

Measuring Irregular Migration: Innovative Data Practices

Expert workshop, 18–19 May 2017

Berlin, Germany

Aims of the workshop

Irregular migration is inevitably difficult to measure due to its clandestine nature. Given the recent increase in irregular migration to Europe, there is growing interest in developing new ways to collect and analyse data on irregular migration. This expert workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to learn about innovative ways of collecting data on irregular migration. While the focus will be on Europe, there will also be some discussion of methods of gathering data on irregular migration in other parts of the world which might apply to Europe and its neighbouring countries. This workshop is particularly timely given current preparations for a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which signatories of the New York Declaration on 19 September 2016 committed to adopting in 2018. This implies that there will be a need to track whether migration is safe, orderly and regular once the Global Compact is signed, calling for more and better data on irregular and unsafe migration. Better data on irregular migration will help States to understand how far migration is becoming more regular, orderly and safe.

In light of such commitments, IOM's Global Migration Data Analysis Centre is organizing a workshop to discuss innovative data collection practices on irregular migration, with support from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The event represents a follow-up to a previous workshop held in Nuremberg (Germany) in 2016, also supported by UK DFID, focusing on the measurement of "safe migration."¹ This year's workshop aims to bring together experts from the governments, academia, international and non-governmental organizations, and provide an opportunity to:

- a) Learn about recent initiatives to improve qualitative and quantitative data on the size and dynamics of irregular migration, particularly in the European context.
- b) Exchange practices to estimate stocks of irregular migrants, with a focus on Europe and a comparison with the U.S. context.
- c) Propose solutions to the challenges of disaggregation of data by migratory status when such status is irregular.
- d) Discuss how to improve understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of migrants travelling irregularly – whether assisted or not by smugglers.
- e) Explore how to gather more data on migrants in an irregular situation – their numbers, profile, needs, and access to services.

¹ Workshop discussions informed a special issue of Migration Policy Practice, a quarterly journal for migration policymakers and practitioners.

Background

The phenomenon of irregular migration – or “movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving country”² is, by definition and by its own nature, hardly quantifiable. Difficulties relate to recording both irregular migrant stocks – numbers of irregular migrants at a certain point in time in a specific country or region – as people’s status can be subject to frequent change, depending on countries’ legislation regulating entry, stay, residence and right to work of foreigners. Accurately documenting irregular migration flows – or events and processes influencing the size and composition of the irregular migrant stock over a period of time (Kraler and Reichel, 2001) – is also very challenging: these events include not only inflows and outflows of irregular migrants, but also people moving into and out of irregularity in the same country, and vital events (births and deaths) within the irregular migrant population, all of which are difficult to track. Data or estimates of irregular migration stocks and flows mainly rely on administrative sources relating to enforcement of immigration legislation (e.g. border apprehensions, applications for regularization programmes, employer sanctions, among others), which reflect policies and practices of immigration control rather than the reality of the phenomenon.

All of the above means that current understanding of the scale and dynamics of irregular migration, and of irregular migrants’ socio-economic profiles, is quite poor for most regions of the world, despite recent efforts to improve the availability and quality of data and estimates. Data collection efforts have been particularly prominent in the European context over the past few years, due to the relatively large increase in the numbers of migrants and asylum-seekers crossing the Mediterranean in an irregular fashion, compared to previous years. According to available data, more than 1 million migrants and asylum-seekers entered Europe irregularly in 2015, compared to less than 300,000 in 2014, mostly through the Eastern and the Central Mediterranean routes (IOM and Frontex). Arrivals decreased to less than 400,000 in 2016 as a consequence of the European Union–Turkey Statement and the subsequent closure of the Balkans route. The EU-funded Clandestino Project also aimed at improving the availability of information on irregular migration stocks in Europe (Düvell, 2009). Irregular migration across the border between Mexico and the United States has also been historically significant, according to recent estimates of the irregular migrant population and border apprehension statistics, though numbers have fallen substantially over the past 10 years, particularly of Mexican nationals (Pew Research Centre, 2015). However, irregular migration is a global phenomenon, concerning richer and poorer economies alike, with supposedly large movements across Africa, Asia and Latin America, though data for these regions are largely unavailable (UNODC, 2011).

Recent global policy developments have forcefully renewed the commitment to improve data on migration – both regular and irregular. First, Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is based on the principle of *leaving no one behind*, including by migratory status – intended as both regular and irregular. However, gauging the extent to which migrants, including those holding irregular status, are not “left behind” requires reliable and disaggregated data on these groups. Irregular migrants are often more vulnerable to dangers, exploitation and abuse during their journeys due to their irregular status. Specific risks and vulnerabilities should be better understood to ensure protection and assistance can be effectively targeted to those who are most in need. Second, Target 10.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for countries to facilitate safe, orderly, *regular* and responsible migration through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies. Data on irregular migration is therefore necessary to assess whether countries are facilitating regularity of migration through their policies. Third, the New York Declaration, adopted at the high-level plenary meeting of

² See IOM, Key migration terms: <http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

the UN General Assembly on September 19th, 2016, stresses the importance of enhancing data collection, specifying that such data should be disaggregated by sex and age and include information on regular and irregular flows, human trafficking and the needs of refugees and migrants, among other aspects. By signing the New York Declaration, countries also committed to starting negotiations towards the adoption of a Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in 2018. Again, this implies that there will be a need to track whether migration is safe, orderly and regular once the Global Compact is signed, calling for more and better data on irregular and unsafe migration.

Agenda

Day 1 – Thursday 18 May 2017	
9:00 – 09:30	Registration
9:30 – 09:45	Welcome remarks and tour de table
Introduction: Irregular migration data in light of the SDGs and the Global Compact on Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration	
09:45 – 10:00	
	<p>By adopting the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, countries committed to facilitating “safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration,” and to make sure nobody is <i>left behind</i>. In this respect, reliable and disaggregated data on different migrants groups, including irregular migrants, are fundamental, but traditional sources of data will hardly capture irregular migrants.</p> <p>This introductory session will set the scene of the workshop by outlining the potential and the limitations of traditional sources of migration data to count those migrants who may often be invisible.</p> <p>Speaker: Frank Laczko, IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Centre</p>
Session 1: Measuring irregular migrant stocks: examples from the U.S. and Europe	
10:00 – 10:45	
	<p>Collecting data on irregular migrant stocks is notoriously difficult. This is due to the fact that migrants’ status (regular or irregular) can be subject to frequent change, depending on countries’ legislation regulating entry, stay, residence and right to work of foreigners.</p> <p>During this session, innovative ways of estimating stocks of irregular migrants in Europe and in the U.S will be presented and discussed.</p> <p>Some proposed questions to guide the discussion are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are estimates of irregular migrant stocks calculated in different countries? • What can be learned from such experiences? • How can the challenges of disaggregation by migrant characteristics be accounted for? <p>Speaker: Jeffrey Passel, Pew Research Center, <i>Estimates of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. and their characteristics</i> – Keynote speech</p>
10:45 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 12:45	
	<p>Speaker: Georges Lemaitre, formerly at OECD, <i>A general method for estimating the size of the irregular migrant population based on traditional data sources</i></p> <p>Discussant: Philip Martin, University of California, Davis</p>

12:45 – 14:00	Lunch break
Session 2: Measuring irregular migration flows: innovative quantitative and qualitative methodologies	
14:00 – 15:30	
	<p>Documenting irregular migration flows is also very challenging as these should account not only for inflows and outflows of irregular migrants into and from a country, but also for people moving into and out of irregularity in the same country, and vital events (births and deaths) within the irregular migrant population, all of which are difficult to track. This session aims to present innovative methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, to improve understanding of flows of irregular migrants and their characteristics.</p> <p>Some proposed questions to guide the discussion are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can be learned from innovative methods to track irregular migration flows? • What are the limitations of such methodologies and how could these be improved? • How can estimates of irregular migration flows contribute to a better understanding of those who may be “left behind”? <p>Speakers: Linnea Lue Kessing, Danish Refugee Council (DRC) Vivianne van der Vorst, IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)</p>
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee break
15:45 – 17:30	
	<p>Amr Wazaz, European Asylum Support Office (EASO) Agnieszka Politewicz, Frontex</p> <p>Discussant: Franck Düvell, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford</p>
Day 2 – Friday 19 May 2017	
Session 3: Migrants in vulnerable situations and access to services	
10:00 – 11:00	
	<p>Collecting data on irregular migration is necessary to inform policy and provide assistance and access to services to vulnerable migrants. However, tracking irregular migrants in vulnerable situations at different stages of their journey is extremely challenging. This session will focus on different perspectives on how to identify irregular migrants’ vulnerabilities and exposure to risk as well as irregular migrants’ access to services.</p> <p>Some proposed questions to guide the discussion are the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the current sources of data on irregular migrants in vulnerable situations? • How can we achieve better disaggregation of data to deliver targeted protection and assistance to such individuals? • What are the boundaries between irregular migration, smuggling and human trafficking and how can these be defined and accounted for in data collection? • How can access to services for irregular migrants be measured? <p>Speakers: Nando Sigona, University of Birmingham Michele LeVoy, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)</p>
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee break
11:15 – 12:30	
	Eliza Galos, IOM’s Migrant Assistance Division

	<p>Luigi Achilli, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, and Gabriella Sanchez (co-author, not attending), University of Texas at El Paso</p> <p>Discussant: Dita Vogel, University of Bremen</p>
<p>Concluding roundtable discussion: Needs, challenges and ways forward for improving data on irregular migration and ensuring nobody is left behind</p>	
12:30 – 13:00	
	<p>The final session will summarize the workshop findings. It will conclude with recommendations on how innovative data collection methodologies may enhance estimations of the size and dynamics of irregular migration, and understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of migrants travelling irregularly. It will highlight the potentials and the limitations of different data practices in counting those who may be “left behind” and in measuring “safe, orderly, regular and responsible migration,” so to contribute to preparations for the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.</p> <p>Speaker: Frank Laczko, IOM’s GMDAC</p>
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
<p>End of Workshop</p>	

References

Kraler, A. and D. Reichel

- 2011 Measuring irregular migration and population flows – what available data can tell. *International Migration*, 49 (5):97-128.

Düvell, F.

- 2009 *Pathways into Irregularity: The Social Construction of Irregularity*. Comparative Policy Brief, Clandestino Project.

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- 2017 What we know about illegal migration from Mexico, available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/02/what-we-know-about-illegal-immigration-from-mexico/>.

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- 2011 *Smuggling of migrants: A Global Review and Annotated Bibliography of Recent Publications*. UNODC, New York.