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Collecting data in a multilateral setting

That there is a lack of comparable, systematic and sufficiently comprehensive migration-related data at the international level is more or less common wisdom and every initiative aiming at the improvement of data collection such as the *Migration Profile* methodology or the *Migrants Count* report thus have to be welcomed. While their objectives are quite different – Migration Profiles essentially aim at a comprehensive mapping of the migration situation in a given countries, while the *Migrants Count* report has a more limited, if no less ambitious objective to promote the collection of certain baseline data and the more efficient exploitation of available data sources, they both stress the importance of collecting key information on migration.

ICMPD itself has long track record in activities related to data collection, data analysis and evaluation of data collection practices, both inside the European Union and related to the neighbouring countries. These include more traditional data collection and data analysis such as various projects compiling data on irregular migration¹ and trafficking² or the ongoing PROMINSTAT project. The latter, an EU funded research project which built on earlier projects in which ICMPD was involved³ established a comprehensive inventory and evaluation of data collection on migration covering altogether 29 European countries.⁴ Its three main elements are a metadatabase providing extensive documentation of available datasets, country reports on national data collection systems and thematic studies on data collection in particular fields. Focused, as it was, on the European Union, migration and development was not a particular focus in this project, although some of the working papers address this issue in passing. However, we undertook a (limited) analysis of data collection on migration and development based on the information collected for the PROMINSTAT database and this analysis suggests that a lot more needs to be done in the European Union to incorporate a migration and development perspective into existing datasets. This often would mean only limited modification of existing variables and addition of new variables. For example, household surveys on incomes and transfers which routinely ask for transfers within families could easily be adjusted to collect information on the place of residence of recipients or senders of remittances.

¹ For example the REGINE project on regularisation practices in the EU, see <http://research.icmpd.org/1283.html> or the Clandestino project, in which ICMPD was involved. See <http://www.irregular-migration.hwwi.net/>

² For example the Study on the assessment of the extent of different types of THB in EU countries. Vienna: ICMPD, online at <http://research.icmpd.org/1465.html>, the Handbook on Anti-Trafficking Data Collection in South-Eastern Europe, see [http://www.icmpd.org/906.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1\[article\]=599&tx_icmpd_pi1\[page\]=603](http://www.icmpd.org/906.html?&no_cache=1&tx_icmpd_pi1[article]=599&tx_icmpd_pi1[page]=603)

³ COMPSTAT, see www.compstat.org, and THESIM, see <http://www.uclouvain.be/en-7823.html>

⁴ See www.prominstat.eu

Many other ICMPD activities in the field of data collection, however, take place in a multilateral setting and in particular in the context of two political processes managed by ICMPD, notably the Budapest process involving countries from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the CIS region and the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) involving Mediterranean states. Both dialogues – amongst others – serve as platforms for information exchange and more precisely, for the exchange of information that potentially serves as evidence for evidence based policies. In addition, ICMPD has also been one of the first institutional actors to work with migration profiles and has been involved, as many other actors present here, in the elaboration of the template.

Data exchange in framework of the Budapest process

From the very outset, the Budapest process, for instance, involved exchange of a variety of statistical data on migration. One of the offsprings of the data exchange in the context of the Budapest process are ICMPD's annual yearbooks on illegal migration in Central and Eastern Europe published now for over a decade.⁵ Almost inherently this type of data exchange through standardised questionnaires implies the routinisation of data collection also on the side of authorities providing the data and thus can also be seen as an instrument of capacity building.

MTM and the i-map

An offspring of the second process of the Dialogue on Mediterranean Transit Migration (MTM) is the so-called i-map – the Interactive Map on Migration⁶, which currently mainly provides data on mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean region, including the Sahel countries and North Africa. The i-map serves as a visualised information exchange among participating states and is accessible only to participating states and selected international agencies. Apart from statistical data, the i-map also provides profiles on irregular migration in the countries covered. Data is provided by states and as in the case of the Annual Yearbook on illegal migration data collection thus involves a routinised and standardised collection of statistical and other information on (irregular) migration.

The main aims of the i-map are twofold: to serve as a portal for information exchange and secondly to visualise patterns of migration in the Mediterranean region. In its first phase of development, the main emphasis has been on visualisation. The emphasis in ongoing phase, in which the i-map will also be extended to the CIS region, more emphasis will be laid on comparability of data and providing rapid access to statistical data in a userfriendly format. In addition, a “migration and development” layer is currently being added. In the case of the i-map to the East, these will be linked to *migration profiles* elaborated in the Czech led initiative “Building migration partnerships” supported by the EC's Thematic Programme.

Lessons learnt, challenges ahead and possibly synergies with other ongoing initiatives.

None of the activities described in the above were conceived in a migration and development. Nevertheless, we believe that all of our ongoing activities in the area of statistical data collection

⁵ See <http://research.icmpd.org/1250.html#c2398>

⁶ See <https://www.imap-migration.org/>

on migration have a potential to contribute to the evidence base needed for a better understanding and policy making on migration and development.

The PROMINSTAT project, for instance, provides a model for documenting and evaluating existing data collection, which might serve also as a template for documentation and evaluation of data collection beyond the European Union context. While documentation of large-scale international survey programmes is now usually readily available from data providers, the added value of the PROMINSTAT project lies in its comprehensive coverage of all data sources on the national level, including administrative data sources and secondly, in the evaluation it provides of data collection practices and national data collection systems in particular thematic areas. Similar elements of an analysis of data collection practices could also be incorporated into the Migration Profile.

Indeed, while the Migration Profiles do an invaluable job of compiling a broad range of indicators, more could be done in regard to evaluating data collection practices, including compliance with international data collection standards and providing concrete recommendations in view of the improvement of data collection. The main benefit of a more careful analysis of data collection practices is that the results can be used to identify particular problems to data collection as well as unused potentials on the national level and that such an analysis thus would help to better exploit existing datasets, and in particular administrative data that may be available. In addition, an evaluation of data collection practices also has the potential of facilitating synergies and linkages of different data collection efforts in a particular country.

The Annual Yearbook on Illegal Migration in Eastern and Central Europe and the i-map follow a different approach. These are essentially state driven data collection exercises with all the limitations this entails. In addition, they are focused on specific fields of data collection (mainly irregular migration) and involve particular actors within governments (ministries of the interior). Nevertheless, there are several lessons that can be learnt from these activities. First: limited data exchange on a voluntary basis has a positive impact on involved administration's capacities to collect, process and disseminate data, even if capacity building is not a major goal of these activities. In addition, limited data exchange can also serve to build trust among stakeholders involved and initiate further data collection, including an expansion of the thematic fields on which data is collected. Thus, both the i-map and the Annual Yearbook engendered various spin-offs that otherwise would have not been feasible.

The i-map in particular also shows the need for and indeed interest in online tools that combine data in different formats and different graphical representations.

The main challenges ahead are, however, to put the data collection undertaken in the context of the i-map and the yearbook more firmly into a migration and development framework.

