DISCUSSION PAPER

Improving Data on International Migration and Development:

Towards a Global Action Plan?

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[1] This paper is in part based on an earlier paper by Frank Laczko entitled "Factoring Migration into the Development Data Revolution", Columbia Journal of International Affairs, 2015.

1. Introduction

Migration is high on the global policy agenda. In September 2016 world leaders came together in New York to agree on a plan to start negotiations leading to the adoption of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. States also reaffirmed in New York the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and noted the historic inclusion of migration in the new agenda to improve global development. In order to achieve the SDGs related to migration, substantial data will be required on migrants and migration.

> *"(…) we are determined to realize the full potential of the Agenda for refugees and migrants. In addition, we recognize the importance of improved data collection, particularly by national authorities, and will enhance international cooperation to this end, including through capacity-building, financial support and technical assistance. Such data should be disaggregated by sex and age and include information on regular and irregular flows, the economic impacts of migration and refugee movements, human trafficking, the needs of refugees, migrants and host communities and other issues."*
>
> –The 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants

It is widely agreed that quality and timely data on migration are essential if migration is to be managed effectively. Lack of migration data, or poor presentation of such data, often lead to misperceptions about the scale of migration and its effects. In many countries the general public often believes that the scale of migration is much greater than it really is.[2] Poor data on migration make it more difficult for decision-makers around the world to develop effective policies. Even when good data are available it is often difficult to find and to navigate. Informed policy-making depends on timely, reliable and relevant migration data. Poor-quality and scattered information feeds prejudice, stereotyping, and can distort public debate. Without reliable, accessible, and balanced information, sound management of migration becomes more difficult.

The need for better data has been widely recognized. In 2013, for example, at the UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development governments agreed on the need for more reliable statistical data on international migration and development. In the UN Secretary-General´s 2016 report, "In Safety and Dignity: Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants", there is also a renewed call to improve data on migration. The report highlights the insufficiency of data on migration, and calls for all UN Member States to invest in data collection. These recommendations were also underscored at the Berlin High-Level Round Table on Refugees and Migrants in July 2016 organized by Germany´s Foreign Office.[3]

The challenge now is for countries to come together to agree upon a common set of principles, approaches and priorities to improve data on international migration. The aim of this short paper is to

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[2] IOM, (2011), World Migration Report, IOM, Geneva.
[3] Berlin Roundtable on Refugees and Migration, July 12th, 2016, Chairman´s Conclusions.

facilitate a discussion about what might be some of the priorities for action. The paper begins by providing a brief assessment of the current migration data challenges.

The UN General Assembly's adoption of 17 SDGs and 169 accompanying targets in 2015, including important references to human mobility, represents a historic step towards incorporating migration into mainstream global development policy. The SDGs highlight the potential for migration to be a positive contribution to development.

There are many migration-related references in the SDGs, as shown in Table 1, which highlights 7 key references. The most prominent and reference to migration is under Goal 10, target 10.7, which calls for countries to implement "well managed migration policies". There are also calls to ensure that other SDG indicators are disaggregated by migratory status in order to ensure that "nobody is left behind".

Table 1. SDG migration-related references

Goal 4 on education

Target 4.b. (scholarships)

By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries.

Goal 5 on gender equality

Target 5.2. (gender-based violence)

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Goal 8 on employment and decent work

Target 8.7. (ending modern slavery)

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

Target 8.8. (migrant worker rights)

Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.

Goal 10 on reducing inequality within and between countries

Target 10.7. (safe migration)

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies by 2030.

Target 10.c. (migrant remittances)

By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent.

Goal 16 on peaceful and inclusive societies
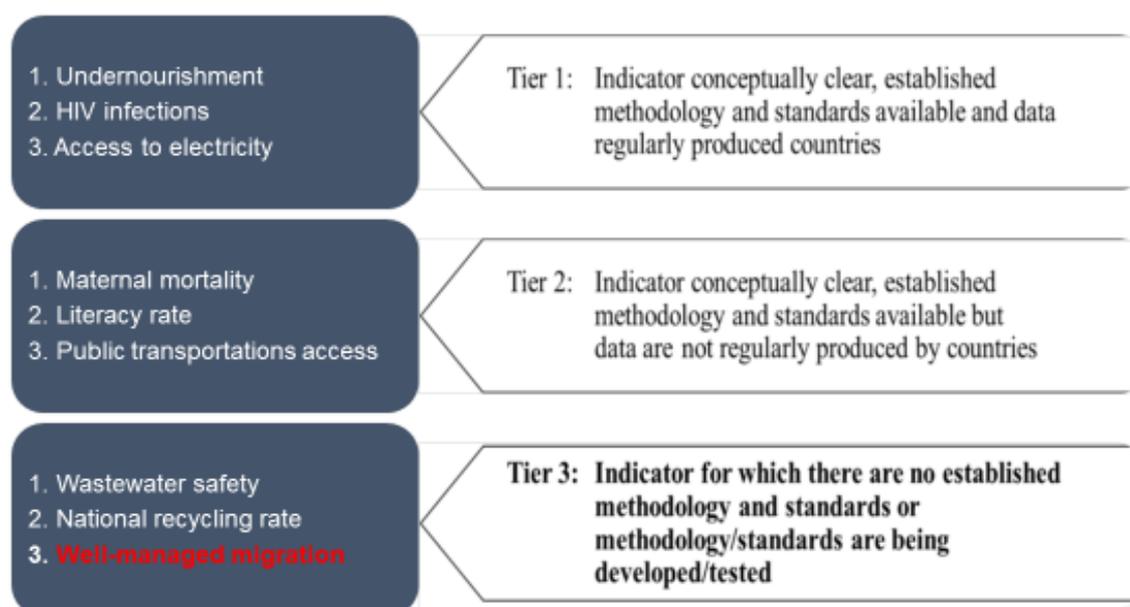
Target 16.2. (trafficking of children)

End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.

Goal 17 on global partnership

2. Data on international migration: examples of key challenges

It is widely recognized that official statistics on international migration remain very poor, and many migrants remain "invisible" because they are not documented. Internationally comparable data on migration are relatively scarce. For example, not a single SDG migration indicator is currently ranked as a Tier 1 indicator by the UN Statistics Division (see Figure 1). By Tier 1 the UN means "an indicator is conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available and data regularly produced by countries". Given the lack of good "migration indicators", a key challenge will be to ensure that key SDG indicators relevant to migration, such as health, education, poverty and employment, are disaggregated as far as possible by migratory status. This will be necessary not only to understand better the living conditions of migrants, but also to understand how migration impacts on a population´s overall health, income and education.

Figure 1. Examples of Key Development Data by Data Quality (UN classification)

1. Undernourishment 2. HIV infections 3. Access to electricity	Tier 1: Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available and data regularly produced countries
1. Maternal mortality 2. Literacy rate 3. Public transportations access	Tier 2: Indicator conceptually clear, established methodology and standards available but data are not regularly produced by countries
1. Wastewater safety 2. National recycling rate 3. Well-managed migration	Tier 3: Indicator for which there are no established methodology and standards or methodology/standards are being developed/tested

While the best migration data often come from censuses, these can be several years old. The UN Population Division recently found, for example, that for 17 per cent of countries in Africa, and 8 per cent of those in Latin America and the Caribbean, the most recent data available from censuses referred to years prior to 2005[4].

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[4] United Nations (2016), "Strengthening the demographic evidence base for the post-2015 development agenda", Commission on Population and Development, forty-ninth session, 11-15th April 2016, UN Economic and Social Council.

Moreover, some countries still do not even include a question about a person's country of birth, or citizenship in their census[5]. Even if countries do collect such data, many, especially those in the Global South, do not have the necessary resources to fully analyse migration trends. Many national statistical offices have limited resources, both human and financial, and migration may be a low priority compared to the collection of data on other topics. As relatively few developing countries have integrated migration into their national development plans, collecting data on migration is often not a political priority.

Censuses can only include a limited number of questions on migration, and thus cannot provide the detailed information needed for a comprehensive analysis of either the causes or the consequences of international migration6. For example, censuses may not provide details of the year of migration, making it impossible to establish whether someone is a recent or long-term migrant. In order to conduct such analysis, more specialized household surveys of migrant populations are needed, but there is **no global migration survey programme** to help countries gather such data (For a more detailed discussion of the potential role of using household surveys to gather data on migration see Bilsborrow, 2016..

Examples of key data gaps

➢ Only approx. 1 in 4 countries around the world can provide the UN Statistics Division with data on international migration flows.

➢ In Asia only 10 out of 48 countries could provide the UN with data on inflows and outflows of migrants between 2005 and 2014.

➢ Only 4 in 10 African countries are able to provide information on the age of migrants[7].

➢ There are no global figures indicating the scale of migrant smuggling or irregular migration.

➢ There is no regular global survey of public attitudes towards migrants.

Nonetheless, there have been improvements in recent years in the availability, quality and comparability of data on international migration. Several examples can be mentioned. The UN Population Division, in collaboration with the UN Statistics Division, the World Bank and the University of Sussex, has developed the "Global Migration Database". This has enabled the UN to produce estimates of migrant stock disaggregated by age, sex, origin and destination, for 232 countries and areas in the world. The UN's

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

Global Migration Database, containing data organized by sex, age and origin derived from censuses and population registers, has expanded to cover over 4,000 datasets[8]. Several other examples can be cited[9].

Broadly speaking, at the global level, we can count the stock of migrants and estimate the level of remittances, but we can say relatively little about the well-being of migrants, the reasons for migration, the skills of migrants, the scale of irregular migration, or the impact of migration policies and programmes. The most frequently cited global statistics in the annual report on migration and development submitted to the UN Secretary-General are the number of migrants in the world and the scale of remittances.[10] With the exception of counter-trafficking policies, there is little systematic monitoring on an annual basis of national migration policies globally[11]. Nor is there any regular report which seeks to explore how well migrants are faring in each country of the world compared to other groups in the population. Large numbers of migrants remain invisible, as there is relatively little reliable data on undocumented or irregular migrants, who can represent a significant share of the migrant population in many countries.

3. Way Forward

In 2008, the Center for Global Development convened a commission of experts to discuss steps to improve data on international migration. The report from the Commission on International Migration Data for Development Research and Policy cites the nonexistence or inaccessibility of "detailed, comparable disaggregated data on migrant stocks and flows as the greatest obstacle to the formulation of evidence-based policies to maximize the benefits of migration for economic development"[12].

The final report of the commission entitled "Migrants Count: Five steps to better migration data" makes 5 key recommendations:

1. Ensure that more censuses include basic questions on migration,

2. Use administrative data on international migrants more extensively,

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[8] Henning, S. and Hovy, B. (2011), "Data Sets on International Migration", International Migration Review, New York.

[9] The UNESCO Institute for statistics, with support from OECD and Eurostat, has upgraded its database on the international mobility of tertiary-level students, collecting data on over 200 countries or areas classified by country of origin and sex. The World Bank has added migration and remittances modules to a number of household surveys, while the ILO and UNICEF have included migration-related questions in existing household survey programmes. The database developed by OECD on the stock of migrants, organized by education, occupation, age, sex, and origin, derived from censuses has also expanded.

[10] UN, 2013

[11] The UN Population and Development Inquiry collects some data from governments about their migration policies but has a very low response rate and is not conducted annually.

[12] Centre for Global Development, 2009, op.cit.

3. Make better use of the migration data collected in labour-force surveys,

4. Integrate migration modules into existing household surveys,

5. Make publicly available micro-data from migration surveys and censuses.

It is not clear to what extent these recommendations have subsequently been implemented, as there is no global monitoring mechanism linked to the findings of the commission. For a more detailed discussion of these recommendations and the progress that has been made in meeting these objectives, see Bilsborrow 2016.[13] While these recommendations remain valid, it is important to note that the world has changed since 2008. For example, in 2008 there was no discussion in the Migration and Development Data Commission of the potential of using "Big Data" to study migration trends. Below we suggest some further possible recommendations for action.

3.1 Making better use of existing data

As funds for producing new migration data are likely to be limited, it is essential that we make the best use of the data that already exist. At the national level, it is often the case that there are more data available than is commonly realized. The UN has also acknowledged that "not all the data produced at the national level reaches the international statistical system, due to poor co-ordination, deficiencies in reporting mechanisms, and the challenge for states in complying with international standards"[14].

Too often migration data are scattered within countries between different agencies and ministries, making it difficult to obtain an accurate understanding of national migration trends. In addition, migration data may be scattered between countries of origin, transit and destination. Migration Profiles were first proposed by the European Commission in 2005 as a means to gather in one place all data relating to migration at the national level[15]. Migration Profiles were not conceived to be merely statistical reports. The process of collecting and analysing the data was also intended to promote greater policy coherence. It was envisaged that such reports would be prepared by a number of ministries which would work together with other actors to collect and share migration data. The benefits of sharing data should not be under-estimated. Whether to try to understand a particular, common flow, to assess the effectiveness of particular policy approaches, or simply to get a handle on the magnitude of certain migration trends, governments and other stakeholders can benefit from sharing migration data.

Most countries in the world have the data and the capacities required to produce a national report/migration profile on migration and development on a regular basis. Although more than 60 such

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[13] Richard E. Bilsborrow, "The Global Need for Better Data on International Migration and the Special Potential of Household Surveys, paper prepared for the conference "Improving Data on International Migration: Towards Agenda 2030 and the Global Compact on Migration", Berlin, December 2 and 3, 2016, www.gmdac.iom.int.
[14] United Nations, (2014), "International Migration and Development", report of the Secretary-General.
[15] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Migration and Development: Some concrete orientations COM (2005) 390, p. 37, annex 8

national reports have been produced since 2005, the reality is that most countries in the world do not produce on an annual basis a national migration and development report. Of those countries who have prepared a migration profile in recent years, only a minority have done so for more than one period in time. Few countries have yet to update such reports and integrate their findings into their policy development processes. Recently, some progress has been made in developing indicators of good migration governance. IOM recently sponsored the Economist Intelligence unit to develop a framework and a set of indicators to make it easier to measure "well-governed migration" (EIU, 2016[16]). The framework was tested in 15 countries and will be extended to a wider range of countries next year.

3.2 Exploiting the potential of non-traditional sources of data.

An increasing amount of data on migration today is not generated by the national statistical offices of governments but by the private sector or international agencies. The unprecedentedly large amount of data automatically generated through the use of digital devices or web-based platforms and tools goes under the umbrella term of "Big Data". Innovations in technology and reductions in the cost of digital devices worldwide, means that digital data are being produced in real time, at an unprecedented rate. In addition, the number and size of organizations working in the migration field on behalf of migrants has grown enormously in recent years, which in turn has generated more migration data. A body, like the International Organization for Migration, for example, has more than doubled in size over the last decade. The growth of the organization's programmes means that it is now generating a great deal more operational data than it did ten years ago (see IOM Statistics Report 2011-2015)[17]. For example, the IOM trafficking database, is the single largest database containing primary data on registered victims of trafficking.

New sources of data are also emerging from the private sector. Gallup launched its World Poll in 2006 which now produces a huge amount of data on migration every year. Since 2006 Gallup has been conducting nationally representative annual surveys, using a consistent methodology and questionnaire format in over 150 countries, representing more than 98 per cent of the world's population, through the "World Poll". A key advantage of this migration data source compared to others is that it is global in coverage, annual, and provides comparable and timely data on a broad range of migration questions. In the 2013 World Migration Report, IOM used the findings of the Gallup World Poll to analyse the well-being of migrants. For this analysis, IOM and Gallup were able to analyse data on nearly 25,000 migrants worldwide. Gallup has the capacity to gather more information by adding new questions to the World Poll, or by increasing the sample size in specific target countries. The World Poll includes questions on public perceptions, migration potential, remittances, and internal migration.

The exponential growth in the use of mobile phones, social media and internet-based services worldwide means the "volume" of data available is larger than ever before in human history. The number of

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[16] Measuring well-governed migration. The 2016 Migration Governance Index, Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016.
[17] IOM-GMDAC, (2016), IOM Statistical Report (2011-2015), IOM-GMDAC, Berlin.

migration studies drawing on Big Data is still relatively limited but rapidly increasing.[18] In emergencies and post-disaster situations it is often very difficult to find accurate data on migration flows. Call Detail Records (CDR) from mobile phone networks have been used in several recent studies to track population movements in the aftermath of disasters. For example, one study estimated the magnitude and trends in population movements out of Port-Au-Prince following the 2010 Haiti earthquake.[19] Big Data has also been used to study global migration trends. For example[20] another study used IP-addresses to map the geographic locations from where 43 million anonymized users sent e-mail messages in a given period.

The use of big data in migration research comes with significant challenges. First, there are serious privacy, ethical and human rights issues related to use of data inadvertently generated by users of mobile devices and web-based platforms. Risks to individual rights to privacy can even threaten personal security in conflict situations[21]. Public concerns over the use of Big Data for any purpose, including research, need to be identified and adequately addressed by policy-makers, perhaps through the creation of a regulatory system setting out conditions and limits to access to and use of certain kinds of data.

There are also more general concerns associated with the selectivity and partiality of big data. This is sometimes referred to as the "Digital Divide" which means that populations' access to and use of digital data tends to vary according to factors such as age and gender, and digital data may not be representative of the total population. Data collection and analysis constitute particularly challenging tasks, given the complexity, velocity, and volume of big data.

3.3 Capacity Building and Development – ensure that migration is integrated into national statistical development plans

There is a growing awareness in the development community of the need to invest in data capacity-building. In 2014, the UN Secretary-General´s Independent Expert Advisory Group on a "Data Revolution for Sustainable Development" published the report "A World That Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development". The report calls for more diverse, integrated, timely and trustworthy information and laments that whole groups of people are not being counted and important aspects of their lives are not measured. The report recommends a "significant investment" of funds to support the "development data revolution", following an assessment of capacity development needs.

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[18] Laczko, Frank, and Rango, Marzia (2014), "Can Big Data help us achieve a "migration data revolution" ? , Migration Policy and Practice, vol. IV, Number 2, April-June.
[19] Bengtsson L. et al. (2011), "Improved Response to Disasters and Outbreaks by Tracking Population Movements with Mobile Phone Network Data: A post-earthquake geospatial study in Haiti. PLOS Medicine,8 (8): e1001083, doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001083.
[20] Zagheni, E. and I. Weber (2012) "You are Where you email: Using email data to estimate international migration rates", in ACM Web Science Conference Proceedings, 25th June.
[21] Latouze, E. « Big Data for Development : What May Determine Success of Failure ? OECD Technology Foresight presentation, October 22, 2012, Paris. www.oecd.org.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly calls for enhancing capacity-building to support national plans to implement the SDGs. Target 17.18 aims to enhance "capacity-building support to (…) increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity and *migratory status*. If we are to ensure that migrants are not "left behind" as countries make progress towards development there will be a need for much better data on the health, education, employment, and income status of migrants. Better data are also needed to help reduce the risks and costs associated with migration. Too many migrants are currently embarking on dangerous journeys, putting their lives at risk, whilst others are being severely exploited and trafficked.

Creating or improving national capacity to collect, analyze, share and manage migration data is the cornerstone of effective migration data management. While some countries have highly sophisticated systems for detecting and monitoring migratory movements (including use of high technology tools such as biometrics and machine-readable visas, etc.), the vast majority of countries in the world have limited to non-existent migration data collection systems. The development community is currently conducting a detailed assessment of the resources, financial and human, which will be required to improve data on development. A similar sort of assessment of migration data capacity-building needs to be made. There is also a need for an assessment of the cost of upgrading migration data capacities in order to be able to monitor SDG migration indicators. How much additional funding will be needed to assist countries to gather better data on migration governance indicators, trafficking, remittances, recruitment costs, and more generally disaggregate SDG indicators by migratory status?

In the development field, there are estimates of the additional funds that would be required to improve data on SDG development indicators. For example, it was recently estimated that at least USD 1 billion a year will be needed to maintain and upgrade the statistical systems of 77 of the world´s poorest countries, as well as to ensure that there is sufficient data collection to monitor the SDGs. One billion USD a year may seem like a significant sum but it represents less than one per cent of official development assistance to the 77 poorest countries in 2013. [22]

More resources for migration data capacity-building are likely to flow if migration is integrated into national development data strategies. It has been difficult to achieve this in many countries given that migration more broadly is rarely integrated into national development plans. With a growing awareness of the need for a "Development Data Revolution", there are new opportunities to make a stronger case for migration data capacity-building. To realize these opportunities, it is essential that migration is integrated into wider efforts to improve data on sustainable development indicators. For example, in 2016, a Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data was launched by the High-level Group for Partnership, Coordination and Capacity-Building for statistics for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The global plan is "intended to provide a framework for discussion, planning, and implementation of statistical capacity building necessary to achieve the scope and intent of the 2030 Agenda".

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[22] Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development, 2015.

4. Concluding Remarks

While there is an urgent need to conduct a detailed assessment of migration data capacity-building needs, there are many ways in which we could make better use of existing sources of data on migration and development. As outlined, above there has been an explosion in recent years in the availability of data on migration and development which has yet to be fully exploited. Big Data, operational data, and data from polling surveys, are examples of these new potential sources of data.

There is also considerable scope to make better use of existing traditional sources of data which are often scattered and not fully utilized at the national level. The creation of a Global Migration Data Portal would help policy-makers to utilize existing sources of data on migration more effectively. However, if we are to fully understand the impact of migration on development, we will need to gather new data on migration most probably through new migration surveys or by adding more questions to existing surveys. Finally, in order to reduce the risks of migration and promote the well-being of migrants we will need better data on irregular migration and the risks associated with the dangerous journeys that migrants are making.

IOM is supporting the ongoing improvement of international migration data through three flagship initiatives:

1. A Global Migration Data Portal: Making Better Use of Existing Data

   As funds for producing new migration data are likely to be limited, it is essential that we make the best use of the data that already exists. Too often migration data are scattered within countries between different agencies and ministries, making it difficult to obtain an accurate understanding of national migration trends. In addition, migration data may be scattered between countries of origin, transit and destination. One glaring shortfall in the current migration data space is the absence of a comprehensive, one-stop-shop for migration information and data – both in the form of timely textual analysis and, in particular, for data access and analysis purposes. Creating a Global Migration Data Portal – that would be readily accessible to policymakers can help to ensure that policymakers around the world have better access to comprehensive and timely data on international migration. IOM will work jointly with partners on regional sections of the global portal, including the European Commission's Knowledge Centre on Migration and Demography.

   The benefits of sharing data should not be under-estimated. Whether to try to understand a particular common flow, to assess the effectiveness of particular policy approaches, or simply to get a handle on the magnitude of certain migration trends, governments and other stakeholders can benefit from sharing migration data more effectively.

2. Global Migration Data Training Programme: Building Data Capacity

Creating or improving national capacity to collect, analyze, share and manage migration data is the cornerstone of effective migration data management. While some countries have highly sophisticated systems for detecting and monitoring migratory movements (including use of high technology tools such as biometrics and machine-readable visas, etc.), the vast majority of countries in the world have limited migration data collection systems. While several steps have been taken recently to build development data capacities there is as yet no global training programme dedicated to helping States to improve migration data.

IOM propose to work together with other agencies to develop a first "Migration Data Handbook" to enhance countries capacities to gather migration data relevant to the Global Compact on migration and Agenda 2030. The Handbook will be one of the key tools to be used in a global migration data training programme which will aim to enhance State´s capacities to gather, analyse and share data on international migration. A series of regional workshops will be organized in every major region of the world to enhance States´ capacities to gather data on migration relevant to Agenda 2030.

3. International Forum on Migration Statistics: Fostering technical exchanges

In order to facilitate the exchange of information and promote mutual learning, the OECD, UN DESA and IOM propose to organize a regular International Forum on Migration Statistics with key partner organizations working on migration. The Forum will bring together all producers, analysts and users of migration statistics in a community of interest centred around migration measurement issues.

The Forum will shed new light on the dynamics of international migration, allowing policy-makers and analysts to better capture key characteristics of migrants and their descendants; identify hard-to-measure and vulnerable groups, assess migrant skills, analyse the social and economic aspects of integration. The First Forum will be hosted by the OECD in Paris in January 2018. The Forum will provide an important opportunity to promote a "data dialogue" between countries of origin, destination and transit which often have different data priorities and capacities.