

Definition of Household Membership in International Migration Surveys

Turgay Ünalán,
Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, Ankara, 06100, Turkey

Abstract: Using data from national surveys conducted within the scope of the Eurostat project titled “Push and Pull Factors of International Migration”, analyses are presented using different definitions (narrow versus wide) of household membership in migrant-sending countries (Egypt, Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Turkey) to see if different definitions are helpful in identifying and increasing the number of migrants who are or was a part of those households. When broad definition was used, the increase in the international migrant members was especially considerable in recent and current migrant households. The findings demonstrated that it was possible to trace an important number of international migrants back in their country of origin and to collect data using proxy interviews. However, it was still impossible to survey emigrants who left the country as a household, those who were not expected to return to the household, those belonging to some dissolved households, or those who died.

Key words: Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, current migrant

INTRODUCTION

Conventional approaches to measure and analyse international migration usually rely on census or survey data as other data sources like passport lists and/or entrance and exit lists are usually not available or of poorer quality. In addition, censuses and population records offer information mostly on quantitative aspects of migrants. Surveys, on the other hand, are usually the main sources of information on why, when and how migration has occurred. Nevertheless, surveys with special methodologies are still needed in order to collect detailed information on migrant’s personal, household, or community characteristics as well as their economic conditions, possessions and income transfers.

Most survey designs in developing country settings require the selection of a household as the basic unit of study. In some cases, a household consists of a nuclear family - a man and woman with their children, if any. However, it sometimes includes the extended family – one or more nuclear families with possible extension via horizontal or vertical relationships. There may also be fragmented households, such as an elderly, young or divorced person who lives alone or friends sharing a house.

In international migration surveys, households are required to be classified as migrant and non-migrant households. A household is considered as a migrant household if at least one person had migrated abroad in a certain period of time in the past.

In general, it is practical in surveys to consider a household as a grouping of people (related to each other

or not) who share the same cooking facilities. Even with such a broad definition of household, problems can arise. One common problem is that households are constantly changing in composition and some members may be away for various time periods, from two days to two years or more. This is especially so when migration is common.

Although surveys are useful in the absence of alternative data on various characteristics of migrants as well as migration processes, one difficult task is to find the immigrant in the receiving country or to trace the emigrant back in the sending country. In order to carry out a survey in the sending country, one needs to trace a migrant by trying to spot the household in which emigrant once lived. To do that, however, the emigrant is required to be declared by the members of the household he or she left some time ago as still part of this household. As it is applied widely in many surveys, if the definition of being a household member is restricted to persons usually living in that household (which implies spending at least half of the year in the household), it becomes only possible to identify a small portion of emigrants who migrated recently. In addition, in the case of migration of a whole household unit, this is an impractical task.

Surveys conducted in immigrant-receiving countries suffer from the fact that only those who have chosen to migrate to that particular country can be studied. From the perspective of migrant sending countries, this implies failing to collect information on 1) those that have either chosen different destinations, 2) those that have returned and 3) those that have not migrated at all.

Studies conducted in migrant-sending countries, on the other hand, may include non-migrants but omit those who have out-migrated, with or without other members of their households^[1] as a natural consequence of surveying the resident population. Although information on those already abroad can be obtained from proxies (a member of the household in sending country who can answer the questions intended to be directed to migrant on behalf of him/her), this approach is generally considered less reliable and unfeasible for questions on attitudes and experiences.

To collect information on international migration for a specific country the need to carry out a survey in sending country with appropriate methodology is clear. The most important consideration should be to find a way of tracing and getting information about migrants abroad.

For the project titled "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" undertaken by Eurostat and NIDI, the usual concept of *household* was extended to include not only those persons who are living together and have communal arrangements concerning subsistence and other necessities of life, but also those who are presently residing elsewhere (inside the country or abroad) but whose principal commitments and obligations are to that household and who are expected to return to that household in the future or whose family will join them in the future. This approach helped the researchers in migrant-sending countries to list those members of the household who were once living in that household but are living abroad for some time^[2]. In order to increase the number of interviewed migrant households, a screening stage was included in the sampling stage of the surveys prior to the sampling of households. With the help of a short screening questionnaire, households were pre-assigned a status of recent migrant household and other household. Then, among these households, households were further selected according to the target sample size. Although the total target sample size was distributed disproportionately, appropriate sample weights were assigned to households before data analyses, depending on their selection probabilities.

The survey questionnaire, therefore, identified not only the members of the household who are living abroad but also those living temporarily elsewhere in the country but listed as part of the household. This allowed classifying the members of the household as 1) currently living in the household, 2) currently living elsewhere in the country and 3) currently living abroad.

However, during the analyses of the "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" project, only two different approaches to define a household were adopted. According to the *narrow definition*, in addition to those who are currently living in the household, the persons who were reported to be living temporarily elsewhere in the country but still regarded as members of the household were included. In other words, narrow

definition included persons living in Turkey only. According to the *broad definition* used in the project a household included not only those living in Turkey but also those living abroad during the time of the survey but declared as part of the household interviewed (current migrants).

A household defined by narrow definition, therefore, includes not only the members usually living in the household but also those temporarily living elsewhere in the country while broad definition includes, in addition, the persons living abroad but still considered as members of the household.

If, in migrant-sending countries, households are of nuclear type, the possibility of finding a migrant member in the household rather weakens as a consequence of the migration of the husband followed by his family, leaving no members or household to declare him (or them) as formerly member(s) of their household. However, if the migrant member is from an extended family, or if he is not joining with his family right after the migration there is a good chance of finding the migrant in the household list.

This study intends to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using the broad definition approach in spotting the emigrants in the country of origin. Analyses are presented with regard to using broad definition of household versus narrow definition in each migrant sending country where the types of households are expected to be different.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses the data from national surveys conducted within the scope of the Eurostat project titled "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" conducted by the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute during 1995-1999. The objective of this project was to improve the understanding of the direct and indirect causes and mechanisms of international migration to the European Union, from an internationally comparative perspective. The focus of the project was on migration from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean region and from Sub-Saharan Africa to the European Union. Within these regions, Turkey, Morocco and Egypt from the Mediterranean region and Senegal and Ghana from West Africa have been selected as predominantly migrant-sending countries and Italy and Spain on the northern Mediterranean border of Europe have been selected as migrant receiving countries for primary data collection on migration. The Netherlands is also included in the survey but the analyses were based on secondary data sources^[1].

The surveys included micro questionnaires in which the data were collected on the household level using a household roster. In this study, analyses will be presented using different definitions (narrow versus broad) of household membership in migrant-sending

countries to see if different definitions are helpful in identifying and increasing the number of migrants who are or was a part of those households.

In order to be able to study migration processes the project adapted the usual definition of household and according to the adapted definition, for the purpose of this project, the household consists of in the case of sending countries:

Members presently residing in the household and Members not presently residing in the household, but considered to be a member of the household, whose principal commitments and obligations are to that household and who are expected to return to that household in the future or whose family will join them in the future and in the case of receiving countries:

Members presently residing in the household and Members not presently residing in the household, but considered to be a member of the household, whose principal commitments and obligations are to that household and to whom the respondent is expected to return in the future or whose family will join him/her in the future.

Migration is defined in this study as a move from one place in order to go and live in another place for a continuous period of at least one year. The line was drawn at one year to distinguish migration from short moves. In this way, short-term visits like family visits, holidays, etc. were not considered as migration. However, there was one exception to this rule. If a migrant is currently living abroad and has migrated more than three months ago, this was also considered as migration and this person was treated as a migrant for whom it is still unknown whether he/she will stay for at least a year.

A *migrant household* is defined as a household in which at least one member - who is still considered a member of that household - has migrated to live abroad for a continuous period of at least one year, or has been living abroad for a continuous period of more than three months. A *non-migrant household* is a household from which no member has ever migrated to live abroad for a continuous period of at least one year and of which no member is currently living abroad for a continuous period of more than three months.

However, since, because of the purpose of this project, the focus was mainly on migration during the past ten years, the above definitions were further refined:

A migrant household is a *recent migrant household* if, during the past ten years, at least one member - who is still considered a member of that household - has moved from the country of origin to live abroad for at least one year, or has been living abroad for more than three months (but less than ten years). A *non-recent migrant household* is a household in which all moves abroad from the country of origin of those persons who are still members of the household took place more than ten years ago.

Both recent and non-recent migrant households may be classified as belonging to either the current or the return type, or a combination of the two depending on the classification of migrant members of the household categorized as current or return migrant. *Current migrants* are those who migrated from their country of origin and actually live abroad at the time of the interview. They may, however, temporarily be in their country of birth, for instance for a holiday or to visit relatives. *Return migrants* have lived abroad for a continuous period of at least one year, but have returned to their country of origin, where they live at the time of the interview.

In principle, any recent migrant, whether return or current, qualified for interviewing about his or her migration experience. However, in order to restrict the number of potential respondents who would be presented with a long individual questionnaire and in order to avoid getting duplicate answers and/or answers that may refer to different households in the past, only one recent migrant in any household was selected for a long interview. This migrant was named the main migration actor, or MMA. Rules were set to select MMAs: potential main migration actors (PMMAs) are all recent migrants in the household aged 18-65 who were born in the survey country and who were 18 years or older at the time of their last migration from the survey country. According to these criteria, in any particular household, more than one member of the household may qualify. But from among the PMMAs identified, only the one who was the first to have left within the ten-year period was selected as the MMA. Additional rules were established to decide on the MMA if several PMMAs had migrated simultaneously.

RESULTS

The samples were not nationally representative and the sample regions were chosen for their relatively high incidence of international migration. Therefore, the data are likely to show a higher incidence of migration than would be the case for each country as a whole (For more information regarding the samples and methodology, see the country reports^[3-7])

Table 1 presents the distribution of households according to their migration status. Even in these regions with high international migration trends, most households had no international migrants at all. When broad definition of household was used, there were more migrant households in Morocco, Egypt and Senegal (ranging from 53,6 to 57,5 percent) compared to Ghana and Turkey (72,1 and 74,5 percent respectively).

Table 1: Distribution of households by household migration status (according to survey countries, 1996-98)

| | Turkey | Egypt | Ghana | Senegal | Morocco |
|---|--------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 11,3 | 26,7 | 24,3 | 19,4 | 26,7 |
| Current International | 8,5 | 14,4 | 19,2 | 13,5 | 24,5 |
| Return International | 2,9 | 12,3 | 5,1 | 6,0 | 2,2 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 3,3 | 3,5 | - | 2,1 | 3,4 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 10,9 | 12,8 | 3,6 | 21,0 | 16,3 |
| Current International | 1,3 | 1,0 | 0,7 | 3,0 | 11,2 |
| Return International | 9,5 | 11,7 | 2,8 | 16,2 | 3,8 |
| Current and Return International | 0,1 | 0,1 | 0,1 | 1,7 | 1,3 |
| Non-migrant Household | 74,5 | 57,0 | 72,1 | 57,5 | 53,6 |
| Total | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 | 100,0 |
| Number of Households | 1564 | 1941 | 1571 | 1740 | 1952 |

Using the broad definition of household membership has obvious advantages of identifying more migrants. Whenever possible, interviews were completed with the migrants themselves when they were visiting the households. Proxy interviews were completed with those migrants who are away from the country of origin. In Turkey, for example, implementation of the survey in summer months when the migrants were likely to spend their vacation in their country of origin increased the chance of conducting face to face interviews with the migrants themselves^[3].

Although the overall mean household size increased only slightly for Turkey using broad definition instead of narrow definition (5,3 versus 5,5), there were significant differences when migrant households are considered (Table 2). In recent migrant households in Turkey, the mean number of household size was 7,9 when broad definition is used, compared to 6,2 when narrow definition is used. Furthermore, when only current migrant households (households with a member migrated within the last 10 years prior to survey date) are considered, the difference increased to more than two persons (6,0 versus 8,2). Although the difference was small for non-recent migrant households in general (4,6 versus 5,0), the difference was more than two persons among current and non-recent migrant households (3,2 versus 5,3).

In Egypt, the overall mean household size increased from 4,5 to 5,7 using broad definition (Table 3). Although the difference was very similar for non-recent migrant households (4,2 versus 5,4), it was larger for recent migrant households (5,1 versus 6,8). In general, the difference was higher in the current migrant households compared to return migrant households. The same pattern applies to recent versus non-recent migrant households. There were also differences in both countries with regard to different regions covered in the survey.

When narrow definition is used, the highest average household size was in non-migrant households both in Turkey and in Egypt. In both Turkish and Egyptian households classified as current international (recent or non-recent), using broad definition brought an increase of at least 2 persons in average.

In Ghana, using broad definition increased the average household size only slightly (from 4,1 to 4,4) as in the cases of Turkey and Egypt but regarding migrant households, the change in average household

size was nearly two persons for recent-current migrant households (Table 4).

Table 2: Average household size by household migration status, Turkey 1996 (according to type of definition of household membership)

| | Narrow Definition | Broad Definition |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 6.2 | 7.9 |
| Current International | 6.0 | 8.2 |
| Return International | 6.8 | 7.0 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 5.0 | 5.6 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 4.6 | 5.0 |
| Current International | 3.2 | 5.3 |
| Return International | 4.8 | 4.9 |
| Current and Return International | (4.9) ^a | (9.3) ^a |
| Non-migrant Household | 5.3 | 5.3 |
| Total | 5.3 | 5.5 |
| Number of Households | 1,564 | 1,564 |

^a Figures in parentheses are based on less than 25 unweighted cases

Table 3: Average household size by household migration status, Egypt 1997 (according to type of definition of household membership)

| | Narrow Definition ^a | Broad Definition |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 6,0 | 6,8 |
| Current International | 5,9 | 7,3 |
| Return International | 6,2 | 6,2 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 5,6 | 5,6 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 5,3 | 5,4 |
| Current International | 4,7 | 5,9 |
| Return International | 5,3 | 5,3 |
| Current and Return International | (3,5) ^b | (5,1) ^b |
| Non-migrant Household | 5,3 | 5,3 |
| Total | 5,5 | 5,7 |
| Number of Households | 1941 | 1941 |

^a In the country report of Egypt^[4], narrow definition were further restricted to the number of persons living in the same household and those members living temporarily in another part of the country were excluded. For comparison purposes, the narrow definition used here includes the members of household living in survey country.

^b Figures in parentheses are based on less than 25 unweighted cases.

Regardless of the migrant status of the households and the definition used in the study, the average household sizes were the highest in Senegal (Table 5). The difference in average household size for recent-current migrant households was around two persons as in other countries.

Table 4: Average household size by household migration status, Ghana 1997 (according to type of definition of household membership)

| | Narrow Definition | Broad Definition |
|---|---------------------|---------------------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 3,9 | 4,8 |
| Current International | 3,7 | 4,9 |
| Return International | 4,3 | 4,4 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | (4,8) ^a | (5,8) ^a |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 4,2 | 4,7 |
| Current International | (5,9) ^a | (7,1) ^a |
| Return International | 3,7 | 3,9 |
| Current and Return International | (10,0) ^a | (11,0) ^a |
| Non-migrant Household | 4,2 | 4,2 |
| Total | 4,1 | 4,4 |
| Number of Households | 1571 | 1571 |

^a Figures in parentheses are based on less than 25 unweighted cases.

Table 5: Average household size by household migration status, Senegal 1997-98 (according to type of definition of household membership)

| | Narrow Definition | Broad Definition |
|---|-------------------|------------------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 12,6 | 14,1 |
| Current International | 13,1 | 15,0 |
| Return International | 11,7 | 12,0 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 11,1 | 11,4 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 11,7 | 12,1 |
| Current International | 11,6 | 12,8 |
| Return International | 11,9 | 11,9 |
| Current and Return International | 10,3 | 12,5 |
| Non-migrant Household | 9,2 | 9,2 |
| Total | 10,4 | 10,8 |
| Number of Households | 1740 | 1740 |

Table 6: Average household size by household migration status, Morocco 1997 (according to type of definition of household membership)

| | Narrow Definition | Broad Definition |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| Recent Migrant Household (with MMA) | 4,7 | 6,9 |
| Current International | 4,6 | 6,9 |
| Return International | 6,3 | 6,9 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 4,8 | 6,9 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 4,8 | 7,4 |
| Current International | 3,9 | 7,4 |
| Return International | 6,7 | 6,8 |
| Current and Return International | (6,4) ^a | (9,8) ^a |
| Non-migrant Household | 6,1 | 6,1 |
| Total | 5,5 | 6,6 |
| Number of Households | 1952 | 1952 |

^a Figures in parentheses are based on less than 25 unweighted cases.

The largest increase in overall average household size was observed in Morocco (Table 6). The average household size for all households increased from 5,5 to 6,6 when broad definition was used. The increase in recent-current migrant households was the largest compared to all survey countries (2,3 difference). In Morocco, unlike in other survey countries, the increase in non-recent and current migrant households was especially noticeable (from 3,9 to 7,4).

By looking at the differences in average household size when broad definition was used instead of narrow

definition, it is observed that implementation of a methodology which broadens the definition of household membership made little differences across different migrant-sending countries. However, as expected, important differences were observed in households where there are at least one international migrant member.

Table 7 summarizes the net gains of households with regard to international members where broad definition of household membership was implemented. The table presents the mean number of international migrants in different types of migrant households. The range of gains is from 1,27 international migrants in Ghana to 1,80 migrants in Morocco when all migrant households are concerned (The theoretical minimum number is one person as any household requires at least one migrant member in order to be classified as a migrant household). With regard to recent migrant households, the increase in average household size due to international migrants is as high as 2,18 in Turkey and for recent-current migrant households, it increases to 2,42 in Turkey. The highest average number of international migrants among recent-return migrant households is in Senegal (1,57). For other recent (non-MMA) and non-recent migrant households, Morocco has the highest averages compared to other survey countries (2,00 and 1,87 respectively). In general, regardless of the household migration status the lowest average number of international migrants was found in Egypt.

DISCUSSION

Although it is not specific to migration surveys, the definition of household and definition of membership to a household may not necessarily mean the same in different cultural contexts. To complicate the things further, membership to a household may imply different meanings when asked to a non-migrant person in the household compared to a migrant.

Because of the nature of the migration process and the cohabitation habits of the individuals in different countries, differences are expected in survey countries with regard to the effect of using different definitions of household. Also, this approach is unable to collect data if the household moved as a whole and no member was left in the country of origin to declare them as members of their household. However, applying the broad definition of household and increasing the chance of migrants included in the household list present important opportunities for researchers to collect data on migration experiences of individuals and households who are already outside the country.

The "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" provided an important tool to test the use of a broad definition of household membership which allowed to list international migrants who are currently living abroad but have ongoing relationships with a

Table 7: Average number of international migrants by household migration status, (according to survey countries, 1996-98)

| | Turkey | Egypt | Ghana | Senegal | Morocco |
|---|--------|-------|---------------------|---------|---------|
| Recent Migrant Household (MMA) | 2,18 | 1,46 | 1,25 | 2,07 | 1,95 |
| Current International | 2,42 | 1,54 | 1,26 | 2,29 | 2,00 |
| Return International | 1,49 | 1,36 | 1,25 | 1,57 | 1,49 |
| Other Recent Migrant Household (No MMA) | 1,44 | 1,27 | (1,46) ^a | 1,48 | 2,00 |
| Non-recent Migrant Household | 1,28 | 1,33 | 1,16 | 1,40 | 1,87 |
| All Migrant Households | 1,70 | 1,40 | 1,24 | 1,71 | 1,93 |

^a Figures in parentheses are based on less than 25 unweighted cases.

household in sending countries. The increase in the international migrant members was especially considerable in recent and current migrant households. Among five migrant sending countries, on average, nearly two international migrant members were declared as part of the migrant household in the survey in Morocco.

Adopting a broad definition of a household presents an important opportunity for migrant sending countries to collect information about the international migrants as the data are otherwise largely unavailable. The findings demonstrated that it was possible to trace an important number of international migrants back in their country of origin and to collect data using proxy interviews. In the absence of alternative data on international migrants in receiving and especially sending countries, this approach is promising. However, more analyses are required with regard to the data quality.

The use of broad definition of household seems to be an appropriate methodology to analyze the national migrants as well. Future migration studies dealing with internal migration movements can adopt a similar approach and collect information about the out-migrants.

There are some drawbacks of this approach. Firstly, it is impossible to survey emigrants who left the country as a household and left no members back at home to declare them as part of their household. Also, recently formed households may complicate the identification of relatives who have migrated recently who were once a part of their previous household. Another potential drawback with regard to collecting information is the cases where the person is not expected to return to that household (and therefore not listed) and a migrant died abroad.

There are of course obvious alternatives of conducting qualitative or ethnographic studies or even

using different data sources, but if a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach is preferred, a better alternative could be to conduct migration surveys inquiring households about any members migrated abroad within a specified period of time (regardless of the expectation from them to return home), although even this approach will likely to suffer from inadequacy to collect information for migrants going abroad as household units.

REFERENCES

1. Eurostat, 2000a. Push and pull factors of international migration: A comparative report. Eurostat, Luxembourg.
2. Eurostat, 1995. Causes of international migration. Proc. Workshop, Luxembourg, 14-16 Dec. 1994, Eurostat, Luxembourg.
3. Eurostat, 2000b. Push and pull factors of international migration: Country Report–Turkey. Eurostat Working Papers, Population and Social Conditions, 3/2000/E/n° 8.
4. Eurostat, 2000c. Push and pull factors of international migration: Country Report–Egypt. Eurostat Working Papers, Population and Social Conditions, 3/2000/E/n° 7.
5. Eurostat, 2000d. Push and pull factors of international migration: Country Report–Ghana. Eurostat Working Papers, Population and Social Conditions, 3/2000/E/n° 10.
6. Eurostat, 2000e. Push and pull factors of international migration: Country Report–Senegal. Eurostat Working Papers, Population and Social Conditions, 3/2000/E/n° 12.
7. Eurostat, 2000f. Push and pull factors of international migration: Country Report–Morocco. Eurostat Working Papers, Population and Social Conditions, 3/2000/E/n° 6.