



Irregular migration flows: composition and trends for the United Kingdom (2000-2007)

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State of knowledge

The quantitative importance of different pathways into and out of irregularity cannot be assessed on the basis of the available evidence. Therefore, this summary contains only tentative plausibility considerations, based on the interpretation of quantitative traces of irregular migration in combination with qualitative information (based on Vollmer 2008).

Composition of flows

In the period between 2000 and 2007, it seems plausible that overstaying of rejected asylum seekers and breaking conditions of work restrictions form the most important feature of irregular migration. Illegal border crossing is of comparably minor importance.

In the same period, the EU enlargement of 2004 had the effect of legalizing residence status and work status of migrants from the enlargement countries (A-8 countries). Thus, regularisation through this enlargement process was a major pathway out of irregularity. Various piecemeal of regularisation schemes (e.g. regularisations granted on compassionate grounds) also enabled a non-negligible number of irregular migrants to change into a regular status.

➤ Demographic component

There is no quantitative information about birth of children in an irregular status and death of persons with irregular status in any given year. The stock of irregularly resident children in the UK is estimated to account for 44 000 to 144 000 (Gordon et al 2009:48). Following the assumption that all of these children are born in the UK the average yearly number of birth can be calculated by dividing by 18 which results in approximately 2 500 to 8 000 birth per year.

➤ Geographic component

The United Kingdom is an island country surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea, the English Channel and the Irish Sea. Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom with a land border (with the Republic of Ireland).

UK is not part of the Schengen area. It still conducts identity controls at borders, and terminology differs from states in the Schengen area. Illegal entries by boat are considered to be of minor importance, and no information is published in the most recent home office report on migration. People seeking to enter the UK clandestinely usually use ports of entry such as harbours, train stations and airports, e.g. by hiding in trucks or using falsified documents. 31 880 non-asylum passengers, excluding EEA and Swiss nationals, were refused at ports and subsequently removed from the UK in 2008, 4 per cent more than in 2007 (30 565) (Home Office 2009:18).

Of the 67 980 persons without residence status who were removed or departed ‘voluntarily’ in reaction to immigration enforcement, about half were refused at the border and the other half were examined and refused by the immigration authorities within country (e.g. refused asylum cases) (Home Office 2009:27).

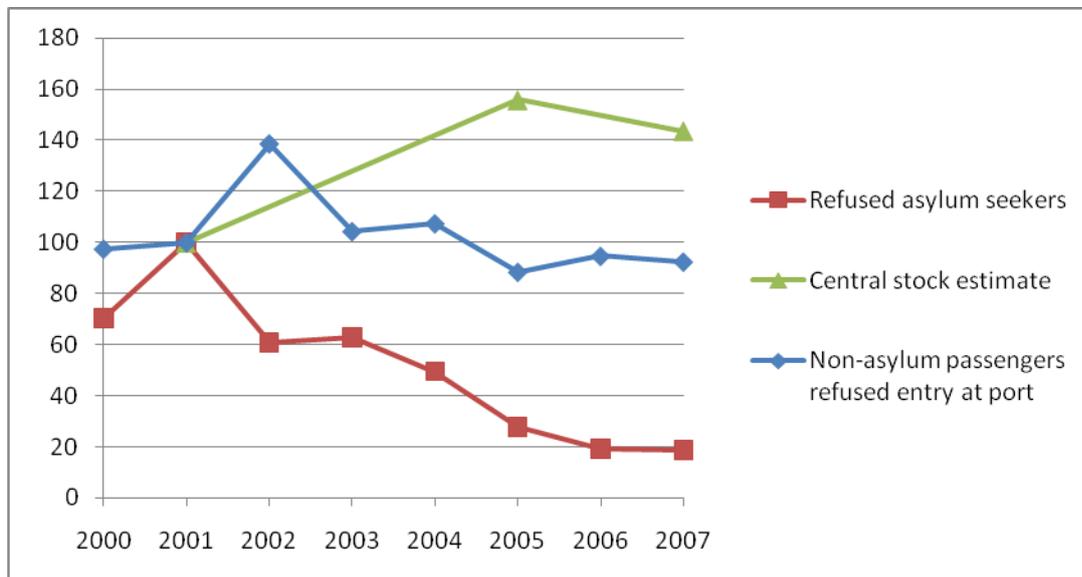
➤ **Status-related component**

Changes to the stock of irregular migrant populations are mainly attributed to status-related flows. After checking diverse government data sets, Gordon et al. (2009) estimate that the inflow into an irregular status between 2001 and 2007 resulted mainly from failed asylum seekers (219 000) and to a minor extent from new overstayers and irregular entrants (21 000-79 000). Outflows are considered to be mainly into a regular status through various piecemeal regularization schemes (126 000) and the EU enlargement (23 000-51 000). Since the beginning of the millennium, the backlog of undecided asylum applications was considerably reduced. It is estimated that about 60 per cent of asylum seekers were neither accepted nor effectively removed. First asylum applications in this decade ranged from 80 325 in 2000 to 27 905 in 2007. After a peak of 103 080 in 2002 the number of applicants has decreased drastically.

Trends

As indicators for the trend in irregular migration we choose decisions to refuse asylum, *non-asylum passengers refused at ports and subsequently removed* and stock trends. The indicators are standardized by taking 2001 as a reference year (2001=100).

Figure 1 Standardized indicators of irregular migration flows (2001=100)



Source: Asylum seekers who were refused asylum and other status leading to a temporary stay (Home Office 2009:57), stock estimates (Vollmer 2008, London School of Economics 2009), non-asylum passengers refused entry at ports and subsequently removed (Home Office 2009:44)

The increasing trend in irregular migration in the UK seems to be mainly caused by the consequences of reducing a large backlog of asylum applications. In the peak year 2001 for example, there were 120 050 asylum decisions, but only 71 925 new asylum applications. Therefore, the asylum system results in more people becoming irregular after an asylum procedure than people changing from a regular status to an asylum seeker status, thus

becoming temporarily regular. We are aware that these trend indicators are problematic and partly overlap.

References

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