

October 2009

Comparative Policy Brief -  
Size of Irregular Migration

## CLANDESTINO PROJECT OVERVIEW

*The project  
aims*

The CLANDESTINO research project was designed to support policy makers in developing and implementing appropriate policies regarding undocumented migration. **The project aims** were to (a) provide an inventory of data and estimates on undocumented migration (stocks and flows) in selected EU countries, (b) analyse these data comparatively, (c) discuss the ethical and methodological issues involved in the collection of data, the elaboration of estimates and their use, (d) propose a new method for evaluating and classifying data/estimates on undocumented migration in the EU.

*The countries  
studied*

**The project covered twelve EU countries** (Greece, Italy, France and Spain in southern Europe; Netherlands, UK, Germany and Austria in Western and Central Europe; Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic in Central Eastern Europe) **and three non EU transit migration countries** (Turkey, Ukraine and Morocco) have been under study in this project.

*Methods, Data  
and Period of  
Reference*

**Country reports.** Individual country reports review all relevant data sources on irregular migration, assess the validity of the different estimates given and where appropriate produce a new estimate for the country studied. The country reports cover the period between 2000 and 2007. This quantitative analysis is complemented by a critical review of qualitative studies and by interviews with key informants with a view to exploring the pathways into and out of undocumented status in each country. It is noted that the non-registered nature of irregular migration makes any quantification difficult and always produces estimates rather than hard data.

*Classification  
of data & esti-  
mates*

The main output of the project is a **database** (<http://irregular-migration.hwvi.net/>) which presents and classifies (as low, medium or high quality) estimates and data on irregular migration in the European Union and in selected member states. The presentation is innovative in its consistent structuring and its carefully developed quality classification, which indicates whether estimates are more or less trustworthy. Quantitative information is accompanied by substantial background materials, both on issues of general concern and on the situation in individual countries. In addition, the database provides aggregate EU level estimates for the years 2002, 2005 and 2008.

*Terminology*

The terms irregular (with no regular/legal status), undocumented (without the appropriate papers) and unauthorized (without legal permission for entry, stay or work) migration denote different facets of the wider phenomenon of irregular migration. These terms are accepted and used by the Clandestino consortium as synonyms. The term illegal is accepted by the consortium when referring to a condition (e.g. illegal work or illegal entry) but not in relation to a person (illegal migrant).

*Definitions*

For this project, **irregular or undocumented residents** are defined as residents without any legal resident status in the country they are residing in, and those whose presence in the territory – if detected – may be subject to termination through an order to leave and/or an expulsion order because of their status. **Irregular entrants** are persons who cross an international border without the required valid documents, either un-inspected over land or sea, or over ports of entry. For more information see: <http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/category/irregular-migration-ethics-in-research/>

*Trafficking &  
Asylum Seeking*

The Clandestino project is not concerned with Trafficking in Human Beings because it considers this as a separate even if related phenomenon. But in some countries it touches upon asylum seeking and asylum processing issues as they are related to irregular migration issues.

## SIZE AND DEVELOPMENT OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION TO THE EU

**State of knowledge** Irregular migration is a top priority in the European Union. Due to security and financial concerns, an increasing amount of resources is devoted to preventing people from entering without authorization, and to enforcing the return of non-EU citizens who are not (or are no longer) authorized to stay. At the same time, NGOs point to serious humanitarian side effects of this restrictive policy approach. Despite the political relevance of the phenomenon, assessments of the size of the irregular migrant population are often vague and of unclear origin. There are few serious attempts to estimate the size of the irregular migrant population in the European Union. Until recently, estimates from 2 million to 8 million were quoted in policy documents. The origin of these numbers is not entirely clear, but they are most likely to be calculated as shares of the EU25 population in 2005. However, better estimates are of relevance for policy-making in a number of fields such as law enforcement, provision of fundamental human rights to irregular migrants and implementation of regularisation programmes.

**Steps towards more transparency** Easy access to well-documented and structured information is a necessary first step for creating more transparency concerning the size of irregular migration. The database on irregular migration developed in CLANDESTINO is an important step in this direction. In this database, estimates for 12 EU countries were collected and classified according to their quality. Comprehensive aggregate European estimates were calculated for 2002, 2005 and 2008 on all 27 member-states (that is including also countries not covered by the CLANDESTINO project), based on the information about the CLANDESTINO 12 countries and additional desk research.

**Definitions** It is not always possible to achieve full comparability between estimates in different countries. The typology of different groups of irregular migrants in figure 1 proposes two broad and partly overlapping definitions: irregular foreign residents and irregular foreign workers. Subgroups are formed with regard to their relevance for estimation purposes. Most estimates do not include seemingly regular registered residents with falsified papers. Some do not include children. Some only refer to workers.

This Policy Brief concentrates on irregular foreign residents (IFR) which are defined as *foreign nationals without any legal residence status in the country they are residing in, and persons violating the terms of their status so that their stay may be terminated, which basically concerns 'irregularly working tourists' from third countries* (see subgroups in grey in Figure 1). Asylum seekers and similar groups as well as regular residents working in the shadow economy are explicitly excluded from this definition.

**Data and methods** In the United States, the size of the irregular migrant population has been repeatedly estimated, and results are included in the official statistical yearbook. Estimates are based on a residual method, comparing data of the centrally conducted census to centrally administered data on regular immigration, with various adjustments.

Even though the European Union has centralised more and more aspects of immigration policy and control, Member States do not apply comparable internal apprehension practices, and centrally collected migration control data are so far not comparable. As long as this is the case, it is unlikely that there will be an estimation method that can be applied in all Member States. Therefore a country specific aggregation of estimates based on different methods is currently and in the near future the best way to comprehensive European estimates. As the aggregated estimates may not always encompass all subgroups, adjustments are necessary to achieve approximate comparability.

**Figure 1: Subgroups of irregular foreign residents and irregular foreign workers**

<b>Irregular Foreign Residents (IFR)</b>				<b>Irregular Foreign Workers (IFW)</b>	
I F R / W o r k i n g a g e	Seemingly regular registered foreign nationals with falsified papers	I F R / W o r k i n g	W o r k i n g	Foreign nationals without residence status in regular tax-paying jobs	Foreign nationals without residence status in regular tax-paying jobs
	Children without residence status			'Tourists' from non-EU countries in irregular unregistered jobs	'Tourists' from non-EU countries in irregular unregistered jobs
	Aged family migrants without residence status			Foreign nationals without residence status in irregular unregistered jobs	Foreign nationals without residence status in irregular unregistered jobs
	Unemployed foreign nationals without residence status			Foreign nationals with residence status and without work permission, in irregular unregistered jobs	Foreign nationals with residence status and work permission, in irregular unregistered jobs
	Foreign nationals without residence status in regular tax-paying jobs				
	'Tourists' from non-EU countries in irregular unregistered jobs				
	Foreign nationals without residence status in irregular unregistered jobs				

Source: Database on Irregular Migration, section Database explanations/ Definition, <http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net/Definitions.6154.0.html>

In addition, differentiated quality standards are necessary to distinguish between guesses without foundation and serious attempts of assessment. *High quality estimates*, fulfilling usual scientific standards, are not available for any comprehensive definition of irregular migrants, although there are high quality studies for less comprehensive definitions in the Netherlands and in Italy. However, there are a number of *medium quality estimates*. Basically, medium quality estimates are well documented, comprehensive and largely consistent estimates that rely on the best available empirical data, even though data may be incomplete and partially biased. Limitations are clearly indicated, ideally by estimating minimum and maximum numbers. *Low quality estimates* are often expert estimates with unclear foundations, or they lack an empirical basis for substantial parts, or they are using clearly inadequate methods. For many European Union states, only low quality estimates have been available. Sometimes there are numbers quoted in the media or in scientific reports without any reference to their basis. Those 'guesstimates' are also included in the low quality estimate category.

The high and medium quality estimates collected in the CLANDESTINO project were produced with *a range of different methods*:

- Residual methods compare regular migration data with more encompassing data sources (Spain and UK).
- Survey-based methods make particular efforts to include irregular migrants and to achieve adequate weights for gaining representativeness (centre sampling approach in Italy).
- Capture-recapture methods adjust techniques of population biology to estimate the size of a population from repeated identification of individuals (applied to police data in the Netherlands).

Multiplier methods make extrapolations from the share of irregular migrants in an observed sample group to the total population. Multiplier estimation techniques have been improved in the course of the CLANDESTINO project: Biased data are considered as a chance for minimum and maximum estimations, provided that samples can be identified in which irregular migrants are clearly overrepresented *or* underrepresented (applied to police data in Austria and Germany). A systematic combination and comparison of different data sets and estimation techniques increases the reliability of the final estimate (as in Greece).

**Size of the irregular foreign resident population in the European Union**

Aggregate country estimates were made for three years: 2002, 2005 and 2008. They show a clear decline in the stocks of irregular resident populations, both when keeping the geographical or the political region constant. In 2002, an estimated 3.1 to 5.3 million irregular foreign residents lived in the European Union. In the same region of the EU15, the aggregation for 2008 results in only 1.8 to 3.3 million irregular foreign residents. The estimate for the European Union of 2008 with its 27 Member States is only slightly higher: 1.9 to 3.8 million, as most of the irregular resident population is estimated to live in the old Member States.

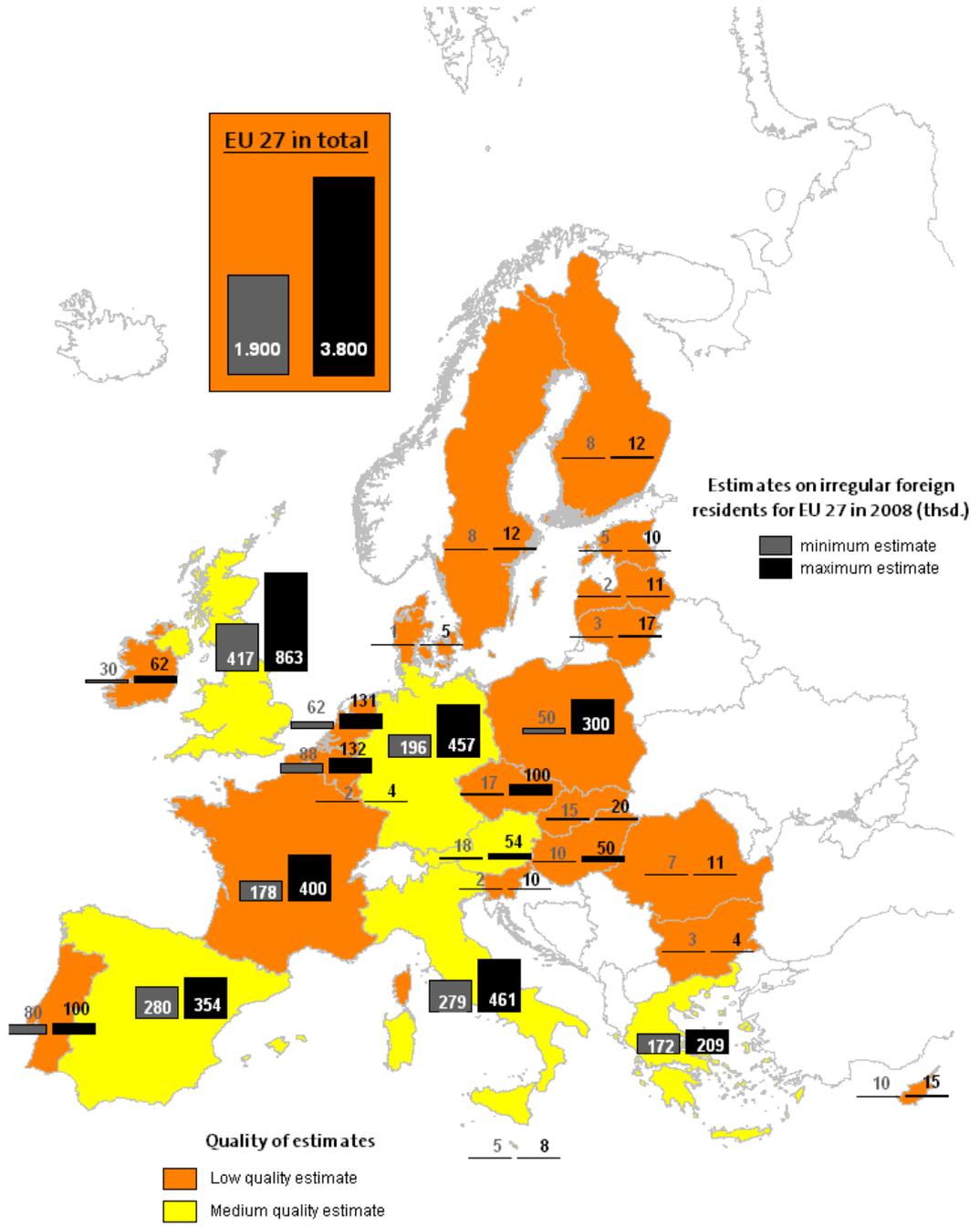
**Table 1: Dynamic aggregate estimate of the irregular foreign resident population in 2002, 2005 and 2008 (last update 30 Sept 2009)**

Year	Absolute population numbers in Mio persons		As percentage of population		As percentage of foreign population	
	minimum	maximum	minimum	Maximum	minimum	maximum
<i>EU 15</i>						
2002	3.1	5.3	0.8%	1.4%	14%	25%
2005	2.2	4.8	0.58%	1.23%	8%	18%
2008	1.8	3.3	0.46%	0.83%	7%	12%
<i>EU27</i>						
2008	1.9	3.8	0.39%	0.77%	7%	13%

Source: Own compilation and adjustment of individual country estimates from different sources

It cannot be excluded that a part of the decline reflects methodological changes, but this is unlikely to dominate the result. The European tendency also applies to individual Member States. A declining or relatively stable irregular resident population is estimated for most Member States with the notable exception of the UK where clearing backlogs of asylum applications lead to substantial inflows into irregular status.

Figure 2: Composition of the European estimate 2008



Source: HWWI compilation of estimates from different data sources

Whereas the 2002 estimate relies on low quality estimates for Member States encompassing about two thirds of the EU population, there were medium quality estimates for Member States encompassing more than half of the EU population in 2008. We would suggest that we could call an aggregate country estimate on the European level a medium quality estimate, if based on medium quality estimates for countries covering at least 70 percent of the regular EU population, unless there are indications that there are considerable irregular foreign resident populations in the countries with the remaining 30 percent of the regular EU population. Figure 3 shows estimates for individual Member States in 2008. The colour of the country indicates whether a low quality (orange) or medium quality (yellow) estimate was available.

## Flow trends

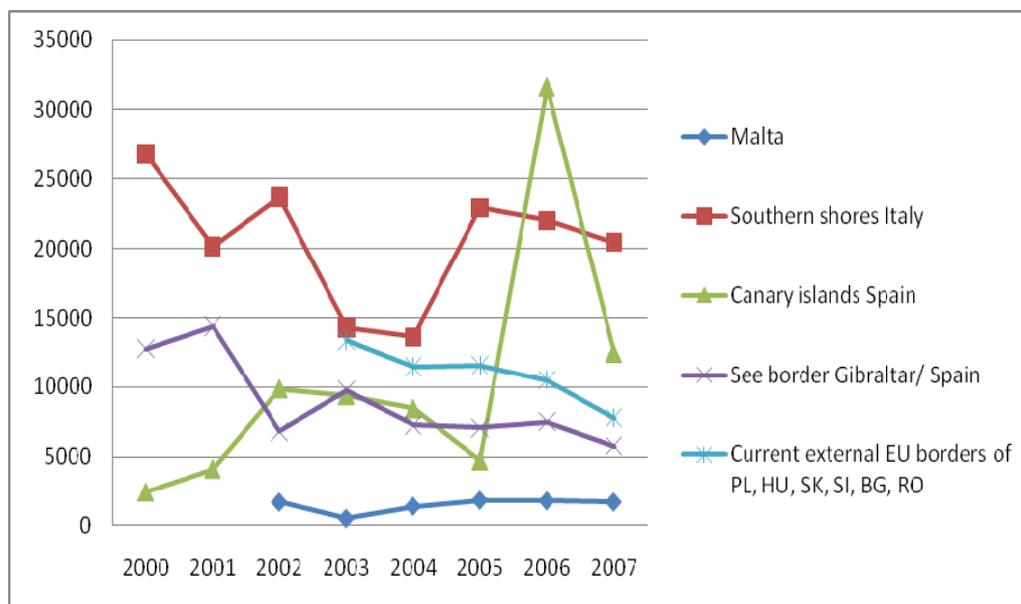
To understand the development, it is necessary to look at inflows into and outflows from the irregular foreign resident population. The public perception of flows is dominated by one particular flow – the irregular inflow over land or sea borders. Therefore, it is first of all necessary to be aware of the full picture of flows. It is important to note that increasing or decreasing stocks of irregular migrants reflect *net* changes in flows.

We differentiate between *demographic, geographic and status-related flows*.

**Demographic flows** concern the birth and death in an irregular residence status. We hardly know anything about the quantitative importance of these incidents. While their quantitative relevance seems to be low, they are causing considerable human rights concerns.

**Geographic flows** are the most visible flows: Boat people try to reach the Southern shores of the European Union, and land borders are used by groups on foot and persons hidden in trucks. Border guard apprehensions are used as indicators of the changing relevance of this inflow. While apprehensions are not only influenced by changing inflows, but also by changing and shifting enforcement practices, enforcement intensity in general has not declined. Data collection according to European standards may improve the quality of published data in the future, but so far not all country experts had a sufficient basis for a differentiated picture, and published data have not achieved full comparability.

**Figure 3: Apprehensions at selected European borders**



Source: ICMPD compilation of border police data from different sources

There is even less information on geographical outflows, concerning irregular migrants leaving the country where they are staying illegally and moving to another EU country or going outside Europe. The lacking awareness of the relevance of outflows may lead to an overestimation of the relevance of irregular migration. The best we can say is that geographical inflows and outflows seem to have declined steadily in the new millennium in many states, with many ups and downs and without a clear trend in Southern European states (see Figure 3).

**Status-related flows** are the third big type of flows: people do not move over borders, they move between legal and irregular status within the territory of a European Union state. The

review of the relevant studies and the empirical research conducted within the CLANDESTINO project in twelve EU countries shows that status-related outflows have been far higher than status-related inflows in the new millennium. Particularly, the EU accession of new Member States legalized the residence status of large numbers of formerly irregular migrants in the old Member States. It should be noted that EU citizens were often not regularized with respect to their work status. In addition to EU enlargement, the first decade of this millennium saw large regularization programmes being implemented in Spain, Italy and Greece leading to substantial outflows into legality. As a result, at least 1.8 million persons were regularized between 2003 and 2008 in the European Union. However, part of the legalized third-country national population runs the risk of falling (or may have already fallen) back into illegality because of the difficulty in finding regular jobs during the recent economic crisis. The share of migrants regularized in the course of recent programmes who lost their status so far seems to be relatively low. In many states, visa overstaying is the most relevant inflow into irregular residence. In some states, there are indications that overstaying decreased.

### **Social and demographic features of irregular migration**

In most countries, apprehension data are the only sources of information concerning socio-demographic features. Comparing apprehension data to other sources and qualitative information where available, we conclude that highly visible and easily deportable nationalities (with regard to costs and administrative difficulties) are overrepresented in these data sources compared to other nationalities. Moreover, men are more likely to be included than women, and children and older people are generally underrepresented. With regard to features on a European level, only some tentative conclusions about the demographic features of the irregular migrant population are possible as there are important differences per country of residence and per country of origin of the irregular migrants.

More specifically, countries of origin of irregular resident populations vary from receiving country to receiving country. In some countries, irregular residence is highly dominated by one country of origin (e.g. Albanians in Greece or Ukrainians in Poland), while other countries are characterized by irregular residence populations from diverse backgrounds (e.g. Germany, UK). Comparing data in the country reports with indications of public discussions, it seems that Asian and European nationalities are underestimated compared to African nationalities which are overestimated. Some nationalities are dominated by men, others by women, and the same can be said for receiving regions. Men still seem to be overrepresented in Europe, but not as much as often assumed. In some cities and regions, the shares of men and women in irregular migrant residents appear to be equal. Children and older migrants are definitely part of the irregular migrant populations in Europe, but their shares vary widely among countries and cities.

### **Key messages for policy makers and stakeholders**

After analysing the data, the following interpretations are suggested for policy makers and the civil society:

- A realistic assessment of the size and structure of irregular migrant populations is particularly relevant for policies aiming at the inclusion of irregular migrants. Political actors and NGOs who lobby for the effective inclusion of undocumented migrants in basic social systems such as health care, schooling or legal assistance are confronted with the question how many persons are concerned, as this has major implications with regard to costs and organisation. Even more so, when new regularisation policies are introduced, it is important to have a realistic assessment how many people may apply and may be eligible, both in order to administer the regularisation adequately and to get an indication of the impact on labour markets and social systems.
- The effects of regularization on the size of irregular migrant populations seem to be highly dependent on internal and external circumstances. If policies do not modify circumstances that lead to irregular migration in the first place, irregular migration will resume and numbers will grow soon to the prior levels or even beyond. If they are accompanied by major changes in other policies as it has recently been the case in Spain, a reduction in the level of irregular residence can be the result.
- The EU accession of new Member States has also led to a substantial legalisation effect in many old Member States. However, only the residence status (and

not the work status) of migrants from these countries was regularized. They, instead, continued to work in the shadow economy.

- For control and enforcement policies seeking to prevent irregular entries such as border control and visa policies, a realistic assessment of the size of the undocumented migrant populations is much less important, as the target of these policies are those who plan to come rather than those who are already in. However, declining *trends* in entries and residents suggest that there is no need for hasty ‘emergency’ interventions and budget increases for control agencies. Whether the tendency will continue or not, it is a good time to evaluate entrance control policies and to consider well-observed experiments, liberalizing selected practices.
- Self-evaluation and internal research is not sufficient for such purposes. Even if the research department of organisations like FRONTEX would be expanded to the size of universities, they cannot avoid an institutional viewpoint. On the other hand, external academic research as presented here often suffers from lack of data access or data understanding. Collaborative research between research institutes and research departments in authorities, with clearly defined roles, is probably the best way to move forward in understanding the size, features, causes and consequences of irregular migration.

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All Project Reports and Policy Briefs as well as the Database are available through the project’s web site <http://clandestino.eliamep.gr>

The Database on Irregular Migration created in the CLANDESTINO project is available under <http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net>

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For more information on the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Programme of the European Commission please see: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index_en.html)

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