stocks and flows emerged when nation-states started to measure and analyse the features of the population living in their territories. They are closely related to methods of identifying individuals (e.g. passports, residence permits and border controls) and statistical instruments (the census and the population registers) that emerged in European and North American countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As modern nation-states were constructed, these tools were used by governments to specify who could benefit from welfare and who had to pay taxes. In the context of nineteenth-century European wars, these instruments were also designed to keep foreigners under surveillance (Noiriel 1998; Torpey 2000). More generally, the emergence of migration stocks and flows as concepts is related to the construction of the 'national' as a category of identification by states, who aimed to distinguish citizens from foreigners. France was one of the first European countries to use data of this sort to make an 'inventory' of foreigners living in its territory. The first official measurements of an

immigrant stock included the 1851 census (Silberman 1992), which estimated that immigrants were 1 per cent of the population living in the French territory. In the USA, the 1850 census established that 9.7 per cent of the population living in the territory were immigrants (Thernstrom 1992).

Today, the measurement of immigration stocks and flows is also used to observe trends in the composition and growth (or decline) of the population living in a country. These statistics also relate to more general political and ideological issues. Massey argues that the measurement of migration is related to issues of 'identity, citizenship, belonging, and entitlement' and that 'an international move is much more than a demographic fact, therefore; it is a social, economic, and political event with strong and often competing interests in how it is defined and measured' (2010b: 126). Figures on migration stocks and flows are used to define general orientations in policies related to immigration and citizenship. These indicators can also influence the orientation of foreign policies (as when one country experiences significant immigration inflows from another) or affirmative action policies in the countries that implement them. As observed by scholars drawing on the concept of cumulative causation, the directions and strength of migration flows connect to the features of migration stocks. The existence of a significant migration stock originating in a specific region usually leads to the self-perpetuation of the flow that produced it. Figures on migration stocks are thus used to estimate the characteristics of future migration flows in a country, and so to analyse the evolution of its population in the long term.

The measurement of migration stocks and flows depends on definitions of migration, because those definitions determine who can be counted as a migrant. The task of definition raises many difficulties for demographers and others who 'measure' migration. For example, how do we distinguish immigrants from tourists? How do we distinguish immigrants from border workers (those living in a country and crossing the border every day to work in another country)? Should we count foreign-born naturalized citizens as immigrants? Definitions of 'migrants' can vary across countries and over time. The majority of countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD – a 'club' of the world's wealthiest countries) define the immigrant population by country of origin/birth (e.g. Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States); others use citizenship or nationality as the key criterion (e.g. France, Germany, Japan and Spain). These differences have major implications for measuring immigration. For example, in the first set of countries figures on migrant stocks include immigrants who have become citizens, while in the second group migration statistics do not include naturalized citizens. Depending on legislation regarding citizenship and naturalization, the second group can also include children and grandchildren of immigrants in the migration stock, i.e., if it is difficult for them to gain citizenship/nationality. Again, these approaches can change: in Germany until the end of the 1990s, most descendants of immigrants did not have German nationality (even if born in Germany) and were therefore immigrants – but acquiring German nationality subsequently became significantly easier, with direct implications for the evolution of data on immigrants.

A deeper analysis of migration stocks and flows requires distinguishing between different categories of migrants: migrant workers, refugees, international students and long-term vs. short-term migrants. Again, there are challenges here for demographers. For example, how can we distinguish a migrant worker from a migrant student when an individual works part-time and/or wishes to remain and work in the country after completing their studies? What is the duration of stay that distinguishes a long-term migrant from a short-term migrant? Here as well, definitions of these categories can vary across countries and over time. For example, since the end of the 1980s, most European countries have changed their definition of 'refugees' and established a set of new criteria for granting this status. Consequently, an increasing number of asylum seekers could not enter the territory of these countries as refugees, and this specific migration flow has decreased in relative terms (Legoux 2012). These difficulties also apply to researchers who wish to compare migration flows in different countries, a point apparent in a discussion of how to define 'foreign workers' (Bartram 2012).

International organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union and the OECD have made considerable efforts to harmonize definitions of migration stocks and flows across countries. In 1976, the UN Statistics Division published *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration* (revised in 1998) and provided some basic definitions that can serve as references. It is thus recommended to define a migrant on the basis of country of residence rather than of citizenship: 'an international migrant is defined as any person who changes his or her country of usual residence' (United Nations 1998: 84). From this perspective, the migration stock is defined as

the set of persons who have ever changed their country of usual residence, that is to say, persons who have spent at least one year of their lives in a country other than the one in which they lived at the time the data are gathered. (United Nations 1998: 18)

For defining migration flows, it is recommended to distinguish long-term migrants ('a person moving out of his usual country of residence for a period of at least twelve months') from short-term migrants ('a person moving out of his usual country of residence for a period of at least three months but less than twelve months'). Based on these definitions, the UN calculated that the international migration stock in the world was 155,518,065 in 1990, and 195,245,404 in 2005 (2.9 and 3.1 per cent of the global population, respectively) (United Nations 2009). Migration stocks have increased significantly in Europe and North America since 1990: migrants were 6.9 per cent of the European population in 1990 and 8.8 per cent in 2005; they were 9.8 per cent of the North American population in 1990 and 13.6 per cent in 2005 (United Nations 2009).

Challenges of defining migration stocks and flows are coupled with difficulties of data collection. For example, in many countries, data on inflows are collected at the border, when a migrant enters the country. However, these data reflect the declared intention to stay and not necessarily the actual stay in a country. For example, an immigrant can state an intention to enter the country as a student but then look for

a job and even abandon their studies completely. Also, a migrant can enter the country as a tourist or short-term migrant and then decide to remain in the country after the legal period of stay has expired. These difficulties also relate to the data collected within the country. In particular, although some estimates exist (e.g. the Clandestino project), it is usually very difficult to know with any real precision the number of undocumented migrants living in a country.

Definitions of migration stocks and flows can also vary significantly beyond the contributions of researchers and government agencies. When the mass media, political leaders and various social groups discuss migration, definitions are typically quite vague. The media in the UK often use the terms 'migrants', 'ethnic minorities' or 'asylum seekers' in an interchangeable way (Baker et al. 2008). Also, public discourse tends to focus on certain categories of migrants: asylum seekers, low-skilled workers and undocumented migrants tend to 'count' more than other types of migrants such as students or high-skilled workers (Anderson and Blinder 2011). It is also interesting to note that people who move from an industrialized country are often referred to as 'expatriates' rather than 'migrants' – but this term is never used when referring to people who immigrate from a poorer country. Public surveys may add to this confusion: some surveys do not present a definition of the term migrant, while others refer to a vague and sometimes even incorrect definition (Anderson and Blinder 2011).

**See also:** *Migration networks Undocumented (illegal) migration*

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## 28 Multiculturalism

*Definition: An 'orientation' to immigration that embraces difference and diversity; it is in certain respects the opposite of an expectation that immigrants should and will assimilate.*