



European Statistical
Advisory Committee

Opinion on migration statistics

23 November 2015

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ESAC notes the following:

- a) In only a few months, the number of migrants entering the European Union has reached exceptionally high levels, requiring policymakers to make decisions at very short notice.
- b) Such exceptional and challenging situations were not envisaged by the Dublin agreement. In turn, these situations potentially threaten the Schengen agreement, one of the great achievements of the European Union.
- c) The situation is volatile and it is difficult to track these migrants and obtain precise information on their numbers and qualifications. This, in turn, gives rise to rumours and strengthens xenophobic prejudices in an already highly sensitive area of public opinion.
- d) Integration in society is the best strategy for handling immigration, in the interests of both migrant and resident populations.
- e) Currently the most important migration phenomena from a policy perspective are:
 - i. asylum and managed migration of persons from outside of the European Union,
 - ii. migration related to free movement of EU citizens between European Union countries and regions; and
 - iii. labour mobility to support the development of the European internal market.

ESAC therefore advises, since better information would help policymakers to choose the right options for handling migration and for promoting labour mobility, that:

1. Migration statistics must be given even higher priority in the European Statistical System at European, national and sub-national levels. A strategy for migration statistics requires two strands:
 - i. a short-term strand providing very quickly a set of coherent aggregate migration estimates; and
 - ii. a long-term strand measuring more precisely development trends in migration into and out of the European Union, between Member States and between regions.
2. In the short term, migration statistics must focus on the number and geographical distribution of migrants, making use of estimates rather than precise counts. They should then — as a foundation for a targeted labour market integration strategy — provide a broad documentation of:
 - i. the qualifications of migrants; and
 - ii. the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities of migrants.
3. In the longer term, migration statistics at Union level must be more closely and precisely linked to administrative registers, at national and sub-national levels.
4. In the context of the internal market with free movement of persons, it is essential and urgent to produce reliable statistics on labour mobility.
5. The key to the creation of indicators of labour market integration is longitudinal data and geographical breakdown. This is because estimates based on repeated cross sections of migrants can be severely misleading in that they mix up the integration (or lack thereof) of migrants with a change in the composition of migrants.