Around 281 million people, or 3.6 % of the world's population, currently live outside their country of birth. Whether driven by armed conflict, poverty, human rights abuses, political repression, or economic and educational opportunities, migration remains a matter of enormous social and political concern for many governments.

Motivated by the understanding that effective migration policies need to be based on reliable evidence, the EU-funded HumMingBird project is working to improve the understanding of changing migration flows and their drivers. There are several international and regional organizations that collect international migration data, but gaps in these data make it difficult for policymakers to develop constructive policies. The HumMingBird consortium recently published its first policy brief on addressing data gaps in international migration.

The policy brief identifies several key gaps in international migration data. These include: inconsistencies in definitions and measurements of data that make it difficult to combine and compare data gathered from different countries; neglecting the reasons and drivers of migration; inadequate representation of certain geographical regions and migrants’ demographic characteristics; and a time lag in making data available to policymakers.

According to a related HumMingBird-funded paper analyzing gaps in international migration data from 76 studies, the main problem lies in inconsistent definitions and measurements, which amounted to 611 of the 916 gaps identified. This was followed by demographic characteristics (113 gaps), migration drivers (101), geographic coverage (48) and data timeliness (43).

As noted in the policy brief, projections and scenarios based on a better understanding of the root causes and drivers of migration are needed for governments to draft effective policies. The authors also emphasize the importance of complementing quantitative data with qualitative data that encompass sociocultural aspects, complex social behavior and the role that individual choice plays in decision-making.

Gender gaps in migration data are described as "a festering sore" that leads to the needs and health problems of female migrants being overlooked, leaving them "in danger and without access to basic services," according to the policy brief. A better understanding of how gender shapes migrants’ needs and decision-making processes is therefore needed to inform migration policies.

The authors also highlighted the need for alternative data sources and methodologies such as Big Data analytics to solve current data challenges. Commenting on the use of mobile phone data to track migration patterns in a news item posted on the website of HumMingBird project partner Utrecht University, Prof. Albert Ali Salah...
stated: "Mobile phone data can provide great coverage and address important data gaps in migration research, but privacy-aware and ethical processing of such data requires new approaches." The importance of protecting not only individual data but also group data was emphasized as well. "If you determine the mobility patterns of refugees, this may have consequences for refugees through policy changes informed by your results or influenced by media responses," Prof. Salah explained. "It is not enough that data processing follows legal requirements, but it needs to be ethically vetted. These are quite different things."

The four-year HumMingBird (Enhanced migration measures from a multidimensional perspective) project ends in November 2023.

**More information:** HumMingBird project website: hummingbird-h2020.eu/

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