

## Suggestions for simple questions on international migration in sibling histories

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### Introduction

Data to study trends of international migration flows are crucially lacking, especially in developing countries. Demographic surveys offer useful opportunities to collect original data on international migration (Kasnauskienė and Igoševa, 2010; Bilsborrow, 1997) at relatively low cost, but very few surveys do actually collect data that can be used to measure migration flows. Improving collection systems on international migration has become a major recommendation from academics as well as from international organizations, as was recently illustrated for instance at the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development<sup>1</sup>.

Measuring risks of international migration from surveys in origin countries relies on information about migrants collected from proxy respondents. This is usually done in household surveys, in which 'migrants from the household' are identified. There is no standardized methodology to register migrants, and currently each survey adopts its own approach to define the migrants to be included in its household questionnaire (Schoumaker and Beauchemin, 2013). Some surveys register information on migration from "previous members of the household", but this definition is problematic because of the changing composition of the households; Another different approach consists in referring to family relationships, such as in the Mexican Migration Project (Massey 1987; Donato 1998) that registers all children of the household head, whatever their place of residence (in Mexico or abroad). A similar approach was used in the MAFE surveys, where information was collected on all the children of the head of household. This approach has the advantage of stable relationships over time – so that the population at risk of migrating is clearly defined. A disadvantage is that children are by definition younger than their parents. Migrations registered in this way mainly refer to migration as children or at young ages. As a result, few migrations are registered. Moreover when parents migrate with their children, such migration will not be visible from surveys at origin, and outmigration will be underestimated.

An alternative is to collect data on brothers and sisters. By using family relationships, the set of people at risk of migration is also defined by stable relationships. Moreover, brothers and sisters are on average the same age as the respondents. This allows collecting data on adult migration. Finally, brothers and sisters are less likely to move together as adults than parents and children.

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<sup>1</sup> See UN Resolution 68/4, adopted by the General Assembly on 3 October 2013 that "emphasizes the need for reliable statistical data on international migration, including, when possible, on the contributions of migrants to development in both countries of origin and countries of destination; this data could facilitate the design of evidence-based policy- and decision-making in all relevant aspects of sustainable development" [<http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/439/69/PDF/N1343969.pdf?OpenElement>]

### **Suggested questions on international migration**

The sibling survival histories collected in DHS already include the list of all the brothers and sisters, and their age (or age at death and duration since death). Three simple questions could greatly improve the knowledge on international migration and be used to compute rates of international migration.

The three new questions in the sibling survival history would be, for each brother/sister, the following ones:

- QA1. "Has [name] ever left [country of survey] for at last one year?"
- QA2. "If yes, in what year did he/she leave" (ore how old was he/she ?)
- QA3. If yes, "to which country did he/she go?"

Given that international migration is a relatively rare event, Q2 and Q3 would not be asked for most people, and the additional cost of these questions is probably limited.

The same method that is used to measure adult mortality in DHS surveys could be used to measure the risk of first migration. To use the same method as for mortality, an additional question should be included in the socio-economic section of the questionnaire to identify return migrants among the respondents. This question would be asked to the respondents of the survey – who are by definition living in the country.

- QB4. "Have you ever left [country of survey] for at last one year?"

A person answering yes to this question is a return migrant. In order to use the same method as for measuring mortality and obtain unbiased estimates (Trussell and Rodriguez, 1989), information on siblings collected from return migrants would be dropped, as if migration were an absorbing event as mortality.

### **Interests of these questions**

#### *Measurement of international migration*

These questions would allow the following analyses:

- Measuring the risk of first migration by age for a recent period, to any destination
- Measuring the risk of first migration by age for a recent period, to specific regions (e.g. Africa, Europe...)
- Reconstructing trends in the risk of first migration

#### *Improvement of quality of data on siblings*

Some siblings might be omitted because they have left the country of residence. Including a question on international migration may limit omissions due to migration. It may also improve the quality of the information on age at death.

#### *Health and migration*

Including information on migration in sibling survival histories can be used to evaluate mortality differentials between migrants and non-migrants.

### **Feasibility**

In a survey collecting sibling survival histories among 10 000 women, with on average 3 siblings surviving to adulthood, information is collected on about 30 000 siblings. Considering 3% of the people migrate, around 1000 migrations would be registered in this way.

### **Possible extensions**

Other simple questions could be included to measure return migrations among siblings who have left.

- "QA4. "Has [name] ever come back to [country of survey] for at last one year?"
- "QA5. "If yes, in what year did he/she come back to [country of survey] ?"

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