



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MIGRATION DATABASE

● Why do we need statistics on international labour migration?

International labour migration is a highly complex phenomenon that presents major challenges for policy-making in both sending and receiving countries. The ILO has the mandate to assist countries in policies and programmes for effective management of labour migration and protect the rights of migrant workers by promoting international labour standards. Countries need reliable statistics to monitor and manage international labour migration. The lack of adequate migration data, however, makes any objective assessment of migration very difficult. Further, many existing data collection systems do not record actual migration flows and lack standardized definitions of who qualifies as a migrant. In many countries, limited administrative resources and large numbers of entry/exit points pose great challenges for the coverage and validity of recorded information. Data on emigration flows are especially weak and much remains to be done to improve existing systems.

In view of the diverse quality of migration statistics and in the absence of harmonized systems for data collection, much of current debates on migration do not seem to be based on a solid empirical foundation. Yet, forward-looking migration policies and informed decision-making require reliable, timely and comparable data. For example, high quality migration information would go a long way in assisting policy-makers on the issue of skilled migration, and its positive and negative impacts.

Major uses of statistics on international migration are:

- Study the relationships between globalization and migration
- Evaluate the effectiveness of migration policies
- Assess the impact of migration on host societies and sending countries
- Inform the policy debates on immigration control, migration and development, and irregular migration
- Monitor condition of migrant workers and ensure their protection
- Monitor compliance with international instruments relating to migrant workers

● What is the International Labour Migration Database?

The International Labour Migration Database (ILM) was launched in 1998 in an attempt to systematically collect and disseminate migration-related statistical information of ILO member states, which otherwise remains difficult to obtain. The ILM database aims at making the information easily accessible through the internet by establishing an online database. For European countries, the ILO is collaborating with the joint questionnaire administered by EUROSTAT in cooperation with the UN Population Division and OECD. For the other countries, ILO employs a similar questionnaire. The first round of compilation was carried out in 1998 to obtain basic data on stocks and flows of migrant labour.

The ILM currently provides data for about 86 countries, and more countries are being added. It is the only global migration database available at present, that provides an important link between providers and users of the data. The database also allows relevant agencies and organisations in different countries to submit

information directly to the ILM Database. The new postings are moderated by the ILM Support Staff and added to the ILM Database – if found to be of acceptable quality. This feature is temporarily not available.

What kind of information does the database provide?

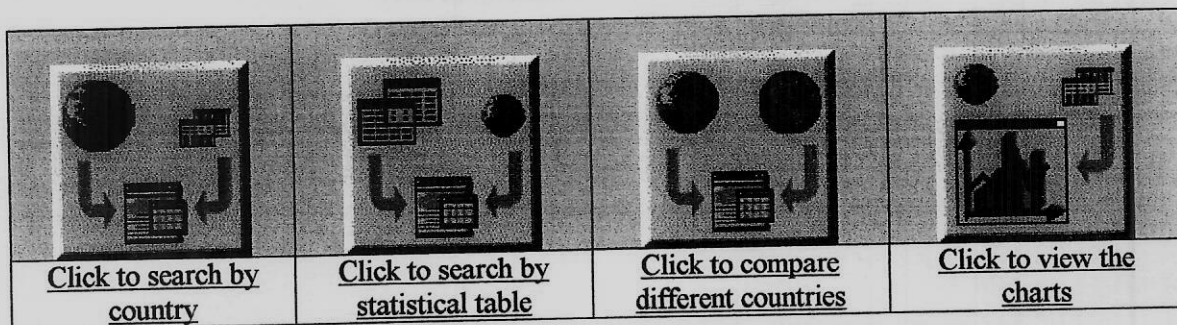
The database contains statistical data on labour migration, organised according to available information from national immigration and emigration statistics. The statistics are presented in 13 basic tables with time series starting from 1986. Of course, some of these statistics or the full time series are not available for many of the countries. For purposes of comparison, statistics on nationals are provided wherever relevant. To ensure consistency and comparability, definitions of basic terms relevant to labour migration are also provided. The tables are set up according to the following categories:

- Migrant population by sex and citizenship,
- Migrant employment by sex and citizenship,
- Migrants employed by economic sector,
- Migrants employed by employment status,
- Migrants employed by occupation,
- Nationals abroad by sex and host country.

These data sets can be arranged according to country and year. Users of the database can make use of the search engine to compile individual information requests, provided the requested country information has been made available by the Member State. It is possible to compile up to five inter-country comparisons with the database. The data is currently limited to data on regular (documented) migrant workers, as the number of irregular labour migrant workers is inherently difficult to estimate.

The database can be accessed through the homepage of the International Migration Programme on the ILO website at <http://www.ilo.org/migrant> or directly through the following hyperlink (URL):
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/ilmdb/index.htm>

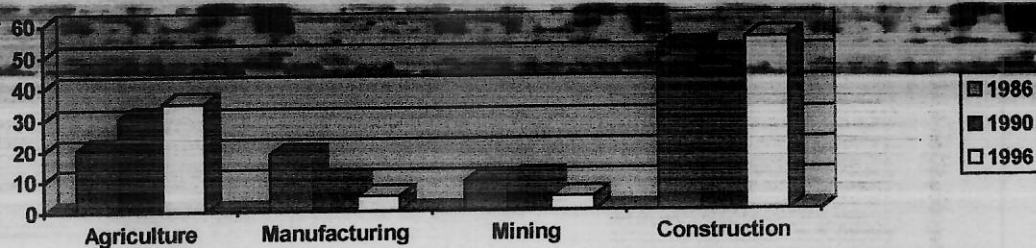
International Labour Migration Statistics



Currently, the ILM database provides hyperlinks to other existing ILO databases such as national labour legislation (NATLEX) and ILO Conventions and Recommendations (ILOLEX). In addition, bibliographic information can be obtained through the ILO library database of LABORDOC.

One option of the database menu provides for display of charts as shown in the sample below.

Sample Chart: Employed Migrants by economic sector in country X



● What are the sources of information for the ILM database?

The data for the ILM is based on information provided by national statistical offices or research institutions that have responded to specialized ILO surveys conducted in 1998, 2000 and 2001, and information provided by the joint-EUROSTAT questionnaire for European countries.

The sources of migration statistics are usually either *statistical surveys or administrative records*. The statistical sources comprise periodic censuses, labour force surveys, establishment surveys and population registers or reports of employers to social security authorities.

The administrative sources that can be used for migration-related data are immigration visas or border counts that compile statistics on migrant workers, and records on work permits, among others. Where available, reports from recruitment agencies or special insurance schemes can also be used. Finally, the immigration data produced by large migrant-receiving countries can, at times, successfully supplement national efforts by migrant-sending countries in a cost-effective way.

● How you can contribute to strengthening the ILM database?

Like any other database, the quality of the ILM database depends on the range and quality of migration statistics provided by member countries. A recurrent problem with the ILM database is the poor response by countries in supplying comprehensive information to be fed into the database. **ILO therefore, requests all member countries to review the information included in the ILM database and advise us on needed improvements and new sources of data, and send relevant migration information and statistics to keep it up to date. In case your country is not included in the database, please make arrangements to supply us the information directly or by contacting the relevant national agency/agencies.**

ILO invites all member governments to designate a focal-point within one of the relevant Ministries through which the collection of migration-related data can be channelled and who would respond to requests for specialised requests and surveys. The ILO coordinator of the ILM database is Mr. Piyasiri Wickamasekara, Senior Migration Specialist, International Migration Programme, ILO, who can be reached at wickramasekara@ilo.org for inquiries regarding country contributions.

ILO had initially provided an interactive *Contributors Section* of the database for registered users who are allocated a virtual working space through which they can directly submit potential statistical inputs for use in the database. An online registration procedure also has been provided.. Special security procedures are in place to verify the information, validate the data and to protect the privacy of contributors. User feedback and migration-related queries to the ILO can be submitted through the "Visitor's Corner" of the database. Due to problems of staffing and interaction in three languages (English, French and Spanish), these features are temporarily not operational.

● What else is ILO doing to enhance the quality of labour migration statistics?

Part from improving the global knowledge base on international migration by making statistical information available through its database, the ILO is actively promoting the adoption of international guidelines and comprehensive data collection methodologies for its Member States. The proposed approaches advocate the combination of several data-gathering methods, including the incorporation of modules in national censuses or household surveys and the implementation of specialized sample surveys. If migration data are seen as an important element of labour market statistics, they should become an integral part of comprehensive Labour Market Information Systems.

In 1994, an *Interdepartmental Project on Migrant Workers* of the ILO targeted 22 countries in an attempt to strengthen national institutional capacities for generating and processing international migration statistics. Based on a review of existing data sources, the ILO subsequently published a comprehensive volume with guidelines for the improvement of data collection systems (Bilborrow et. al. 1997). Also in 1994, the ILO initiated an *Informal Network on Foreign Labour in Central and Eastern Europe*, which promoted policy coordination among countries seeking to enhance the quality of their migration statistics through the development of a common approach. As a result, the network has been reviewing existing systems of migration statistics and attempted statistical assessments of regional migration policies. In 1999, a *Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe* was organised in Warsaw, Poland in collaboration with OECD. As a follow up, the possibilities for incorporating a migration module into future national surveys were explored in a selected number of participating countries.

ILO is fully aware of the problems faced by countries, especially developing countries, for timely collection and processing of migration data. ILO therefore, recognizes the crucial importance of providing technical assistance to countries for increasing their capacity in the field of migration statistics, in collaboration with other concerned international agencies.

● ILO publications on labour migration statistics

ILO's Strategy for Developing Statistics on the International Migration of Workers, unpublished draft. ILO Migration Branch, Geneva 2001.

Improving Methods of Collecting Migration Statistics in Central and Eastern Europe; Report of the Regional Training Seminar on Migration Statistics, Warsaw, Poland, 30 June-2 July 1999. ILO Geneva.

R.E. Bilborrow & G. Hugo & A.S. Oberai & H. Zlotnik: International Migration Statistics – Guidelines for improving data collection systems. ILO, Geneva 1997.

E. Hoffmann and S. Lawrence: Statistics on International Labour Migration – A review of sources and methodological issues, Interdepartmental Project on Migrant Workers. ILO Bureau of Statistics, Geneva 1996.

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