

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

USA

Name and email address of rapporteur: MPI Europe

Date: 1 August 2023

Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?

Both the availability and quality of irregular migration data and estimates has been increasing over the past decades in the United States. Several government bodies (e.g. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and US Border Patrol) and specialized research institutes (e.g. the Migration Policy Institute, the Pew Research Center, and the Center for Migration Studies) now provide estimates of irregular migration that allow comparisons and benchmarking of competing estimates. The estimates rely predominantly on different versions of the residual method. In addition to this method, the Migration Policy Institute has developed a methodology in close cooperation with Prof. Jenny van Hook and Prof. James Bachmeier that uses Combined-Sample Multiple Imputation to assign legal status in the American Community Survey (ACS) and provides more granular estimates about the characteristics of the unauthorized migration population in the USA.

Certain groups that have been granted temporary relief from deportation are typically included in estimates of the irregular migrant stock. This includes persons benefitting from Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPC), and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). While methodological notes clearly specify which groups have, or have not, been included in estimates of unauthorized populations, news article headlines often do not include this nuance. The inclusion of groups with temporary relief from deportation may therefore distort the perception of how many people are residing in the United States without authorization.

The sources for stock estimates that are included in the attached excel file derive from the Pew Research Center, the Department of Homeland Security, Center for Migration Studies, the Migration Policy Institute, the Center for Immigration Studies and the Congressional Budget Office. For flows, the only source is the Center for Migration Studies. The estimates were overall of good quality given the extensive documentation provided regarding their methodology and the authoritative data on which they are based. However, not all raw data

were available for all estimates, and some didn't provide ranges but only point estimates (see more details in the excel sheets).

Note on the numbering system of the attached excel file:

The sheets in the attached excel file on stocks and flows are named using three numbers. The first number identifies the source:

- Pew Research Center - Sheet 1 et al. (stocks);
- Department of Homeland Security - Sheet 2 et al. (stocks);
- Center for Migration Studies - Sheet 3 et al. (stocks) and Sheet 5 et al. (flows);
- Migration Policy Institute - Sheet 4 et al. (stocks);
- Center for Immigration Studies – Sheet 6 et al.;
- Congressional Budget Office – Sheet 7 et al.

The second one indicates the year to which the data refers, and the third one maps a sub-category (e.g. estimates by country of birth, gender, age, etc.). For instance, while all the sheets beginning with “2” refer to the Department of Homeland Security database, sheet 2.1 shows the estimated unauthorised immigrant population in the US for 2008, and Sheet 2.1.1. reports only the portion of this population whose country of origin is Mexico.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

Policymakers in the US rely on various sources of data, including government agencies, research institutions, and non-governmental organizations, to understand the scale, trends, and characteristics of unauthorized migration. According to the Congressional Budget Office, *“information on the number, demographic characteristics, and labor market outcomes of foreign-born residents without legal status is necessary to assess the cost of federal programs and to estimate the economic impact of immigration policies.”*¹ Besides, these estimates of irregular migration have a significant impact on the political discourse and are shaping electoral statements, making them a highly sensitive information.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

Generally, our data collection process involved three stages:

- Recommended sources by MPI Washington colleagues;
- Search engine research;
- Literature cross-referencing.

These stages were similar for stocks, flows, and indicators. While looking for indicators, the search was tailored towards identifying at least the categories requested in the guidelines, even if not all could be found (see answer to question 5 below).

¹ <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2021-03/57022-Legal-Status.pdf>

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

Overall, the data sources for population stocks are easy to identify and access. However, we only identified one source for estimates of total inflows and outflows (the Center for Migration Studies). These estimates could therefore not be compared with other estimates.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

As for the indicators mentioned in the guidelines, we did not include the following:

- Inland apprehensions:
- Births in irregularity: We couldn't identify any sources.
- Dublin regulation (incoming and outgoing): N/A

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful.

Julia Gelatt – Associate Director of the U.S. Immigration Program at the Migration Policy Institute (jgelatt@migrationpolicy.org).

7. Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example?

The Migration Policy Institute uses Combined-Sample Multiple Imputation (CSMI) to assign (impute) legal status to noncitizen respondents to the American Community Survey.

Given the significant demand for information about unauthorized immigrants living in the United States, researchers at the Migration Policy Institute (MPI)—in collaboration with demographers—have developed a three-stage method to estimate the number and characteristics of the unauthorized immigrant population. The method employs data from three sources: (1) the American Community Survey (ACS), which offers a large sample size and a wide range of characteristics; (2) the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), another Census Bureau product that uniquely collects information about respondents' legal permanent resident status (i.e., whether they have a green card); and (3) federal agency administrative data—mostly from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—which provide actual counts of immigrants in various legal statuses rather than estimates from population surveys. By utilizing these data sources, MPI identifies noncitizens in the ACS who are likely to have a legal status of one type or another, for example lawful permanent residents (LPRs), refugees, asylees, and nonimmigrants with temporary

visas such as international students and H-1B workers (see Box 1). The remainder of the noncitizen population represents the likely unauthorized immigrant population.

In brief, MPI's three-stage method starts with estimating the number of unauthorized immigrants by comparing the number of all immigrants in the ACS with a count of legal immigrants in DHS administrative data. In the second stage, researchers identify which noncitizens in the ACS are legal immigrants and which are unauthorized by comparing their characteristics to immigrants counted in the SIPP. In the third and final stage, the ACS estimates of unauthorized immigrants derived in the second step are weighted upwards to account for coverage error in the ACS and to match the totals derived in the first step comparing the ACS with the DHS data.

For more information about this three-stage method, please consult the [methodological note](#) provided on the MPI website. For resources on how to apply the Combined-Sample Multiple Imputation method, please consult this [slidedeck](#) that was developed for the Summer Institute in Migration Research Methods at UC Berkeley or this edited [videorecording](#) of a lecture by Prof. Jenny van Hook on how to apply this method.