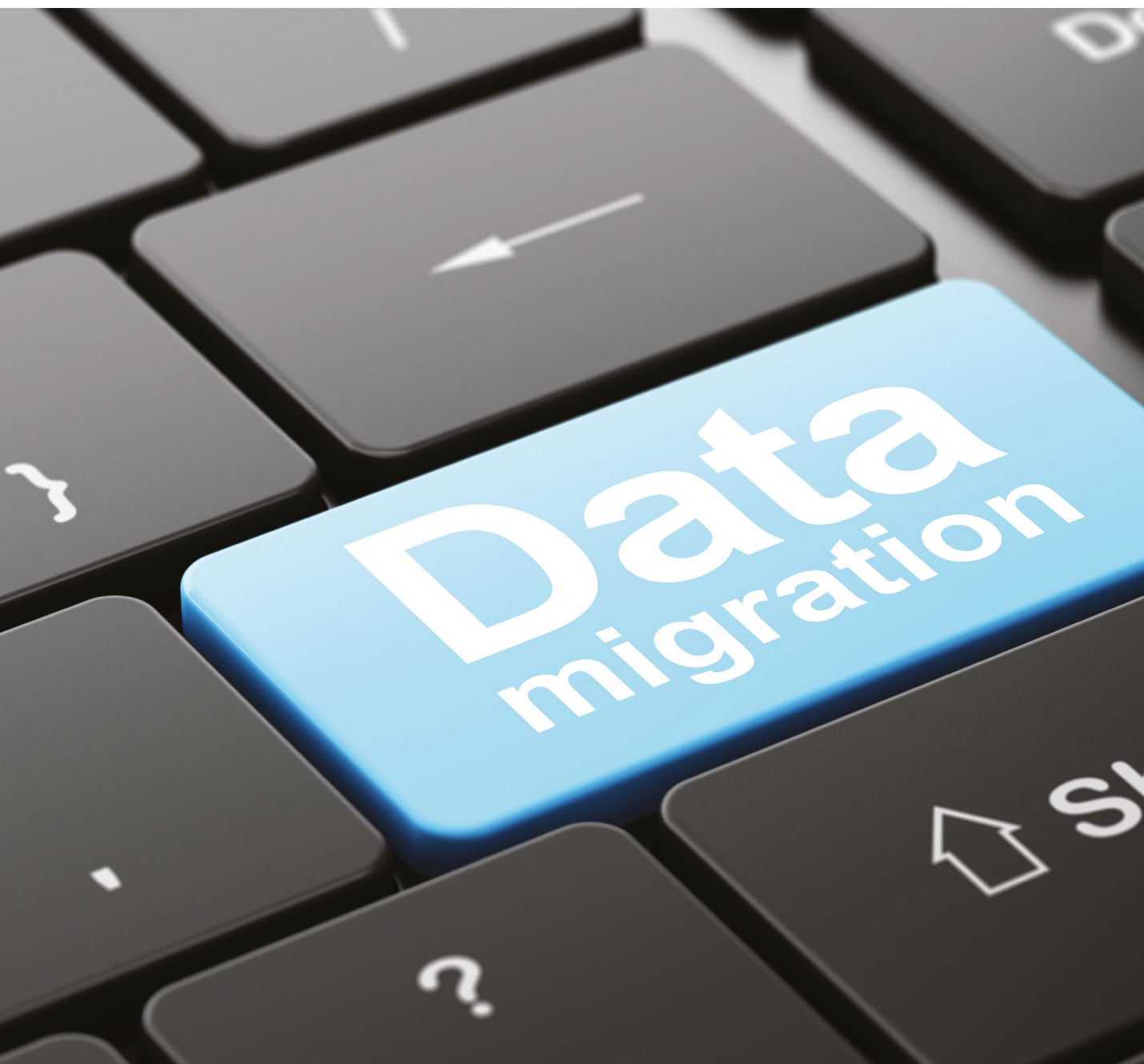


**UNECE**

# Guidance on the Use of Longitudinal Data for Migration Statistics



**UNITED NATIONS**

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Guidance on the  
**Use of Longitudinal Data  
for Migration Statistics**



**UNITED NATIONS**

Geneva, 2020

# NOTE

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# PREFACE

As the number of international migrants has grown, it is becoming increasingly important for the public and policymakers to understand migratory flows and the impact of migration on individuals, families, societies and economies. For this, it is necessary to look at change over time, as underscored in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. A longitudinal approach where information is collected from the same individuals or households over time is particularly useful for this, as it can reveal the geographic and socio-economic outcomes of the migration experience.

The data sources available to many national statistical offices carry a great potential for producing longitudinal migration statistics, which is not sufficiently used to date. To improve the situation, the Conference of European Statisticians established the Task force on the use of longitudinal data for migration statistics. This task force of experts from national statistical offices and international organizations worked through 2018 to 2020 to develop the present Guidance. It shows how to develop longitudinal data sources, how to address various challenges associated with such projects, and how to disseminate key indicators and findings.

The Guidance was endorsed by the 68th plenary session of the Conference of European Statisticians in 2020.

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

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

1. As the number of international migrants has grown, it is becoming increasingly important for the public and policymakers to understand migratory flows and the impact of migration on individuals, families, societies and economies. In many cases, the key questions pertain to the process of migrant settlement – how long migrants stay in the receiving country, how they integrate with the receiving societies and how their socioeconomic outcomes change over time.
2. Ultimately, to study migration is to study change. This begins with changes in residence but can expand to include changes in legal or residence status and changes in socio-economic outcomes. Migration and settlement are processes, not states, and outcomes can be short- or long-term. In addition, migration is a renewable event and outcomes can occur in various patterns over time. A longitudinal approach can be used to identify whether a person is a migrant, and would therefore be useful for statistics on migrant arrivals, migrant departures, and net migration, and in measuring durations, especially when disrupted by multiple border-crossings. Because of this transient nature, these are topics well suited to be studied using a longitudinal approach. The need for a temporal basis for migration statistics was underscored in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which calls for data that “allows for effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of commitments over time”.
3. Traditional methods for longitudinal data collection (e.g. cohort studies and panel surveys) have become more challenging to undertake due to high costs and attrition. Consequently, countries are increasingly turning towards alternative data sources to produce longitudinal results.
4. The production of statistics in many countries has been evolving due to the increased availability and usability of administrative data. More and more, administrative data holdings are improving in terms of the completeness, frequency and quality of the information collected. With the increasingly widespread use of administrative data and data integration for producing migration statistics, more and more countries can construct longitudinal datasets without bearing excessive costs. Countries with limited possibilities for integrating administrative data can pursue alternatives such as comparisons of synthetic cohorts.
5. While in the past longitudinal studies of migration were often standalone or produced on an ad hoc basis, national statistical offices (NSOs) are beginning to incorporate them more and more into their regular production of migration statistics. Globally, a number of United Nations handbooks and recommendations address statistics on international migration and its specific aspects.<sup>1</sup> However, there are currently no international guidelines on how to develop longitudinal data sources from integrated data, how to address various challenges associated

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