Notes for Gretchen Donehower’s Introduction of the **Workshop on “NTA Research on International Migration”,** Bangkok, Thailand, 11 March 2025, 11:15am – 1:00pm.

15th Global Meeting of the NTA Network, Bangkok, Thailand, 10-13 March, 2025

Welcome everybody to this workshop on NTA research on international migration.

I am collaborating with Jorge Bravo, who can’t be here today, in the organization and follow-up of this workshop.

As noted in this meeting’s program, the purpose of this workshop is to establish a working group on how NTA research can speak to issues around migration and immigration.  Many of us have worked on related issues and this is a great opportunity to share methods and experiences and develop further innovative research ideas in this crucial area, where so many member countries are experiencing rapid change and looking for evidence-based policy analysis and recommendations.

We will start with short presentations from a group of NTA researchers who have worked on migration and immigration using NTA tools and then have a moderated discussion to include other related work going on in the network, promising future directions to enhance policy relevance and international comparability of results, and what a common framework and collaboration strategy might be to make progress in this area.

< Further moderators speaking notes >

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*Jorge’ note to Gretchen*: either before or after the short presentations, you may wish to give a succinct overview of key concepts, data availability, methods in use to answer what type of questions. My rough draft notes on these issues follow. If you think useful, I could extract a few, short bullet points for the workshop.

1. **Demographic big picture**

NTA data and analyses are geared to document and study intergenerational reallocations and their economic implications for individuals, families, the macroeconomy and fiscal budgets in each country. One major priority is the study of the implications produced by the changes in the age structure of the population over the course of the demographic transition.

In most countries, the changing population age structures are mainly driven by the medium to long-term decline in fertility and mortality. But in some regions and countries, international migration accounts for a significant or large proportion of the change in the working-age population (WAP), and the corresponding workforce.

International migrants constitute only 1.2% of the WAP of destination countries in Asia & the Pacific and 2.5% in Africa. But they represent 8.5% of the WAP of the Americas (higher than that in Northern America), 12.3% in Europe and Central Asia, and as much as 25% in the Arab States. In Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, international migrants represent more than ¾ of the working-age population!

There is similar diversity in the demographic dimension and economic importance of emigration across countries and regions of the world. In most cases, emigrants are a small proportion of the origin population and workforce but are sizeable (in absolute numbers or in proportion to the origin population) of some countries of Asia like India, China, The Philippines, of Europe (Russian Federation, and more recently, Ukraine), of Latin America (Mexico, Venezuela, El Salvador) and of Africa (Egypt, Morocco, South Sudan). Remittances are an important source of income for many people in these and other countries.

1. **NTA research on or including consideration of international migrants**

NTA-based or related research spans a range of topics and objectives, including, as a first approximation, cross-sectional/annual estimates of native-migrant differences by age in income, public and private consumption and transfers, and their corresponding life cycle deficits and economic dependency (e.g., in the U.S., Canada, Sweden, Slovakia).

In the case of the U.S., the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council, commissioned and published two comprehensive studies, one in 1997 and the other in 2007, detailing the lifetime net fiscal balance of immigration, distinguishes between migrants of different age groups and educational levels, and their descendants, in *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration* (NAS/NRC, 1997, <https://doi.org/10.17226/5779>) and *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration* (2017), National Academy Press (<https://doi.org/10.17226/23550>). Ron Lee, Tim Miller, Gretchen Donehower and Ryan Edwards made key contributions to this work. Both reports are widely cited, to date, in practically all technical and applied research, reports and blogs on the merits of various policy approaches to immigration in the U.S.

Some NTA colleagues have examined specific questions, for example the degree of underemployment of Venezuelan migrants in Chile and the potential productivity gains to be obtained if educational credentials were recognized a better matching of migrant workers with jobs of their skill types and level. Very few thus far within the NTA network (there is a wider literature out there) have tackled the economic benefits and costs to origin countries, for example in Mexico, that benefits from migrant remittances but also bear the cost of loss of workers and corresponding human capital. Similar concerns have been expressed by some NTA teams in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. **Data availability and utilization**

The vast majority of countries’ population statistical systems identify international migrants in their main statistical sources, either by distinguishing natives from the foreign-born, from those that don’t have citizenship in the country in which they reside, or from those that did not reside in the country “n” years ago.

Among the countries that responded to a questionnaire circulated by Jorge Bravo among NTA members in February, the census micro data sources identify migrants on the basis of country of birth in more than 70% of cases, on the basis of citizenship in almost 60% of countries, and about ¼ of them on the basis of place/country of residence *n* years ago. In household surveys, used extensively in NTA to pull data on individual’s income, consumption, taxes paid and government benefits received, migrant status is identified in nearly 60% of countries on the basis of country of birth, more than 40% by citizenship, and much less often (just over 10%) by the place/country of residence *n* years ago.

One basic issue worth discussing during the workshop is the wisdom, and practicality, of adopting a standard definition of international migrant for the purpose of international comparability.

Another, higher level and more complex question to discuss and explore, is the adoption of one or more types of estimation and analytical methods, again to allow a modicum of cross-national comparability of research and policy outlooks. This does not preclude, of course, that each national team exercise full discretion to also use specific approaches, definitions and data, as best suited to national circumstances, and the analytical or policy question at hand.