

EXTENDED ABSTRACT PREPARED FOR EPC 1-4 SEPTEMBER 2010, VIENNA
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Title:

Comparing international data on migration between Sweden and the Netherlands

Introduction

In theory, data on international migration between two countries are recorded in similar ways in the sending and the receiving country. In practice there are large differences between the two (Poulain et al. 2005). These incongruities are due to differences in registration systems and in the definitions used for international migration. Another commonly recognized problem is the underreporting of emigration caused by unclear rules or the absence of incentives to individuals to deregister. The United Nations and Eurostat have long been working on harmonising the definitions of migration (UN, 1998). The recent Eurostat regulation on migration and international protection (Eurostat, 2007) is one example of the steps taken towards better comparability. Other initiatives to solve the problem of emigration data quality include gaining insight in immigration data in order to improve the receiving countries' emigration data (UNECE, 2009a/b). Various bilateral initiatives have been taken to compare migration flows between countries in detail (e.g. Van Agtmaal-Wobma et al. 2008).

In this paper, we look into details of the migration flows between the Netherlands and Sweden and analyse the differences found. Both countries have fully computerized register-based population statistics that will make comparison possible. Migration flows between the Netherlands and Sweden have increased in the past five years. Emigration to Sweden was between 1 and 1.5 percent of the total emigration flow from the Netherlands.

We expect to find differences in registered migration between the countries. The definitions used for immigrants and emigrants are not the same, so we expect this to explain a substantial part of the difference. After controlling for this, the remaining difference is expected to be due to unreported emigration. It can be estimated that some of the unreported emigrations have Sweden or the Netherlands as their destination, using information on country of birth or citizenship. Using the immigration data of the receiving country will shed even more light on this group. Also, the registered migration motives of immigrants to the receiving country will give more insight into the emigration motives. After the analysis, we expect to have suggestions for improving of the migration statistics in both countries, and for how other countries may learn from this.

Data and method

Migration flows between the Netherlands and Sweden are first compared at an aggregated level on data published by both Statistical Offices. We describe migration flows by age, sex, country of birth, and citizenship. Secondly, the flows are recalculated using the same definition for migrants in both countries. Thirdly, unreported migration is estimated by using data on country of birth and/or citizenship.

Finally, we will explore the possibility to use micro data of both countries in order to test the hypothesized underreporting of emigration. Did the immigrants registered in the receiving country not officially emigrate from the sending country?

In Sweden, a Nordic citizen is recorded as an immigrant if he or she intends to stay in the country for at least *twelve months* and reports this to the Tax Agency. If the migrant is a non-EU citizen, nor a citizen of Norway or Iceland, he or she will need a residence permit valid for at least one year. A non-Nordic EU-citizen must have a “proof of registration” from the Migration Board before being registered at the Tax Agency.

People leaving Sweden with an intended stay abroad of at least *twelve months* must report this to the Tax Agency and will then be registered as emigrants. There is an exception for people who move to Norway or Denmark with the intention of staying abroad at least three to six months. This is because of the inter-Nordic agreement on migration where someone can only be registered in one Nordic country at a time.

Asylum seekers are not considered migrants, no matter how long they stay in Sweden.

Asylum seeker who obtain the right to stay in Sweden (a permit of at least one year) will be registered at the Tax Agency and the year of registration will be considered the year of immigration.

In the Netherlands, everybody who intends to stay in the Netherlands for at least *four of the forthcoming six months* should notify the population register immediately after arrival in the country. So, *immigration* relates to all individuals arriving in the Netherlands of whom the arrival is recorded in a municipal population register. Asylum seekers are considered immigrants after they have received a residence permit or after six months of legal stay in the Netherlands.

People leaving the Netherlands with an intended stay of at least *eight of the forthcoming twelve months*, should notify the population register and are registered as *emigrants*.

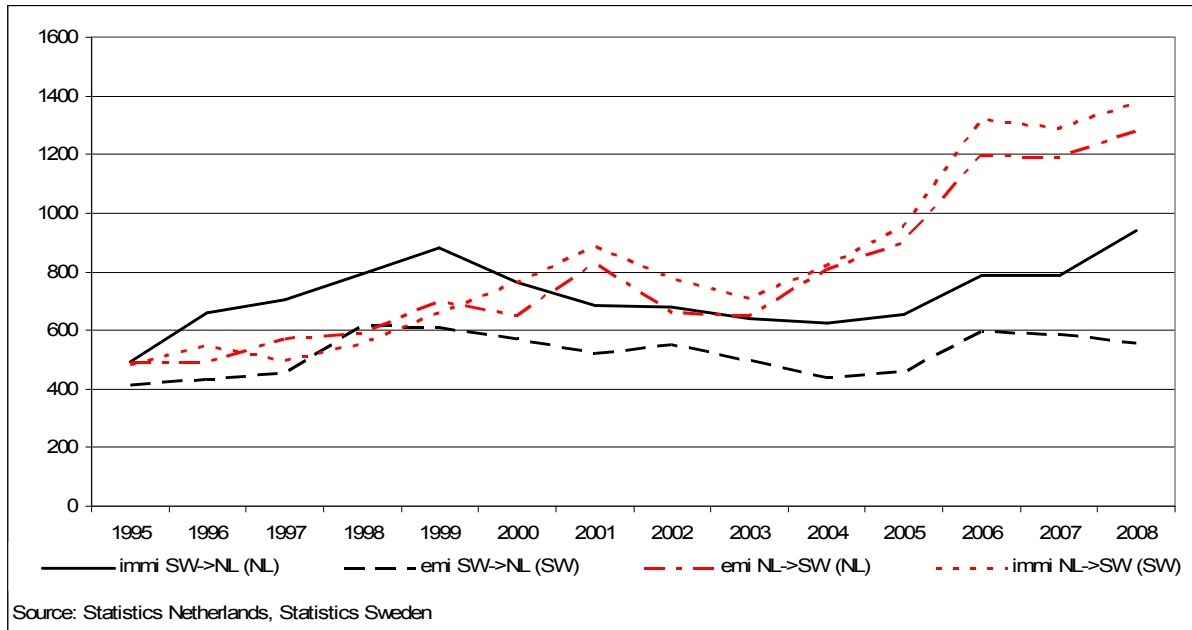
These definitions are different from the UN and EU definitions, where an (intended) stay or absence of at least 12 months is used as a criterion for both immigration and emigration. The 12-months criterion can only be determined on an *ex-post* basis. Calculations show that about 90 percent of all registered emigrants from the Netherlands do not return within 12 months, so they are considered emigrants by international criteria.

First results

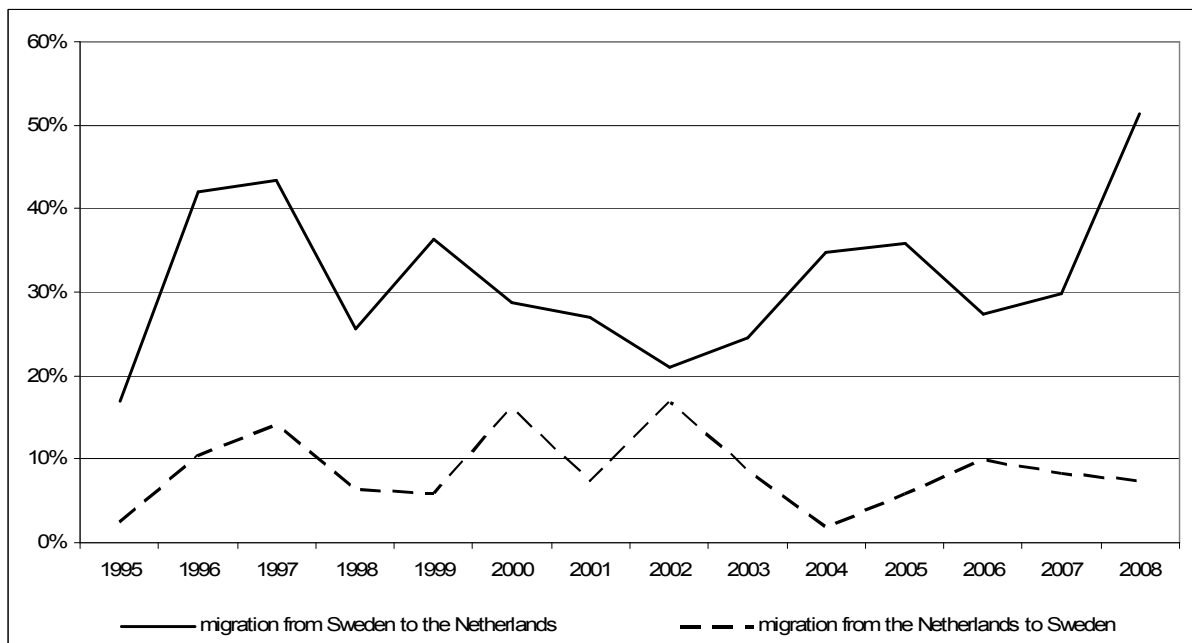
The international migration data published by the Statistical Offices are shown in Figure 1. The data on the migration flow from the Netherlands to Sweden – Dutch emigration and Swedish immigration - are very similar. In most years, the difference between the two is less than 10 percent (of the mean of both figures, see Figure 2). Data on the migration flow from Sweden to the Netherlands are further apart: the difference between them varies between 17 and 50 percent.

Based on differences in definitions, the better fit of the Netherlands-Sweden flow data as compared to the Sweden-Netherlands flow data was expected. The Dutch definition for emigrants (8 months) is closer to that of Swedish immigrants (12 months) than the Dutch immigrant definition (4 months) is to the Swedish 12 month’s emigrant criterion.

1. Migration flows between the Netherlands and Sweden



2. Difference between datasets, as percentage of the mean of Dutch and Swedish data.



However, if definition was the only problem, the share of difference would be very similar each year. And this is not the case, especially not where the Sweden-Netherlands flows are concerned.

We expect unreported emigration to play a major role here too. Adding estimates to the registered emigration, total emigration rates will be higher and thus more in line with the immigration data of the receiving country.

Conclusion

Comparison of migration flow data between two countries with very good Population Registers reveals important differences. Variation in definitions does not explain all of it. An important part is unreported emigration.

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