

UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES OF THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU
ON IMMIGRATION AND THE FOREIGN-BORN

U.S. Census Bureau

A. INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines different on-going activities at the U.S. Census Bureau related to immigration and the foreign-born. Several of the projects listed below are coordinated by the Immigration Statistics Staff (ISS), which is a branch in the Estimates and Projections Area of the Population Division of the U.S. Census Bureau. This paper also discusses related projects coordinated by other areas in the Population Division and the Census Bureau.

B. SUITLAND WORKING GROUP

The Suitland Working Group is an outgrowth of two other collaborative efforts, the U.S. Census Bureau's work with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Conference of European Statisticians' Work Plan to Improve Migration Statistics. The primary objective of the Suitland Working Group is to improve the use of household surveys to measure levels and outcomes of migration. To achieve this objective, the Working Group intends to produce a series of products that would provide agencies in both developed and developing countries with practical guidance on how to best use household surveys—possibly combined with other sources—to measure levels and outcomes of international migration and the characteristics of migrant populations.

In March 2009, the Census Bureau, along with Eurostat, ECE, the United Nations Population Division, and the United Kingdom Office of National Statistics, sponsored a conference on using household surveys to measure migration and the size, distribution, and characteristics of migrant populations. This conference was held at the Census Bureau headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, from 16 to 17 March 2009. Invited participants represented statistical agencies, non-governmental organizations and universities from around the world. The initial output of this conference was a workplan available on the ECE website.¹ The workplan lists several projects that the group hopes to accomplish in the next 18 to 24 months, including, for example: (a) developing questionnaire modules on migration and remittances; (b) developing a website repository of household survey questionnaires; (c) developing a typology and defining hard-to-count populations; (d) developing a working paper reviewing methodologies used to estimate emigration, and (e) analyzing methods used to link population register data with other forms of administrative data. The Steering Committee of the Suitland Working Group has monthly conference calls and continues to work on coordinating and completing these and other projects. Volunteers who would like to participate in any of these projects are welcome.

C. IMPROVING ESTIMATES OF NET INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

The Immigration Statistics Staff (ISS) at the U.S. Census Bureau is responsible for producing estimates of net international migration that are included as part of the annual population estimates produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. Net international migration is

estimated in four components: (a) net international migration of the foreign-born; (b) net migration between the United States of America and Puerto Rico; (c) net migration of natives to and from the United States, and (d) net movement of the armed forces population to and from the United States.

During the last several years, ISS has been working on improvements to the estimates of foreign-born international migrants and migration between the United States and Puerto Rico. Previously these components were estimated as a net number using a single-year change method. Beginning with the 2007 population estimates, the Residence One Year Ago (ROYA) method was used to estimate net foreign-born migration and migration between the United States and Puerto Rico. The ROYA method estimates foreign-born immigration and emigration separately. Foreign-born immigration and immigration from Puerto Rico is estimated using information from the American Community Survey (ACS) on reported residence one year ago. Foreign-born emigration is estimated by developing rates of emigration by period of entry using information from the 2000 United States census and the ACS, and then applying these rates to the stock estimate of the foreign-born in each year of the ACS. Puerto Rico emigration is estimated using information from the Puerto Rico Community Survey on residence one year ago in the United States.

ISS is also updating the demographic characteristics and geographic distribution of the components of net international migration. Prior estimates used geographic and demographic information from Census 2000. In an effort to account for shifts in the demographic characteristics and geographic distribution of immigrants and emigrants since 2000, the 2009 net international migration estimates will use information from both the 2000 census and the 2005-2007 ACS to obtain demographic and geographic detail.

D. DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Demographic Analysis (DA) is a method for assessing census coverage that has been used by the Census Bureau in every census since 1960. The DA population estimates are constructed using vital statistics, estimates of net international migration and—for the population aged 65 or over— data from Medicare. DA estimates will likely provide the first indication of census coverage after the 2010 census counts are released. The traditional DA estimates have been disaggregated by sex and single year of age. The race categories have been black and non-black. New data sources and changes in the racial and ethnic make-up of the country and patterns of international migration present both challenges and opportunities for DA in 2010. For 2010, the Census Bureau is planning to produce the traditional DA estimates described above. It is also exploring ways to expand the DA categories, such as estimates for Hispanics and non-Hispanics. After Census 2000, the Census Bureau undertook a major initiative to improve its ability to measure international migration. For 2010, the Census Bureau will draw on this expertise to develop estimates of international migration using different strategies and alternative assumptions.

E. 2010 DECENNIAL CENSUS

Every 10 years since 1790, the United States has completed a decennial census of its population. In 2000, two census forms were used. The “short form” was used to collect data on every person in the United States, including information on age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, relationship, and housing tenure. The “long form” was used to collect data on approximately one

in every six persons in the United States and included the short form questions as well as other questions covering a variety of demographic, social, economic and housing topics. The long form data provided a wealth of information on the characteristics of the foreign-born in the United States, including place of birth, United States citizenship status, year of entry into the United States, residence five years ago, language spoken at home, race, ethnicity and ancestry.

A number of important changes have been implemented for the 2010 census round. The census will include only one form sent to the entire United States population and will ask questions similar to those on the 2000 census short form. However, detailed demographic, social, economic and housing data will no longer be collected as part of the decennial census, and there will be no questions that can be used to identify the foreign-born population included on the 2010 form. Instead, the ACS will provide data that are comparable to the decennial long-form sample data. The ACS is a household survey conducted by the Census Bureau that is designed to meet the needs of federal Government agencies. Most of the questions that were asked on the 2000 census long form are included on the ACS questionnaire. Key migration-related items included in the ACS data include place of birth, United States citizenship status, year of naturalization, year of entry into the United States, residence one year ago, language spoken at home, race, ethnicity and ancestry.^{2, 3, 4}

F. 2010 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY CONTENT TEST

In preparation for introducing changes to the content of the 2013 ACS, the Census Bureau is conducting the 2010 ACS content test. The primary objectives of the ACS content test are to test whether changes to question wording, response categories and redefinition of underlying constructs improve the quality of the data collected. Cognitive testing and expert review of the new and revised questions were completed from May to August 2009 to determine which of the new and revised questions should be used in the subsequent field test.

The Immigration Statistics Staff (ISS) requested that questions on parental place of birth, reported separately for both father and mother, be included on the 2010 ACS content test. ISS organized, and currently chairs, the Subcommittee on Parental Place of Birth, consisting of Census Bureau experts and representatives from other United States Government agencies. The Subcommittee suggested to include two sets of questions —one shorter and one longer— on the cognitive test. The results suggested no substantial conceptual differences between the two versions. As no additional information would be obtained from further testing different question set versions, the subcommittee recommended: (a) testing a single version of the parental place of birth question set and (b) testing this version on two different places on the content test questionnaire. The subcommittee chose the following question format: In what country was this person's father born? In what country was this person's mother born? The 2010 ACS content test will have two panels, testing alternative placements of the parental place of birth questions between questions on year of entry into the United States and school enrolment and between questions on ancestry and language spoken at home and English language ability.

The 2010 ACS content test questionnaire will be fielded in 2010, and the data will be available to Census Bureau staff for analysis in February 2011. After the analysis of the data, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will determine if the parental place of birth questions will be included on the 2013 ACS questionnaire.

G. CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY 2008 MIGRATION SUPPLEMENT

The Immigration Statistics Staff developed a migration supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) monthly questionnaire fielded by the Census Bureau in August 2008. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labour Statistics and is the primary source of information on labour force characteristics of the United States population. The migration supplement covered five topics: (a) citizenship; (b) year of entry; (c) residence one year ago; (d) residents and emigrants abroad, and (e) remittances. It included questions on: (a) changes in citizenship status; (b) when people came to and left the United States; (c) time outside the United States; (d) where people lived one year previously; (e) whether or not anyone who had lived in the household in the previous 12 months had moved outside the United States; (f) basic demographic information on those who did move outside the United States, and (g) whether or not households gave or received money from friends and family living abroad. Currently, Census Bureau staff are reviewing the data from the migration supplement and completing related technical documentation. The 2008 migration supplement public use micro-data file is scheduled for release in 2010 and will be available on the Census Bureau's website.

H. POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2008 national projections for the United States were released on 14 August 2008. The national projections are of the resident population and demographic components of change, including births, deaths and net international migration. The data are available by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin for each year from 1 July 2000 to 1 July 2050. The projections are based on Census 2000 and were produced using a cohort-component method.

The 2009 national projections, which supplement the 2008 national projections, provide results for differing assumptions of international migration. Given the fluctuations in international migration over the past century and the changing economic climate since 2000, it is plausible that patterns of international migration could increase, decrease, or remain stable over the coming decades. The 2009 national projections provide new projection series that modify the series released in 2008 by incorporating four alternative net international migration assumptions: (a) high net international migration; (b) low net international migration; (c) constant net international migration, and (d) zero net international migration. Except where noted for international migration, all other methodology and assumptions, including those for mortality and fertility, are the same as those used in the 2008 national projections.^{5,6}

NOTES

¹ For the website, see <http://unece.org/stats/documents/2009.03.migration.htm> (accessed 5 May 2010).

² For additional information about the American Community Survey, see <http://www.census.gov/acs> (accessed 5 May 2010).

³ To access ACS data, including the "Selected Population Profiles" for over 100 foreign-born groups, use the American Fact Finder feature at <http://factfinder.census.gov> (accessed on 5 May 2010).

⁴ The "Compass" products provide additional information researchers need to download and analyze ACS data and are available at http://www.census.gov/acs/www/UseData/Compass/compass_series.html (accessed on 5 May 2010).

⁵ For the 2008 and 2009 national projections see, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/index.html> (accessed 5 May 2010).

⁶ For more information about the methodology used by the Census Bureau to produce the projections, see: <http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/methodstatement.html> (accessed 5 May 2010).