

## National policy recommendations on the enhancement of migration data for Serbia



2014

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<http://www.seemig.eu/downloads/outputs/SEEMIGPolicyRecommendationsSerbia.pdf>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the recent years, the Republic of Serbia reported one of the highest rates of natural decrease in Europe with an average of -4.9 per 1,000 people in a three year period (2009-2011). As such, Serbia belongs to the group of former communist countries, which have been experiencing the process of population decline and has one of the oldest age composition of population in Europe, with a median age of 42.5 years. Reduction and ageing of the population are two clearly identifiable characteristics of the contemporary Serbia. From the demographic perspective, the continuation of these trends is quite certain in the very long-term.

Emigration is recognized as one of the major challenges in that regard. It can be observed as a reaction to the current labour market conditions in the country. Thus, the economic crisis is considered as the main push factor, especially for the highly skilled and highly qualified persons. According to the national population projection, the increase of fertility rates itself will not be sufficient if Serbia seeks to alleviate the effects of unfavourable demographic trends. The transition to a positive migration balance is needed as well.

However, statistics on international migration from and to Serbia are not fully available for decision makers, the academic community and the other stakeholders in the country. Consequently, the first challenge with regards to improvements and development of stated policy areas refers to the process of improving the availability and quality of data on international migration. During the SEEMIG project, the key issues affecting the production and management of migration-related data in Serbia were identified.

### **1.1.Introducing SEEMIG**

SEEMIG (Managing Migration and its Effects in SEE: Transnational Actions towards Evidence Based Strategies) ([www.seemig.eu](http://www.seemig.eu)) was a transnational cooperation project that has been implemented in the framework of the European Union (EU) programme 'South-East Europe' (<http://www.southeast-europe.net/>) from 2012-2014. In order to facilitate evidence-based policy-making on the national, regional and local levels, and focusing on data availability and data enhancement, the main objective of SEEMIG was to better understand and address the longer term migratory, human capital and demographic processes of the SEE area as well as their effects on labour markets and national/regional economies. It also strengthened capacities of local and regional authorities to better collect and utilise statistical data in their planning and sectorial policies, and to introduce evidence-based policy-making and implementation.

### **1.2.Introducing the policy recommendations**

This document recapitulates policy recommendations regarding enhancement of migration data in Serbia. The policy recommendations have been elaborated by the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and the Municipality of Kanjiža within the framework of the SEEMIG project. The latter has been concentrated on providing useful planning tools for national/regional/local administrations, as well as on assisting them in building capacities for a better data collection and utilization.

In order to enable a participatory approach when elaborating the policy recommendations, the results of a foresight exercise on future migration scenarios for Serbia and the socio-economic impact of the different scenarios were presented to and discussed with national, regional and local level policy makers during stakeholders' workshops. The workshops served as a basis for the elaboration of strategies for enhancing data production and data utilization at the local, regional, and

national levels.<sup>1</sup> These strategies aim at empowering decision makers to adapt their policies as a response to the challenges put forward by the demographic, migration and labour market processes. To strengthen interactive, bottom-up contributions to policy making and as a precondition for sustainable strategies, stakeholders' focus groups were organized. These were followed by the revision of the strategy, thanks to the input provided by the local migration roundtable held in the Municipality of Kanjiža. Such elaborated input from the national/local stakeholders and partners supported the drafting of policy recommendations to streamline national level sectorial policies and programmes.<sup>2</sup>

This policy document is set to provide an easy to read and short policy recommendations helping national decision makers and non-experts to understand policy actions necessary to reform the data systems related to migration, human capital and the labour market in Serbia. Drafting these national policy recommendations will also contribute to the formulation of transnational policy recommendations for the South-East-European region.

In the following sections, the main policy areas related to national data collection and utilization improvements, the key actions aimed at addressing challenges in these policy areas as well as the role of respective stakeholders involved in this process is indicated. Each action is justified, while the respective short term and long term outcomes/impact are highlighted. In case any challenges were identified related to the implementation of these actions, these were included.

## **2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

An important step towards the improvement of the migration monitoring system at the national level is to produce a complete and coherent legal framework to support its harmonization with the EU regulations and facilitate the communication flow among producers of migration statistics. This process will improve the national migration policy by adopting bylaws/decrees under the present Law on Migration Management, which would define the institutional role and responsibilities of every actor involved in the complex activities related to the migration data collection, methodological adjustments, dissemination and reporting.

Furthermore, the existing data obtained from the state administrative sources needed for migration statistics are not sufficiently adapted to the European Union standards. Beyond the methodological harmonization, it is important to legally ensure for producers of migration statistics the institutional authorization to have access to all administrative data they may need. This step could be implemented by establishing an inter-linked register, regulated by an inter-institutional agreement. The inter-institutional agreement should be based on the adoption of a common concept for the enhancement of migration management, backed-up by mutual interest and understanding that this subject is of a national importance.

### **2.1 Policy area 1: Adoption, improvement and more effective implementation of laws regulating migration**

Population registers are a good source for migration statistics, but the existence of such a register is still not legally defined in Serbia. In the near future, respective measures to this end should be regulated by a specific law. By adopting, the *Law on Migration Management* in 2012, ("Official Gazette of RS", number 107/12) a coordinated system for migration management was established

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<sup>1</sup> For further information see <http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.seemig.eu/index.php/downloads-project-outputs-action-plans>

and basic definitions of migration were defined in the Republic of Serbia. A number of public institutions are responsible for different categories of migrants. Among them: the Ministry of Interior, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Health and other public institutions.

In the operational framework of the current system of migration management, a lack of competency based integration is evidenced among relevant institutions, while the definition of the respective roles and tasks in the data collection process is still to be completed. In addition, particular attention has to be paid to the necessary harmonization of national migration policies with the EU regulations on migration.

#### *2.1.1 Providing a stronger inter-institutional integration by adopting the legal framework*

The recommendation aims at achieving an institutional integration by drawing upon the capacities and responsibilities exercised by each public institution in conform to characteristics of migration data they collect. This would be defined by specific decrees in order to provide inter-institutional cooperation and to raise the migration data quality.

The short-term outcome of this policy would be the adequate division of institutional responsibilities in the state administration. To this end, we propose the establishment of a Working Group in charge of effective coordination and implementation of all activities related to the development of a monitoring migration flows' system. The long-term outcome consists of improving the quality and coverage of migration data.

Relevant stakeholders: the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRMS), the Ministry of Interior (MI), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), other ministries of the Republic of Serbia, local authorities.

Possible challenges: non-recognition of the significance (insufficient awareness of this need) in the development of the legal framework at the national level.

#### *2.1.2 Improving the administrative records with the establishment of an operational network and platform for data exchange among state institutions*

Partial records of different state institutions are an integral part of administrative data sources on international migration in the Republic of Serbia. These records should be improved in the sense of methodological harmonization with the international standards such as data quality and quantity, with an emphasis on the process of integration and harmonization of different databases and data sources. This relates to the records of the Ministry of Interior, as the main source of data on migrant population. The latter is needed for migration statistics.

Inter-institutional data exchange would be possible by establishing an official operational network among the relevant institutions and using a common platform, which would be defined in accordance with national and international needs. This should be regulated by an inter-institutional agreement.

The short-term outcome would be that of providing reliable, internationally comparable data.

The long-term outcome would be that of overcoming deficiencies in the system of monitoring of migration and fully establishing a reliable international reporting tool.

Relevant stakeholders: the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRMS), the Ministry of Interior (MI), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), other state administration.

Possible challenges: financing

### *2.1.3 Establishment of a Registry of population*

The concept of a Registry of population would present a reliable base for obtaining comprehensive data on population and at the same time it would present a monitoring tool on migration flows.

The population register lists all the residents of a municipality. It is kept regularly and provides the picture of the population real state in a given area at any point in time. Within this system of continuous registration of the population, the most important data for each person are collected and updated, particularly those data concerning any changes in the place of residence. This is vital to ensure notification of residence or departure and to ensure a well-functioning system. The legal grounds, that would determine the contents of the population register, the exchange, keeping, maintaining, safeguarding and use of the data, the setting up and using of a personal identification tag and regulating other issues of importance, should be defined by the Law on Population Register. The register ought to be kept by the public administration body in charge of the IT, in order to ensure electronic support and data exchange from different databases. The data would be sorted by contents, time and territory, by the place of registration of vital events, permanent residence, place of birth abroad or the place of prior or future permanent residence abroad in case of moving abroad. The state bodies and other users of the register data may use them solely for carrying out tasks from their respective domain. The data from the register would be used for statistical, scientific, research and other purposes, without any reference regarding the identity of the persons to whom the data refer. The population register (statistical needs and requirements must be taken into account in setting up the registry) would represent the current and the most accurate source of the data on migration, both at the local and at the national level.

The short-term outcome in establishment of a Registry of population and improvement of the public records is the provision of reliable, comprehensive, up-to-date data on population.

The long-term outcome would be the improvement of quality and coverage of migration data in accordance with the national and the EU legislations.

Relevant stakeholders: state administrations at national and local level, state institutions responsible for management of migration.

Possible challenges: this measure is still not legally defined and its approval largely depends on financial opportunities at the national level.

## **2.2 Policy area 2: Promotion of international cooperation and data exchange**

The Republic of Serbia is not in a position to produce good-quality migration statistics in all their complexity on a regular basis. Currently, for many other countries as well, it is more difficult to collect information about emigration than immigration, so there is a need to find a way on how to compensate the system's *weaknesses* on emigration data in the sending country by using existing immigration data in the receiving country. It presents a promising statistical source for emigration either by estimating missing data or improving existing figures for increasing data quality.

### *2.2.1 Creating and updating trans-national databases (SEEMIG transnational database)*

One of the forms of cooperation and data exchange among countries is the example of the established trans-national database by the SEEMIG project.

In order to improve the use and exchange of all relevant data necessary for the analysis of migration processes at the national and regional level, the SORS has to emphasize the importance of the SEEMIG transnational database. The database offers a centralized and comprehensive approach to demographic, social and economic indicators for the countries in the region of South-Eastern Europe.

The short-term outcome would be the improvement of the quality, comparability, easier accessibility and transparency of data (only exchange of envisaged aggregated data).

The basis for better understanding and regular data exchange on migration at trans-national level would be obtained as a long-term outcome.

Relevant stakeholders: the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRMS), the Ministry of Interior (MI), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), other ministries of the Republic of Serbia, SEE countries, EU countries, international organizations.

Possible challenges: Additional processing of all statistical data would require additional financial support.

### *2.2.2 Improvement of administrative capacities of state institutions*

Statistical monitoring of migration is a necessary condition for planning strategic development based on evidences, which can provide a wide spectrum of reliable and harmonized demographic and socio-economic data on migrants. In connection to that, it is necessary to carry out activities that include capacity-building in all relevant state bodies in terms of increasing the number of experts, upgrading their knowledge, provision of international technical support, etc.

The short-term outcome would be systematic monitoring of migration according to the national and EU regulations.

The long-term outcome would be the establishment of an efficient and sustainable system for monitoring migration at the national level.

Relevant stakeholders: state institutions in charge of activities related to migration management.

Possible challenges: financing

### *2.2.3 Establishing an organizational unit and introduction of surveys on international migration in the SORS*

It is necessary to establish an organizational unit/Group for migration statistics in the SORS as well as to introduce statistical surveys on international migration (survey on emigration and survey on immigration). The SORS is already working on centralization, processing and publishing of data on internal migration, but there is no statistical survey on international migration. This specific unit will ensure an efficient system of producing centralized national data on migration in accordance with international standards. Due to financial constrains, there is however, a limitation in applying additional modules in the LFS.

The short-term outcome of these activities is the development of a more systematic approach to the statistics of migration in accordance with the national and EU legislations.

The long-term outcome would be to enable the establishment of an organized and developed national statistical system, as well as constant monitoring of the migration phenomenon.

Relevant stakeholders: the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (CRMS), the Ministry of Interior (MI), the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS), other relevant ministries.

Possible challenges: financing