8. Internal Migration

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INTERNAL MIGRATION

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

The rapid transformation of developing countries into urban societies is a common theme wherever the process of social and economic change occurring in these countries is discussed. Although a number of these countries are already predominantly urban, while others will not reach that stage before the turn of the century, the overwhelming majority are experiencing annual rates of urban growth of between 4 and 6 percent and will continue to do so well beyond the twentieth century (United Nations, 1975). At the same time, many developing countries are characterized by a trend toward increasing urban concentration and city primacy, with the largest city often being several times larger than the following three. Estimates of the contribution of migration to urban growth are by no means exact—usually they depend on some very rough assumptions concerning the ratio between rural and urban places in natural increase and include re-classification of previously rural communities—but they indicate that migration accounts for about 42 percent of urban growth in the developing world as a whole. This share ranges from about 34 percent in some subregions to about 58 percent in others (Findley, 1976).

The objective of this chapter is to briefly set out what is known about the patterns of migration in developing countries and their dimensions, the determinants and consequences of internal migration, and the impact and efficiency of government policies.

Types of Internal Migration and the Migration Process

Rural-to-urban migration is only one type of population movement contributing to the pattern of and trend toward urbanization that may be found in a country. Other types of migration that it may be vital to take into account when analyzing the migratory process in a country are seasonal, rural-rural, urban-urban, and return migration. When the perceived problem is the rapid growth of the largest cities, urban-to-urban movements are apt to be of special importance.

Unfortunately, knowledge about the various types of migratory movements is often dramatically inadequate. In large part, the problem lies with the limited amount and problematic nature of the migration data that have been collected in developing countries. Only recently have specific questions on migration begun to be included in censuses, and only a few specialized surveys have been undertaken on migration—at least in comparison to the number of fertility surveys that have been conducted in recent years. A large share of the migration estimates now available for developing countries are derived from the application of indirect techniques to the intercensal volume of population change. Such estimates refer only to net migration and provide no indication of the size of the flows of in- and out-migration to and from the region or city in question. As a rule, the migration surveys that have been done have focused on individual spatial units of analysis, rural and urban, but particularly large cities and, therefore, do not capture many elements of the migration process in the country as a whole.

In addition, specific census questions on migration are usually made with reference to place of birth or place of residence at some previous time,
thus restricting analysis to permanent migration. The situation becomes more critical when only limited numbers and kinds of census tabulations are made available. The limitations of the data base have been especially great with regard to determining the volume and nature of both seasonal and rural-to-rural migration. Return migration is in a similarly disadvantaged position, both because of the difficulty of obtaining estimates from census data and because it has been neglected in most specialized surveys (Urzúa, 1978). As a result of this situation, attempts to understand the migratory process as a whole and the mutual interrelations among the different types of migration are practically non-existent. Some analyses and interpretations address themselves to the links between rural-urban and urban-urban migration within the framework of the stepwise migration model; but even within this restricted view, the studies are few and the conclusions unclear.

The Determinants of Internal Migration

Ideally, population distribution policy should be based on knowledge of the effect that different factors have on the several particular types of population movement, as well as on migrants and potential migrants from different social classes. Most of the work that has been done on the determinants of internal migration, however, refers either to migration in general or to rural-urban movements in particular, and does not distinguish between socioeconomic groups.

The actual process of deciding whether or not to migrate, when to do it, where to go, with whom and for how long has been a relatively neglected subject in the analysis of the determinants of migration. Lacking direct data, most studies assume that the decision-making process is an economically rational one and that people decide to migrate when the perceived costs of staying at their present place of residence are higher than the benefits of changing residence minus the costs of moving. 22 But an understanding of what is responsible for the differences between families and individuals in terms of their "inertia" to move and strength of attachment to place of birth or current residence is notably lacking.

There is, however, a considerable amount of information regarding the motives for migrating that has been collected retrospectively from individual respondents to survey questionnaires. Although the relative importance of the reasons given by respondents is not necessarily the same, they basically fall into five main categories: (1) low income at the place of origin and expectations of increasing it at the place of destination; (2) unemployment, underemployment, or dissatisfaction with present job at place of origin and expectation of better employment opportunities at the place of destination; (3) the desire for better educational facilities/resources than those available at place of origin; (4) a number of other reasons such as marriage, death of a family member, presence of friends and relatives at the prospective new place of residence, and so on; and (5) the movement of a spouse or parents for any physical distance.

22. The classical formulation of this model is found in the often-quoted paper by Sjaastadt (1962). Similar assumptions are made in the well-known Todaro model (1969) and its successive modifications.
of the four previous reasons (Urzúa, 1978; Caldwell, 1968; Simmons et al., 1977).

Most of the information available on the objective conditions and developmental factors that determine aggregate migration flows is from cross-sectional econometric studies of census data on net migration between administrative units and, occasionally, between rural and urban areas. The most recent reviews and evaluations of the findings from this type of study (Yap, 1976; Findley, 1976; Simmons et al., 1977; Todaro, 1976; Shaw, 1975; Urzúa, 1978) confirm the importance of differences in average income or wage levels and in employment opportunities that previous reviews had already emphasized. Migration is positively associated with urban wages and negatively associated with rural wages. At the same time, the chances of obtaining employment (which are inversely related to the urban unemployment rate) are independently significant, but the distinction between opportunities in the modern or formal sector and in the traditional or informal sector does not seem to be of much importance (Yap, 1976). Other variables that usually obtain statistically significant coefficients in cross-sectional studies are the degree of urbanization, urban contacts, distance, and education.

These findings are consistent with those from surveys with respect to the reasons for migrating given by individual respondents in showing that rural-urban migration, as well as other types of internal migration, is responsive to opportunities for economic improvement. But, while wage differentials, the probability of finding a job, and the other factors mentioned above are clearly the immediate factors determining migration, these in turn clearly depend on, among other things, the spatial allocation of economic activities and patterns of regional and sectoral development, which are the result of both government policies and decisions made in the private sector of the economy (where this exists). Within this framework, an important question is, what are the identifiable aspects of overall development that tend to promote or retard migration to urban areas? By and large, the answers that are presently available are the product of logical argument rather than empirical comparative analyses.

Perhaps the most basic hypothesis is that migration rates will be higher where economic growth is more rapid. The argument usually turns on rising levels of personal income in combination with income-inelastic demand for agricultural products and greater efficiency of urban as opposed to rural configurations in production and consumption of non-agricultural products. It is widely recognized, however, that a number of other features of development will modify the rate and the pattern of urbanization. Among those frequently mentioned are: (a) unbalanced technological changes (say, between primary and secondary activities; (b) international economic relations (affecting the pattern of import and export specialization); (c) population growth rates and differentials (affecting the relative abundance of and returns to labor in rural and urban areas); (d) institutional arrangements governing relations among factors of production (land tenure systems, financial and credit mechanisms, and price and tax distortions, usually in favor of urban activities); as well as (e) biases in government services, especially health and education (Preston, 1978). Increasingly, it is also being recognized that such fundamental aspects of an economy do not vary at random but are closely linked to
Certainly one approach to verifying hypotheses regarding the influence of patterns of development on migration and urbanization would be comparative cross-sectional studies utilizing data for a large number of countries. As Preston (1978) suggests, probably the main reason these studies have not been conducted is the absence of an internationally comparable set of data on rural-urban migration rates.

The Consequences of Internal Migration

Until a few years ago, much of the literature on the consequences of migration for individual migrants was characterized by a pessimistic view about the opportunities cityward migrants had in their places of destination. Their difficulties in adjusting to an urban environment and culture, their economic disadvantages compared to the native population, their inability to move upward socially in the cities, and their frustration and the political radicalization derived therefrom were a constant theme. But, viewed from the perspective of the empirical results of studies undertaken in recent years, as well as from more careful analyses of past surveys, that pessimistic image appears to lack factual support, to be highly exaggerated, or to be empirically wrong.

One of the most common assumptions about migrants' adaptation to their new environment was that they encounter great difficulty in finding employment. The evidence indicates that this is not so, at least for the majority. Not only is their search for employment shorter than was expected, but also their unemployment rates do not differ significantly from those of natives (Simmons et al., 1977; Urzúa, 1978; and Findley, 1976). Studies from three very different parts of the world--Taiwan, Kenya, and Brazil--also support the generalization that migrants receive higher incomes in their place of destination than in their place of origin (Spears, 1971; Harris and Rempel, 1976; Yap, 1976). Similarly, there is very little evidence showing that migrants suffer social and psychological maladjustments in their new environment.

All told, if one considers only the fate of migrants themselves in the cities, attempts to reduce cityward migration cannot be justified on grounds of improving their lot.

Migration may, of course, influence the welfare of the population that remains in the places of origin or that is already present in the places of destination, but the consequences of internal migration for sending and receiving areas have proved difficult to evaluate. Among the economic effects

23. For example, one hypothesis with considerable currency in Latin America is that the pursuit of economic growth through import substitution-led industrialization often combines a number of these factors in such a way as to produce massive movements to a few urban centers. This is apt to be the case when economic decision-making is closely tied to a centralized bureaucratic apparatus, leading to a concentration of political power and government institutions in a few industrial centers. Inherent in the unbalanced center-periphery relations that emerge is sharp inequality of opportunities between the largest cities and the rest of the country.
of migration that have been taken into consideration are those on economic growth and productivity, on wages and employment, and on technological change. With regard to sending areas, the empirical association between rural out-migration and declines in agricultural productivity has given rise to the hypothesis that migrant selectivity by age, education, and skill level (a common finding in all the regions reviewed) results in a drop in productivity (Schulz, 1976; Skinner, 1965; Martínez, 1968; and Chi-Yi-Chen, 1968). The other explanation is that both the out-migration and the productivity decline are the result of third factors, such as soil erosion and increasing population density (Simmons et al., 1977). Another debate has been with regard to the nature of the relation between technological change (mechanization) in agriculture and rural out-migration (Urzúa, 1978).

With regard to the impact on rural wages, there is some evidence that these are higher than they would be in the absence of migration (Gaude, 1976). Remittances from migrants to their communities of origin, either in cash or kind, constitute another mechanism through which migration has an economic effect on sending communities (Caldwell, 1968; Johnson and Whitelaw, 1974; Simmons et al., 1977; and Connell et al., 1976).

The economic effects of migration on the receiving cities are even more difficult to unravel. Increases in urban unemployment and underemployment, fragmentation of the urban labor market into traditional and modern sectors, increased congestion and environmental pollution, and greater expenditures on and/or greater shortages of public services are some of the consequences considered to derive either directly or indirectly from urbanward migration.

Movements of population between areas with different social and cultural consequences of migration that have been mentioned are: rural losses in the capacity for social change that result from the selective character of rural out-migration, the "ruralization" of cities due to the maintenance of rural life patterns in the urban environment, and the "modernization" of rural areas through seasonal rural-urban migration and return migration.

Although there is little research available to demonstrate the point, migrant selectivity by age and sex can have a recognizable effect on nuptiality in both places of origin and of destination. Data on the characteristics of migrants from all three developing world regions confirm that rural-urban migrants are predominantly young adults. In Latin America, more women than men migrate from the rural areas, while the contrary seems to be the rule in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. The situation in other parts of Asia appears to vary from country to country: women have recently caught up with men in South-East Asia, with the exception of Indonesia, and have surpassed men for over two decades in East Asia.

The negative statistical association found between urbanization and fertility gave rise to the hypothesis that rural-to-urban migration has a depressing effect on the national fertility rate. The issue, of course, turns on the question of whether the fertility of female migrants would have been higher had they remained in a rural area. Research on the topic has usually involved comparing migrants with rural women of similar characteristics, and for the most part the latter have more children at an equivalent duration of marriage. Such results have occasionally been cited to support the case for rapid urbanization (Currie, 1971).
In addition to the issues raised by rural-to-urban migration in general, in recent years the question of migration to the largest metropolitan cities—whether from rural or other urban areas—has been gaining special attention. Until a few years ago, it was almost an article of faith among economists, sociologists, and social planners that both urbanization and metropolitanization were positively associated with higher productivity, industrialization, and social integration. Proponents of the thesis that large cities have a positive role in development have pointed to the advantages that firms or businesses receive from access to larger markets for their products as well as for labor and other inputs; the advantages that urban residents enjoy in terms of access to better social services; the benefits deriving from the diffusion and adoption of a culture more attuned to the needs of development; and the value of the more organized participation in the political process that comes with increased urbanization.

In recent years, however, unqualified endorsements of urbanization have become much less frequent, and social scientists of quite different ideological and theoretical persuasions have become increasingly concerned with the possibly negative effects of high city primacy and the concentration of economic activity and population in the huge metropolitan agglomerations that now exist in many developing countries. An ever-growing concentration of industrial development in one or at most a few pre-existing large cities creates, according to some authors, a type of internal division of labor and asymmetric "center-periphery" relations that help to perpetuate dependency on developed countries and wide inequality in the distribution of income and opportunities within and between regions of a country. This dependency and inequality, in turn, contribute in a recursive way to further concentration and metropolitanization. The "over-urbanization" that results is associated with widespread unemployment and underemployment in addition to all of the problems of environmental pollution, lack of social services, marginality, and traffic congestion that plague most cities in the developing world (Geisse, 1978, pp. 31-33).

In large measure, however, the debate over whether or not urbanization cum metropolitanization is beneficial has come to rest on the empirical but elusive question of whether the largest cities in a country have become "too big" in the sense that diseconomies of scale have set in. There are several aspects of this issue. The first is in regard to the demand for and cost of publicly provided services such as water, electricity, and waste disposal. It is argued that, up to a point, the larger the city (or town), the more efficiently (cheaply) these can be provided. Beyond that point, the marginal and average cost of providing such services rises sharply. Attempts to estimate these relations are at an early stage in developed countries (Carlino, 1978) and are just beginning in developing countries. In the latter, however, there are a number of clear examples—such as Jakarta and Mexico City—where this sort of diseconomy may have been important for some time. Also, there is the secure impression among policy-makers that providing services in "medium-sized" cities is cheaper than in the very largest (IRG, 1978).

The second aspect of the agglomerative economies question refers to production. After taking into account the cost and availability of public services, there are still other considerations—such as a larger and more efficient labor market and reduced transportation costs—that make larger cities more efficient in producing goods and services. The point at which such economies diminish and then become negative is unknown for both developed and
developing countries. It is an empirical question, but one that seems very hard to get a grip on (Alonso, 1975).

The Impact and Efficiency of Government Policies

Government policies designed to modify or guide the spatial distribution of population take a wide variety of forms, and are, of course, complemented or frustrated by policies and programs implemented with no consideration as to their effect on migration.

Direct policies. Among the most direct policies to affect the spatial distribution of population are colonization and resettlement schemes to induce migration to selected rural areas. Although these programs are often multipurpose in their conception, agricultural development is a dominant and recurring objective (Mabogunje, 1978). They are perhaps most common in Sub-Saharan Africa but are also found with some frequency in Asia and Latin America. Two of the most well-known projects of this type are the Tanzanian program of villagization and the resettlement of Javanese on the outer islands of Indonesia. The former is undoubtedly the most thorough-going program to influence the spatial distribution of population in recent times, involving the resettlement of about half the population of Tanzania.

Measuring the initial impact of colonization and resettlement is usually quite straightforward in that the responsible agency is apt to collect reliable statistics on the number of families or individuals that have been relocated. What return migration may occur after relocation is often much harder to estimate and has considerable bearing on the "success" of the program. More often than not, thorough evaluations of colonization projects are lacking. 24/

Legal controls, enforced by the police, are another quite direct way in which governments may try to influence migration. In China, for example, passes are required to leave a rural area, to enter an urban area, to secure the transfer of use of food ration cards, to move within the transport system, and to secure accommodation in an urban area; police checks at the entry point to the city, as well as periodic pass checks in urban areas, are used to make this regulation effective. In Indonesia, a slightly simpler regulation governs Jakarta—the legal prohibitions against moving to the city are used as a method of intimidation rather than as an enforceable law. Comparable controls of one form or another have also been used in Tanzania and South Africa. Less direct controls have also been implemented. For example, in order to move to Havana, Cubans must present evidence that they have secured housing with a certain minimum area of floor-space per member of the family.

How successful such policies are in limiting migration depends largely on the amount of influence government is able to exert at "street" level; laws are likely to be evaded, enforcement officers are likely to be bribed, and exceptions sought as an illegal black market in the labor supply emerges (Wiener, 1975). Such policies may also have an important political cost, but

so far there are no comprehensive studies of both the political and demographic impact of major policies of this type.

**Indirect policies.** Government policies to influence migration often take the form of "doing things differently" for the sake of avoiding the negative effects of a too rapid or too concentrated pattern of urbanization. Indirect policies of this nature are of several kinds:

- Efforts to narrow the rural-urban wage gap. These usually involve incomes policies to keep urban wage rates from rising and price supports for agricultural products to raise rural incomes, as in Kenya. More generally, rural development programs that generate employment opportunities in rural areas serve to raise incomes relative to those in urban areas and, perhaps, reduce the pace of rural-urban movement.

- Attempts to increase the relative disposition of public services in rural areas and medium-sized cities. These are another aspect of many integrated rural development programs that incorporate sectoral inputs in areas such as transport, electrification, and education. In urban and semi-urban areas, housing may be an important good that is provided by government and that may serve to attract population. Housing policy has apparently been used extensively and with great effect to guide the spatial distribution of population in Cuba.

- Administrative decentralization and relocation. Policies of this sort range in magnitude from the relocation of a few government offices, to major programs to decentralize the administration of public programs to state and district-level capitals. Building an entirely new national capital as in Brazil and, more recently, Nigeria would also fall in this category.

- Regional development and industrial location policies. These usually have as part of their stated purpose the redirection of migration toward selected new or medium-sized towns or cities—either as a matter of planned metropolitanization or of creating so-called "growth poles" at a considerable distance from existing industrial centers. There are important examples in India, one of the best known being the policy implemented in Maharashtra State (Harris, 1978). Algeria and Egypt have undertaken important efforts to disperse industrial activity away from the capital. Colombia has implemented a policy whereby investments in industrial plants by foreign capital may only be made in cities other than the principal urban centers (Bogota, Cali, Medellin, and Cartagena).

- General town planning principles. Regulations in this area are often designed to curb as well as rationalize urban growth. Measures include the creation of green belts around cities, zoning laws, and land use and density controls.

The efficiency and effectiveness in reorienting migration of most of the indirect policies mentioned above have, in general, not been researched. 25/

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25. See, however, Simmons (1979) for a stimulating analysis and overview of Asian policy experience.
Part of the problem is that the redistributive aims of many policies were never clearly stated, and often the policies themselves were never fully implemented. Clearly one important factor is the amount of control that the state has over economic activity in general. When there is a large private sector subject to few controls, the implementation of policies to influence migration has usually met with considerable difficulty.

TOWARD ESTABLISHING A POLICY-RELEVANT RESEARCH AGENDA

Pulling together the strengths and weaknesses of the knowledge base and taking into account the policy-making context, certain considerations seem to be critical in terms of the contribution that social science research can make to migration policy in developing countries.

The Nature of the Problem

As was indicated above, there are few "hard" empirical research findings with regard to questions such as how fast should urbanization proceed, when are cities "too large," and what is the most appropriate spatial distribution of the population, although these are hotly debated issues among scholars, many of whom have very firm opinions in this regard. This lack of consensus is in marked contrast to the understandable uniformity of opinion among most politicians and officials responsible for providing public services in the largest cities, who believe that rapid rural-metropolitan and urban-metropolitan migration should be curtailed.

An important complication is that even if the facts of the case were clear, the matter of whether urbanization is proceeding too rapidly or not would be seen from different perspectives by different groups, and there would clearly be no single answer to the question. What appears to be important is to concentrate on learning more about the proximate consequences of migration, placing special emphasis on determining the costs or effects that are not borne or felt by the migrants themselves (and their immediate or extended families), but which rather "spill over" onto the public sector and different population groups resident in the place of destination, or onto the population remaining in the place of origin. Clearly, such spill-over effects are not negligible--and this, for many, provides the justification for public intervention--but analysis and quantification have not yet proceeded far.

Jurisdictional Issues and the Current State of Planning

The wide variety of governmental actions that were earlier identified as migration policies usually lie within the purview of a number of ministries or governmental departments. With increasing frequency, a special ministry or agency has been given authority to coordinate or develop a national "human settlements" policy. What is of some relevance to the need for and the role of social science research in this area is the type of ministry or agency where such authority is apt to be placed. In the main, these tend to be the departments responsible for housing and public works. Their coordinating function and authority is usually exercised jointly with the planning agency or budget office. The point, however, is that the people who develop such plans are mostly engineers or architects, or administrators used to relying on professional inputs from these fields. Social science inputs are often given short shrift or are not considered. Often, the "comprehensive" planning
document that such departments produce meets with a cool reception from social scientists who are quick to point to its technical deficiencies and lack of social content, and who argue that the proposed policy measures are of a piecemeal sort, doomed to failure in the absence of a major shift in development strategy.

**Felt Needs of Policy-Makers**

At the series of IRG workshops, policy-makers expressed quite definite preferences with regard to priorities for research on migration. Not surprisingly, uppermost on their list was evaluation. In the case of countries where direct policies have been implemented and quantitatively significant redistributions have taken place, such as Tanzania, the chief interest of policy-makers was in evaluating the extent to which the program had accomplished its ultimate social objectives. In the case of countries where indirect policies have been implemented, such as Kenya and Colombia, the interest was more in the first-order question of how much migration flows had actually been altered by the policy.

Latin American policy-makers were quick to recognize that for a long time governments in the region had neglected rural development, while concentrating their energies on industrialization by way of import-substitution. They also claimed, however, that recently the majority of these governments had taken important steps to correct this bias and had implemented many of the indirect policies listed above with the intent of achieving a more "rational" pattern of urbanization; but that so far the demographic impact of most of these measures had not been studied seriously.

A second major and related concern expressed by most policy-makers was with regard to the lack of detailed information on the size and character of the migratory flows taking place in their countries.

**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Consequences of Internal Migration**

There is a need for additional knowledge on the consequences of migration. The fact that so little has been accomplished to date is an indication that the issues are complex and not easily quantified. For this reason, initial efforts should be directed toward investigating the most tractable questions about consequences. One priority topic should be measuring the economies and diseconomies of agglomeration in the provision of public services. Beyond that, attempts should be made to identify and quantify the most important spill-overs or externalities that immigration to major metropolitan cities has for different population groups already resident in those cities and for rural residents left behind. Where feasible research designs are forthcoming with respect to analyzing the effects on productivity, both in the receiving and the sending area, of population redistribution, these too should be supported.

Work along these lines will not produce finely-honed estimates of the different costs and benefits of alternative patterns of migration. It could, however, introduce some quantification into an area of policy debate that up
to now has been an empirical vacuum. No simple answers will emerge, but the inevitable political decisions that will be taken on migration policy in the next ten years could then be based on a more accurate appreciation of who the affected parties are and what is it that they stand to lose or gain.

**Links between Migration Patterns and Overall Development Strategy**

Among the seemingly most consequential hypotheses that have been advanced by scholars in the field is that the pattern or style of development is what in the final analysis determines the spatial distribution of population and changes therein. An implication or corollary is that most of the indirect policy measures available to governments will either never be effectively implemented or will have little impact unless there is also a change in the mechanisms responsible for rural-urban and inter-urban differentials in wages and employment opportunities.

These hypotheses merit further investigation that should be carried out at different levels. First, detailed studies of individual countries should be undertaken to determine the nature of the mechanisms and forces at work in concrete situations. These studies should pay particular attention to how changes in social and economic structures are affecting the levels of living and employment opportunities of particular social groups in specific rural and urban places. Secondly, international comparative studies should be attempted that make use of comparable data on migration and indicators of development style for as large a sample of countries as possible. This type of comparative analysis would follow on and expand the scope of research that has recently been undertaken by the Population Division of the United Nations.

**Evaluation of Migration Policies**

In the past 15 years or so, such a wide variety of direct and indirect policies have been adopted with the objective of modifying migration flows that there is at present a pressing need for studies to evaluate their success in affecting the spatial distribution of population, as well as their ultimate impact in terms of improving social welfare.

One project that would constitute an important first step and a foundation for further work would be to prepare a comprehensive descriptive and evaluative inventory of policies adopted during this period in developing countries to curb rural-to-urban migration. Attention could be focused on some of the more important cases (Indonesia, Tanzania, India, Nigeria, Colombia, and Cuba), appraising the degree to which the policies adopted were actually implemented, to what extent they achieved the stated purposes, and whether what was achieved was desirable. This review would describe the design and mode of operation of these different policies and assess their costs—economic, administrative, and otherwise. In short, it would attempt to answer the question of what has been tried and how it has worked. Such a broad and comparative overview would not preempt but would rather complement detailed studies of programs and policies that should be undertaken in the context of individual countries.
Descriptive Research

As was described above, basic knowledge of the various dimensions of the migration process is notably deficient in most developing countries. While data are generally available on the net transfer of population from rural to urban areas, reliable estimates of return, seasonal, and rural-to-rural migration are usually not available. This represents an important impediment to policy design as well as to further understanding of the determinants and consequences of the migration process itself.

A large part of the blame lies with the bluntness of the instruments (especially censuses) that are presently relied on to produce data on migration flows. One venturesome suggestion put forward in the IRG workshop for Latin America was to conduct a preliminary investigation of the feasibility of establishing a system of indirect population registers that, while avoiding the potential for abuse and political control inherent in a population registry such as that existing in Sweden and other European countries, would use information collected by the various public agencies or services with whom migrants come in contact. While this suggestion is far from constituting a well-developed proposal, it bears following up.
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