

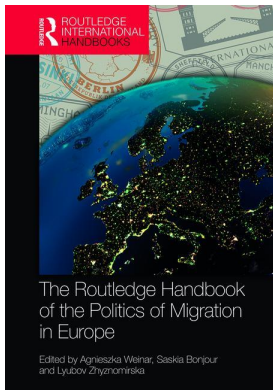
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## **The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of Migration in Europe**

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### **Politics of irregular migration in Europe**

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POLITICS OF IRREGULAR  
MIGRATION IN EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

## Moving beyond an EU-driven research agenda

*Lyubov Zhyznomirska***Introduction**

Knowledge creation surrounding irregular migration and its politics has been largely dominated by policy priorities of immigrant-receiving, mainly 'western' states. Research examining irregular migration in North America, western Europe and Australia feature prominently in global migration studies, as scholarship has sought to account for policy responses aimed at regulating 'unwanted' migration present in these territories (i.e. stock migration), and at preventing the arrival of asylum seekers and immigrants (i.e. flow migration). Since the late 1980s, western states' concerns with controlling or 'managing' migration have resulted in a myriad of policy responses directed at the regulation of access to territory (through visa and border policies), labour markets, welfare states, citizenship, humanitarian migration (asylum and refugee policies), as well as at the conduct of policing, border protection and municipal registration of residents. In the European Union (EU) specifically, policy responses to irregular migration have become an issue influencing the fortunes of political parties at the ballot box and, more recently, the dynamics and popular support of the European integration process. In the EU's migration policy universe, all migratory flows in the region have been viewed as being EU-destined, turning the EU's neighbouring countries into so-called transit migration countries and making external migration relations with countries of origin and of transit of migration towards the EU a priority.

The politicisation of irregular migration has had an impact on the intellectual structure of migration studies. Bommes and Sciortino (2011, p. 13) characterised the field as being long dominated by policy-embedded scholarship and humanitarian reporting, with both streams of literature portraying irregular migration as a problem to be solved. Only since the mid-2000s, migration scholars have started systematically examining irregular migration as a structural phenomenon of European capitalist economies after World War II and a research problem, rather than a political problem of governance and management. In addition, there is a difference in the attention migration scholars in the east and the west of Europe pay to irregular migration. In Eastern Europe, irregular migration has largely remained a category for public policy reporting, rather than academic studies (with an exception of studies on Turkey and Russia, due to the presence and politicisation of large undocumented and asylum-seeking population in these countries).

This chapter reviews scholarship on the policies and politics of irregular migration in Europe by paying critical attention to how irregular or illegal immigration has been theorised. It starts by examining the emergence of the concept and its inherently political nature as it relates to wider socio-economic and political transformations in Europe. Then it reviews the literature on the politics of irregular migration in Europe, highlighting the three major framing of irregular migration in policy terms – specifically, as the expression of the state’s loss of control over borders and territory, a security threat and a problem of uncontrolled flows. This is followed by an examination of scholarship that utilises the concept of ‘transit’ irregular migration. The chapter concludes by highlighting the European challenges in the governance of irregular migration and charting potential avenues for the development of scholarship in this field.

### **What’s in the name: the concept of ‘irregular migration’**

The emergence of the concept of irregular, or ‘illegal’, migration is related to the political and economic dynamics of the modern nation state. Changes in the perception and categorisation of foreigners as ‘illegals’ is associated with processes of political nation-building, and the emergence and construction of the idea of citizenship, which divided the world’s populations into nations, some of which were cast as being undeserving and/or ‘national security threats’ (Düvell, 2006a, p. 24; Chacon, 2008). Politically, in the twentieth century, states increased their capacity for population and territorial control thanks in part to law enforcement, particularly with the invention of passports (Torpey, 2000) and implementation of deportation procedures (Walters, 2002). In turn, economic changes triggered social transformations, and changing modes of production in postmodern economies built on the demand for mobile, flexible and insecure labour (Düvell, 2014). However, states responded to new forms of geographic mobility within globalised neoliberal economies with increasing attempts to control and regulate people on the move. As Düvell (2014, p. 1) succinctly states, ‘Irregular migration only exists because policies determine which types and levels of migration are permitted and which are not.’

Legal definitions and terminology used in relation to migrants in irregular situations differ across the continent. Inherently political, they usually capture irregularity of a foreigner’s status in a given country in reference to modes of entry, residence status, employment status and type of employment. The factors influencing one’s irregular status may be multiple. One’s irregularity may be derived only in relation to employment, while residence papers are legal, or it may be based on informal or illegal status in both respects (i.e. residence and work). Researchers have documented that bureaucratic red tape and/or labour market dynamics in some southern European countries may produce irregular stay or irregular work creating ‘befallen irregularity’ (González-Enríquez, 2014) or ‘semi-legality’ (Kubal, 2013), when migrants morph from legal to illegal status and vice versa with regard to employment or residence. This also happens because certain sectors, such as construction, domestic work, agriculture and the hospitality industry, are dependent on the cheap labour of irregular migrant workers. Finally, the stock of irregular migrants also tends to include tolerated persons without a regular status (with or without documents) and those whose asylum claim was denied but who cannot be deported on compassionate or humanitarian grounds (for a wider discussion on typologies of irregular statuses, see Tapinos, 2000; Triandafyllidou, 2010; Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011; Triandafyllidou and Bartolini, 2017).

Despite much-discussed and repeatedly circulated numbers on the sizes and features of irregular migration in Europe, the real-time situation with irregular migration is often unknown (CLANDESTINO, 2009). Comprehensive statistics on migrants of irregular status are rarely available even in those countries that claim the ‘fight against illegal immigration’ as a key policy

priority (Triandafyllidou, 2010). Nevertheless, the ‘number games’ and ‘political games’ associated with a group labelled as irregular migrants occur in all European countries, albeit with subtle differences in each state (Vollmer, 2011). As the next section will demonstrate, political anxieties about unregulated employment and its links to irregular migration, conflated with the perception of asylum seekers in Europe as ‘bogus’ and, more recently, terrorist threats, has become a point of contention for European governments in the last 30 years. Such preoccupations further link irregular migration to state concerns over lost control over borders and migration flows, resulting in increased attempts to institute migration controls as a response. The perceived need by executive authorities to demonstrate to their populations – or to EU institutions, in light of the pressures of the European integration and/or political and economic association with the EU – their capabilities to effectively manage migration is an important element in the politics of irregular migration (Geddes, 2005; Vollmer, 2010; van der Leun and Iliès, 2010; Follis, 2012).

### **Irregular migration in Europe: the expanding logic of migration control**

What stands out in migration studies in the field of irregular migration is scholarship that, for a while, was very much driven by policy developments in (western) European countries. In the policy and public realm since the 1990s, across many European countries political responses to irregular migration were based on the conflation and confusion of migration categories (specifically, irregular migration with asylum and irregular migration with human smuggling and trafficking), stirring native population’s anxieties about cultural identity and economic safety (Geddes, 2005). Scholars focused on examining the effects of increasing migration controls on the movement of people across and within European countries, controls which were instituted in response to concerns about the perceived loss of state control over borders and population movement, over labour markets and effective means of preventing the irregular employment of foreign workers, and, finally, concerns about potential security threats coming from asylum seekers in the EU. Since the 2000s, there has been significantly more attention paid to the dynamics of irregular migration and their interaction with European labour markets, welfare states and societies (Düvell, 2006b; CLANDESTINO, 2009; Triandafyllidou, 2010; Bommès and Sciortino, 2011).

### ***Irregular migration as an outcome of liberal constraints***

In western Europe, concerns over irregular migration emerged on policy radars in the 1960s, in connection to irregular work. Already in the 1960s and 1970s, northern European countries had pioneered legislation aimed at controlling irregular migration as part of more comprehensive migration legislation packages (Vollmer, 2011, p. 318). In 1976, in light of growing interdependence and integration of national labour markets, the European Commission also weighed in by proposing a directive to develop a common approach to ‘combat illegal migration and illegal employment’ in the EC (European Commission, 1976) but it was not successful. Migration control logic trickled down to all European countries that have since become associated in any manner with the evolving European integration project in the last three decades. In the late 1980s, southern Europe (mainly Italy, Spain and Greece) followed with their own immigration control policies as they began experiencing an inflow of immigrant workers from Central and Eastern European countries, Asia and Africa. In turn, in the late 1990s and especially in preparation to the EU accession, Central and Eastern European countries adjusted their immigration and asylum policies in line with the EU’s demands (Boswell, 2003b). With the EU acquiring

supranational competencies on visas, external borders, asylum and irregular migration in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), EU-level policy-making on irregular migration had intensified in the 2000s (van Munster, 2009).

Migration scholars responded to such policy developments by analysing the effects of changing admission policies on the structure and composition of migration flows. The 'liberal constraints' literature conceptualised irregular migration as related to liberal western governments' inability to enforce their migration controls due to bureaucratic resistance or inaction, existing human rights frameworks and vulnerable migrants' ability to utilise judicial protection for recourse, and a lack of enforcement capacity to hold employers accountable for employing irregular migrants (e.g. Joppke, 1998; Cornelius *et al.*, 2004). This literature shed light on the internal constraints associated with introducing restrictive migration controls and, hence, was among the first to explain why migration controls in practice have been less effective than the governments tend to present to the public. As irregular migration was conceptualised as being an outcome of the lack of enforcement of migration control policies, it spoke well to the narrative of states losing control over their borders and immigration flows, prompting the further introduction of controls at borders and consulates (Bigo and Guild, 2005). Media stories in the 1990s about the abuse of foreign workers, the frequently inhumane conditions that some irregular workers were exposed to, or the conditions under which they were transported, together with the media spectacle of migrants' inventive ways of circumventing border checks in hide-outs, triggered both societal responses and heightened human rights concerns about irregular migration on the one hand, and increased crackdowns on illegal border entries through investment in border technologies on the other hand.

### ***Irregular migration as a security risk***

With the increased politicisation of immigration, a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment and support for far-right parties in the 1980s, European governments prioritised dealing with irregular migration through a security lens and reinforcing the migration control logic, rather than tackling the challenges associated with the availability of irregular work and opening channels for immigration and legal employment. The literature on the framing of immigration as a security threat has been growing (Wæver *et al.*, 1993; Huysmans, 2000, 2006; Tsoukala, 2005; Bigo, 2008). Scholars examined the impact of securitisation both on the internal governance of the EU (e.g. Mitsilegas *et al.*, 2003; Walters and Haahr, 2005; van Munster, 2009), and on the external relations in migration management (Lavenex and Uçarer, 2002; Boswell, 2003b; Balzacq, 2009; Zhyznomirska, 2012). The policy framing of immigration as a security threat has activated productive research agenda that examines, to give a few examples, irregular migration flows and 'routes' to Europe (e.g. Carling, 2007; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012), human trafficking and its links with irregular migration (Carling, 2005), the actors and institutions involved in (irregular) 'migration industry' (Bigo, 2014; Andersson, 2015), and the criminalisation of irregular migration in the EU (Karakayali and Rigo, 2010; Provera, 2015).

### ***Externalisation of migration controls***

Security-based logic in response to irregular migration drove European governments to seek an 'added value' of the EU, and domestic migration control agenda became shifted 'up and out'—up to the EU level and out into the external relations with the countries of transit and origin of migrants (Lavenex, 2006). In the politics of irregular migration, managing flows through the prevention of arrivals and the deportation of those found in illegal situations has become a policy

response, as have measures aimed at penalising/criminalising the facilitators of irregular migration those and who employed them. Generally, these broader principles have remained the core pillars of Europe's response to irregular migration, whether they were applied to managing irregular migration flows through eastern borders in the 1990s–2000s, or, since the 2000s, through southern borders.

As the EU's external migration relations are reviewed by Reslow (this volume), the author's treatment of this theme will be schematic. As EU institutions and governments seek cooperation with countries of origin and of 'transit' to control migration towards the EU, it creates an environment for policy convergence on migration and border control. The EU has been effective in policy transfer due to the EU's accession conditionalities and other conditionalities built into readmission and visa cooperation with non-EU European countries (Trauner and Kruse, 2008; Trauner, 2009; Taylor *et al.*, 2013). Scholars have shown that the externalisation of migration management has created new actors in migration policy-making – specifically, by empowering (1) international organisations in charge of migration (such as International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)) to act in transferring EU policies to countries deemed to lack effective migration management policies (Geiger and Pécoud, 2010), and (2) domestic and international actors in charge of immigration law enforcement and borders. The externalisation of border controls have pushed scholars to examine these policies' effects on the governance capacities of non-EU co-operating governments and the fate of migrants potentially seeking entrance to the EU.

The control turn in the EU's immigration policies, among other things, has made it harder for humanitarian migrants to gain access to EU territory and submit asylum claims on the soil of some of the preferred asylum countries (such as Sweden or Germany), pushing some of them into the hands of human smugglers, or 'facilitators', and further blurring the distinction between asylum seekers and irregular migrants. Both human smuggling and trafficking have received plenty of attention, with researchers focusing on such broad themes as migrant strategies, smuggling as a business model, the effect of policies on migration routes (e.g. Carling, 2007; Triandafyllidou and Maroukis, 2012; Brachet, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2018), and the use of trafficked labour in the EU (for the domestic care sector, see Ricard-Guay and Maroukis, 2017). Together, these diverse studies document and analyse key components of government strategies aimed at regulating immigration flows by punishing those who participate in them in an 'illegal' manner, and those who act as intermediaries. The research demonstrates that both migrants and those who may facilitate their travel show creativity in adjusting to migration and border control regimes in Europe.

### ***Are states in control of irregular migration?***

Uniquely for the EU, the principle of free movement within the EU gives migrants access to all countries once they legally enter one country. EU countries have shadow economies and demands for irregular workers, while lax migration enforcement policies make it possible for some irregular migrants to avoid being detected. Some scholarship has exposed migrants' strategies to circumvent or abuse immigration regulations and policies (e.g. Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Engbersen and Broeders, 2009; Ellermann, 2010), or find ways to maintain their quasi-legal illegal statuses in countries with more 'illegality-tolerant' cultures (e.g. González-Enríquez, 2010, for Spain; Düvell, 2006b, for the UK; van Meeteren, 2014, for Belgium and the Netherlands). From an institutional perspective, bureaucratic cultures and practices may impede internal law enforcement and create an environment of bureaucratic tolerance of irregularities (Ellermann, 2006). Since the mid-2000s European policy-makers – both at the national and EU levels

– have turned towards enhanced internal control mechanisms that have been dubbed as ‘policies of exclusion and discouragement’ (van Meeteren, 2014, p. 13). Such measures as the exclusion from basic public service provisions, increased police raids and identity checks, incarceration and expulsion, ‘voluntary’ returns, and employer sanctions have all been introduced in an effort to further intimidate irregular migrants and increase their visibility and detectability under state surveillance practices (see Broeders and Engbersen, 2007). In other words, European governments have poured resources into law enforcement and measures geared towards making irregular migrants more visible in order to intimidate, apprehend and ultimately expel them (see Engbersen and Broeders, 2009, on the Dutch case; Troitskiy, 2016, and Luhn, 2013, on the Russian case). These measures have expanded in European governments’ response to the inflow of migrants in 2014–2016.

Specifically in the EU, governments have sought to increase their ability to expel illegally residing foreigners or those who entered the territory illegally by negotiating various bilateral or multilateral mechanisms for readmission (Cassarino, 2007), harmonising procedures for return and treatment of migrants undergoing expulsion (i.e. 2008 Return Directive), and instituting penalties for employers (2009 Employer Sanctions Directive). Despite the fact that the two directives were contentious at their adoption, there is little debate about their effects in the academic literature. The return has been largely normalised by being packaged as a ‘humane’ way of returning migrants with no legal right to remain and has been depoliticised by presenting the return as ‘voluntary’ in the European policy universe (see Kuschminder, this volume). Initial assessments of the Employer Sanctions Directive suggest that member states have introduced the restrictive measures from the Directive, but failed to bring about a regime of rules that guarantees fair treatment and appeal procedures to foreign workers employed without proper authorisation (European Commission, 2014; Guild, 2014; PICUM, 2015). More importantly, European governments continue to differ with regard to their internal migration regulation and enforcement regimes, with some countries simultaneously and contradictorily, having strict external controls and lax internal control measures as well as large informal economies (see Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini, 2011, for Greece and Italy).

For that matter, European governments differ in terms of how tolerant they are of irregular migrants in vulnerable positions and how friendly they are towards regularisation. Toleration usually applies to those cases of failed asylum seekers, people in vulnerable positions (such as pregnant women or unaccompanied minors) or to those awaiting return or removal who cannot be deported and hence, are issued a special ‘tolerated’ designation (European Commission, 2013). The European Commission has argued that differences in how various member states apply the toleration statuses make it difficult to enforce a common implementation of the EU’s Return Directive. Importantly, there is a lack of scholarly literature on the topic of tolerated status and its normative challenges to European governments, and public debate and policy responses ‘take place in a context’ marked by various ‘emergencies’ (particularly in 2015–2017) (Triandafyllidou and Bartolini, 2017, p. 16).

In turn, regularisation practices in the national context have been studied at least since the 1980s when regularisation became more common as a tool to address unintended outcomes of migration controls (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009). Since the 2000s, they have been treated to a more comprehensive comparative analysis as regularisation of foreigners became contentious in the EU that was harmonising its migration policies (Apap *et al.*, 2000; Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009). Scholars have deemed regularisation an effective tool for foreign labour management (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009), even if it continues to be contentious policy-wise (Brick, 2011).

The existing research shows that southern Europe is an outlier in how often, and in what numbers, countries in this region have used regularisation programmes. Whereas Italy, Spain

and Greece have undertaken a number of large-scale regularisation programmes, northern European countries prefer not to use regularisation, or at least employ them only at a smaller scale and frequently in relation to migrants in vulnerable position (ICMPD, 2009). Therefore, the EU member states are guided by two distinct logics in their regularisation policies – specifically, by (1) a humanitarian and rights-based logic and (2) regulatory and labour market-oriented logic, which is non-humanitarian in nature (Baldwin-Edwards and Kraler, 2009). Almost all European countries have some form of legal, administrative or policy measures and have used regularisation as a migration management tool (*ibid.*). Regularisations tend to encompass those forms of irregularity that are being tolerated by governments, and may include both formal and informal incorporation of unauthorised migrants in a balancing act between economic/cultural incorporation and incorporation on vulnerability or civic contribution grounds (see Chauvin and Garcés-Masareñas, 2014). European governments play with the ‘deservingness’ of irregular migrants in terms of allowing them to regularise and under what conditions, with employment deemed the important requirement for foreign residents to remain in the EU (Chauvin *et al.*, 2013; Chauvin and Garcés-Masareñas, 2014).

### **The politics of transit irregular migration**

EU’s policy concern with irregular migration created a lively research agenda examining ‘transit irregular migration’, with the focus on the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of the enlarging EU in the late 1990s–early 2000s, with the migrant population there largely constructed as migrants in waiting en route to western Europe. Triggered by alarms from western governments over potential massive migration flows from the Soviet Union (which, as history showed, failed to materialise), in the early 1990s, the IOM produced a report on ‘transit migration’ in Ukraine (IOM 1994a) and the Russian Federation (IOM 1994b). Concern over the movements of citizens from distant countries, taking their time and effort and engaging in dangerous journeys through multiple borders in their attempt to reach the EU, resulted in an intensive push by EU governments and EU institutions to co-operate with the ‘transit’ countries on migration management. International migration organisations such as IOM, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and UNHCR have been important partners in producing knowledge related to the migration situation in transit countries and in the Europeanisation of their migration policies through the transfer of policies, tools, and best practices in migration governance (Geiger and Pécoud, 2010; Lavenex, 2007). Initial studies on transit migration were largely descriptive, focused on policies and data collection. IOM continued to advance the importance of transit countries in international migration flows and remained important to the study of irregular migration in post-Soviet countries (see IOM 1997, 2004, 2010).

However, it is also important to examine transit countries’ internal concerns regarding unregulated people flows and/or the presence of foreigners without legal right to stay. Irregular migration emerged on the policy radar of various non-EU European countries at almost the same time as EU-15 started tightening their migration and border controls. After the fall of the iron curtain and the break-up of the Soviet Union, a substantial part of population movement within Europe was irregular in nature. In effect, having relaxed registration and passport controls, post-communist states had turned into migrant-sending countries in a short period, while at the same time they also began experiencing inflows of new, ‘non-traditional’ migrants from further east; for example, Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) countries became destination countries for labour migrants from the former Soviet Union (Braichevska *et al.*, 2003; Malynovska, 2004, 2006). Particularly, the Russian Federation had experienced significant flows of humanitarian migrants and became a second regional magnet in Europe for legal



and irregular labour migration, especially for nationals from former Soviet countries (Molodikova, 2010). It serves as a 'core' for the so-called 'CIS migration system' (Tishkov *et al.*, 2005; Molodikova, 2010) or the 'Eurasian migration system' (Ivakhnyuk, 2007), and has its important role in the politics of irregular migration in Europe. Illegal migration has been a highly contentious and politicised topic in Russia since the 1990s (Zhyznomirska, 2012). In English-language migration scholarship, however, at least until the mid-2000s Russia featured mainly as a source and transit country for human trafficking and irregular migration flows towards the EU. Only since the 2000s, as Russia's demographic crisis and need for labour resources became more pronounced, has the scholarly focus shifted towards examining policies, actors and experiences of irregularly employed foreign workers in Russia. The country also ceased to be of significance as a transit country for the EU.

Turkey is another important country in Europe's politics of irregular migration. Sitting at the intersection between pan-European, Asian and Middle-Eastern migratory systems, Turkey became a country of transit irregular migration in the 1990s (İçduygu and Keyman, 2000) as it also received its share of illegal workers from the Balkans, former Soviet republics, Iran, Iraq and Africa (Kirişçi, 2002; İçduygu and Aksel, 2012). In European migration research, Turkey features prominently as the 'transit' country for irregular migration (especially from Turkey to Greece) and a partner in the EU's irregular migration management (Angeli *et al.*, 2014; Ercan, 2016; Kuschminder and Koser, 2017).

The concept of transit migration was actively used by migration scholars from the transit countries. Thus, in her studies of transit migration through Russia, Ivakhnyuk (2008, p. 6) defines the concept as 'a short-term temporary stay of a migrant on his/her way from a country of origin to a country of destination' while İçduygu (2005), who studies irregular migration in Turkey, points to the intention of migrants there to move further west. For example, in Ukraine and Russia, neither the policies nor the public discourses in the 1990s and 2000s presented any 'non-traditional' (meaning 'not from former Soviet countries') immigrant populations as migrants in waiting to leave for the EU (Zhyznomirska, 2012). Migration experts in post-Soviet countries during the 2000s, especially if they viewed migration through the security lens, subscribed to the framing of 'transit countries' and the logic of migration routes inherently destined to the EU (on Ukraine, see Polyakov, 2004; ICPS/IPP, 2006; see Ivakhnyuk, 2008, for Russia). Studies on labour migration flows, however, pointed to the relevance of the two-directional movements in Europe showing that workers from the former Soviet countries moved both west (to the EU countries and Central and Eastern European countries) and east, to Russia and Turkey among the main destination (Pirozhkov *et al.*, 2003; Malynovska, 2006).

Arguably, this inquiry into transit migration from the EU's eastern neighbours has become less significant as the eastern migration route ceased to be important to the EU (accounting for less than 1 per cent of migration flows to the EU in the last decade, according to Frontex). Scholars have shifted their attention to studying transit migration mainly from the EU's southern neighbours and Turkey (see Düvell *et al.*, 2014; Koser and Kuschminder, 2016; Kuschminder and Koser, 2017). The EU's externalisation practices have been under scrupulous investigation by human rights organisations (for example, Human Rights Watch, 2005, 2010). This line of inquiry – investigating the effects of the EU's migration governance and external migration relations – has grown exponentially since the EU has been pushing for more migration management cooperation with countries in the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Our knowledge of the illegal or irregular migration situation in this group of transit countries in Europe remains limited and far from systematic, meaning that scholarship remains largely in its infancy (see CARIM East web-site, [www.carim-east.eu/publications/](http://www.carim-east.eu/publications/) for a review of legal and policy frameworks on irregular migration in non-EU European countries). With the exception

of studies on Russia (IOM, 2004; Ivakhnyuk, 2014) and Turkey (e.g. İçduygu and Aksel, 2012; Koser and Kuschminder, 2016), no qualitative or quantitative analyses examining irregular migration in non-EU European countries in a non-politicised manner, appear to exist. Studies to systematically and comprehensively analyse, for example, the effects of structural (e.g. economy or labour market conditions) and institutional (e.g. admission and integration policies) factors on the irregular migration situation in non-EU Europe are needed. Hence, the research has some gaps waiting to be filled.

## **Conclusions**

Research into the phenomenon of irregular migration in Europe has grown increasingly more systematic since the early 2000s. However, irregular migration research is saturated with the problematique of a ‘developed’ Europe that prioritises finding solutions to the problem of irregular employment, irregular residence, and the arrival of foreigners without proper authorisation to enter and stay in their territories. More studies are needed in order to better understand country-specific situations with migration flows across Europe and to account for discrepancies, if any, between national responses to the mixed migration flows in non-EU European countries – specifically, with regard to the irregular employment of foreign workers and the situation of rejected asylum seekers.

Is there anything exceptional in the way Europe has responded to irregular migration in policy terms? Arguably, the EU has been a leader in actively externalising migration and border control practices to the countries of origin and transit through foreign policy, development, trade, and other policies. The EU’s engagement with countries in its vicinity and further away have led to a pan-European migration and border control regime that converges with respect to the prevention and control of irregular migratory movement. Managing (irregular) migration flows has largely become a priority that impacts other dimensions of the EU’s external relations and its internal policies. Publicly, EU governments and institutions pronounce the importance of addressing irregular migration in order to create channels for legal and well-managed labour migration and to increase trust in the EU’s labour migration system (Walters, 2010). On the other hand, the management of irregular migration and asylum is also meant to save the EU’s humanitarian migration system from being overburdened. Addressing irregular migration has become a governance tool deployed in an effort to attain other political objectives.

Irregular migration continues to pose political, economic, social and moral challenges to Europe overall. No policy thus far has been able to capture the diversity of intentions or agency of those migrants who choose irregularity as their path to realisation of life dreams and opportunities. As routes to legal immigration and employment become tightened and diversified (targeting specific groups of economically ‘worthy’ immigrants), those who cannot fit into existing policy boxes are left with no choice but to engage in a complex process of mobilising ‘the resources they can mobilise, developed in interactions with intermediaries (such as smugglers, border guards, fellow nationals, natives at transit or destination), and involving different tactics and strategies of navigating, or even manipulating, migration and asylum policy options’ (Triandafyllidou, 2017, p. 2).

## **Note**

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