



Why people move

Understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe

Clare Cummings,
Julia Pacitto,
Diletta Lauro and
Marta Foresti



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SUMMARY**
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It is time for an effective and durable policy response to the current ‘migration crisis’ in Europe. Such a response, however, requires a better and broader understanding of what drives people to migrate in the first place. There is much debate about their motivations, and about possible solutions to the ‘crisis’ – debate that often leads to conflicting messages and theories. To shine a light on this issue and provide some clarity, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has used a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) approach to assess the quality of the evidence that is already available to identify what drives migration to Europe.

Despite inconsistencies in the statistical data on irregular migration, there is no doubt that the number of people trying to come into European countries through irregular means soared in recent years, driven by a combination of conflict, political instability and economic insecurity. The evidence reveals that the asylum-seekers and economic migrants often have similar reasons for choosing to make the dangerous journey to Europe and one person may fall into both of these categories at the same time. One common and crucial motivation is their search for a secure livelihood.

Measures that aim to allow asylum-seekers in, while restricting the entry of economic migrants, overlook the reasons why a particular person migrates, and are likely to increase irregular migration still

further as migrants seek alternative – and often more dangerous – ways to reach European countries. The data show clear patterns in the routes and nationalities of those entering Europe by irregular means, but it is hard to predict the route of any single individual, and a person’s motivations and plans may often change during their often long and convoluted journey to Europe.

The fact that refugees can be motivated by the need for a secure livelihood in their decision to migrate to Europe in no way discredits their claim to refugee status as a protected category of persons under international and domestic law. Rather, this review finds that tightening migration policies and discriminating against other migrants on the basis of what are deemed to be ‘more genuine’ motives, seems both ineffective and unfair given the complexity of people’s choices to migrate at different stages of their journeys. The growing professionalisation of the people smugglers and the greater availability of information via the internet and social media also appear to facilitate migration. As a culture of migration from a particular country grows – as seen in Senegal, Morocco and within particular ethnic communities – local and international networks become stronger, encouraging further migration and providing vital information and resources for the journey.

Policies that do not recognise the complex and changing nature of irregular

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Increased economic prospects in poor countries makes it more likely that people will migrate

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migration are unlikely, therefore, to effectively address the difficulties faced by both migrants and governments in the current crisis. While tightening border security may change migration patterns and routes, migration policies alone are unlikely to influence the volume of people migrating. A person's need to leave their home – or flee from it in the face of extreme danger – is likely to be far more important to their decision to migrate than the lure of another country's welfare, migration and asylum policies.

Understanding migration flows

ODI's Rapid Evidence Assessment found clear evidence of a major increase in the number of people trying to enter Europe via three main migration routes across the Mediterranean: the Central Mediterranean, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Balkans. From January to June 2015, 137,000 refugees and migrants arrived in Europe, an increase of 83% since the same six-month period in 2014. Syrians are the single largest nationality, followed by Eritreans and Afghans. Given the circumstances from which they have fled, most are likely to qualify as refugees in EU countries.

Data sets from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Frontex differ significantly because they use different methods, but it is still clear

that the numbers of people using irregular means of entry into Europe is on the rise, and that the routes they are using are constantly changing. Countries that were once primarily sources of migrants, such as Turkey, or 'destination countries', such as Libya, are now becoming transit points on a much longer journey.

Studies on irregular migration to Europe find that migration flows must be understood as long-term and shifting trajectories that may span many years as migrants may settle in one country but later move on to another, or return to their home country as conditions there improve. This makes it very difficult to monitor migration accurately when using such categories as 'transit migration' or 'asylum-seeker', and statistical data can provide only an indication of the nature of migration flows. Predicting future migration is another challenge, and requires a detailed understanding of the factors that drive people to migrate, including conflict, social unrest and economic instability, which are themselves difficult to predict. Possible scenarios suggest a continued and steady increase in migration in general, and a likely increase in circular migration (the temporary of often repetitive movement of migrants between their home and a host area for the purpose of employment). Critically, it is not only conflict and political unrest that drive migration: emigration is likely to increase

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Refugees and migrants share **similar reasons** for attempting dangerous journeys to Europe: safety, livelihoods and aspirations

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as a country's economy grows, as more people have the financial resources and the information they need to make the journey.

What motivates people to migrate by irregular means

Two major factors are often cited as shaping people's decisions to migrate: personal and political security, and the quest for a secure livelihood. However, one person's motives may change in nature and in importance during their journey, suggesting that categorising individuals as 'economic migrants' or 'asylum-seekers' does not reflect the complex and fluid reality of people's experience of migration. Any policy or programme that aims to influence current flows of irregular migration has to be based on a thorough understanding of the different factors that motivate people to move, the relationship between the options for regular and irregular migration, and the role that social networks and information sources play in determining who is migrating, where and how.

International and national policies, economic conditions and political situations may all play a part in determining whether a person of a particular nationality migrates. Other factors relate to that person's own circumstances – particularly whether they have the funds for the journey, as well as any intention to undertake it – and

their local and wider social network, all of which can either encourage or prevent their migration.

Studies on the influence of different countries welfare and asylum support systems suggests that they are not important to a person's initial decision to migrate. However, the policies and rules of different destination countries may influence later decisions on whether to continue to another country where opportunities and conditions may be better. There is strong evidence that while tightening border security may change migration routes, and often results in more people making more dangerous journeys, migration policies are unlikely to influence the actual number of people migrating.

Migration as a collective effort: the role of social networks

Although ODI has found little evidence on the specific role of social networks in the current European crisis, the evidence available does suggest that social networks and information flows are, in general, vital components of migration systems and in decisions to migrate. Studies of migration from many countries, such as Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, and Senegal show that irregular migration is usually a collective effort in which families and social and religious networks play a crucial role. This effort includes the role of family members in host countries, who may encourage

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potential migrants through remittances and information. During the journey, an individual's access to smuggling networks and their experiences in the different countries they cross along the way also help to shape where and how they migrate.

Members of communities with a history of migration may be more inclined to migrate than people who are less accustomed to such a 'culture of migration'. Beyond the culture of their immediate community, migrants are influenced by broader social networks and are exposed to information through mass media, word of mouth and – increasingly – social media. Internet-based technology and social media are connecting different groups of migrants and non-migrant populations, and migrants often provide each other with reciprocal support for day-to-day subsistence, sharing food and accommodation, as well as information on travel routes and destinations. These local networks are often informal and concealed, staying firmly under the radar.

Evidence gaps

ODI's Rapid Evidence Assessment has revealed some important gaps in the evidence that need further investigation. For example, the evidence on detailed migration routes, especially across North

Africa and from Eritrea and Somalia, is limited, and little appears to be known about what influences the amount of time people spend in different countries during their journey to Europe, or why they move on to other countries after spending some time in a particular European country. There are also crucial gaps in the evidence on the role of networks and information flows in the current crisis. This includes the role of networks in influencing initial decision to migrate; their role during the journey and in transit locations; the role of technology, communication tools and online media in shaping these networks and influencing decisions; and how individual characteristics, especially gender, relate to these networks.

Another major gap pinpointed by ODI concerns the lack of information on smuggling networks, including their influence on the destination of migrants and on the overall feasibility of irregular migration. While it is bound to be difficult to gather evidence on the clandestine activities of the people smugglers, the lack of such evidence means that attempts to tackle smuggling often rely on inadequate information and analysis.

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**Tightening borders
doesn't stop migration –
people will simply take
more dangerous routes**

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Overseas Development Institute

203 Blackfriars Road

London SE1 8NJ

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

odi.org