

## **Does the EU Enlargement Decrease the Undocumented Migrations from Central and Eastern Europe: The Experience of Brussels<sup>1</sup>**

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Even though the phenomenon of undocumented migrations attracts significant scientific and political attention, the information about the types of undocumented immigrants in Europe, their motivations and future migration plans is still far from satisfactory. While certain immigrants' populations such as the undocumented immigrants from Africa and the Middle East have been in the focus of research interest, others, such as those originating from Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter CEE) have remained largely understudied. Some of the reasons could be sought in the relative invisibility of those immigrants in Europe and their relatively recent appearance on the scene of undocumented migrations. Additionally, the Western European fears that the fall of communism will result in huge emigration levels from CEE turned to be unjustified and this additionally redirected the research interests back to the traditionally studied non-European migrants. Nevertheless, the presence of undocumented immigrants from CEE in Western Europe is undeniable fact and the implications from such lack of systematic knowledge about it results not only in restricting the possibilities for analysing the reasons behind the undocumented movements from different parts of the world and in hindering the prediction of future undocumented flows but can also have a significant impact on the policy measures designed to manage the undocumented flows.

The current paper represents an attempt to contribute to the general understanding of the irregular migrations from Central and Eastern Europe, by focusing on the case of Brussels. Subsequently, the impact of a country's accession to the EU on the existing undocumented migrants stocks will be evaluated.

The research on undocumented immigrants in Brussels is surprisingly limited and is restricted primarily to identifying the major groups of undocumented migrants and exploring their living conditions and occupational practices. The so collected purely descriptive information has a limited power to predict the future developments in the composition of the

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has been written in the framework of a project on "Legal and Undocumented Immigrants in Brussels" financed by Brussels Capital Region, 2002-2004. However, the views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Brussels Capital Region.

stocks and flows of undocumented migrants to Belgium. With the present contribution, not only the factual knowledge about understudied populations will be increased but also a the multifarious factors behind the persisting undocumented migrations from CEU will be presented.

The paper will proceed by offering an overview of the major migration tendencies from Central and Eastern Europe, Bulgaria and Poland. After presenting the primary patterns of pre, and the post-totalitarian population mobility from CEU the reasons and the persistency of the developed new forms of migration such as the temporary, circular and irregular migrations will be examined. The undocumented flows from CEU will be taken as an evidence supporting the thesis that the measures aiming at restricting the irregular migration such as closure of borders and imposition of visa regimes do not reduce the migration pressures but just redirect the migratory flows towards alternative entry points and force potential migrants into irregular migration.

The paper will further on offer a critical assessment of the knowledge about undocumented immigrants in Brussels and in this context will present the arguments for selecting the Polish and the Bulgarian undocumented immigrants as target research groups. Subsequently some methodological issues will be addressed including 1) the techniques for identifying respondents; 2) the issue of representativity and generalizability of the results based on research on non-random sample; and 3) the research methodology and instruments.

Concluding the theoretical and the methodological premises we will focus on the profile of the studied population by presenting a comprehensive information about the immigrant's demographic characteristics; migration history; reasons for choosing Belgium and in particularly Brussels as a target destination; occupational activities in Brussels; and income and remittances level. The paper will then proceed by tackling the main research question: Is a country's accession or anticipated accession to the EU influencing the patterns of irregular migrations of nationals of the candidate countries? The answers will be sought by firstly analyzing the immigrant's perception of *if, how and to what degree* the accession of their home countries to the EU will have an impact on their immigration status and on their occupational activities. Secondly, the perceptions for potential positive or negative developments in the country of origin will be assessed based on the respondents' accounts of how they view the employment perspectives, the economic development and the general living conditions in their countries after the EU enlargement.

The future migration plans in general and the decision for return or non-return in particular will be then analyzed. Conclusions will be based on the respondents' direct

accounts about their future migration plans as related to the EU enlargement, and the perspectives for well-being in the home country and in Brussels. Since however, migration motivation is not always a good predictor if migration will occur in the future, we will employ other variables with potential explanatory power. On the first place, we will trace the past changes in the individual migration behavior and will identify the factors that produced those changes. Secondly, we will explore to what degree previous plans for return have not been fulfilled and under what circumstances. Thirdly, the pull factors will be evaluated and the changes in these pull-factors over time will be traced. Finally, the impact of structural factors such as the market needs for undocumented workers will be assessed based on interviews with those who contract the services of undocumented immigrants.

A separate section will be dedicated to the effectiveness of repressive and punishing measures on controlling irregular migrations from CEE. Research results will reveal that deportation practices, police apprehensions and border control measures have only limited success in coping with irregular migration and the inefficiency of these measures is in fact one of the factors that influences migrants decision to migrate clandestinely to Belgium and not Germany, which has been the traditional destination for Central and Eastern Europeans.

Based on the so collected information, several principal conclusions will be made: The undocumented migration from Poland and from Bulgaria to Belgium has not decreased in volume ever since 1989. The EU accession status influences only the type of migration - long or short-term - as a direct result of the border control measures or the possibility for entering Belgium without being stopped at a EU border.

In the case of Poland, the pattern of irregular migration has changed during the past 10 years, to include more shuttle migration and more short-term stays in Brussels as reaction to the relaxed attitude towards undocumented Poles in Belgium and to the subjective perception that after accession no more formal restrictions on entry can be raised. The accession of the country to the EU is not a factor that has changed the existing size of undocumented migration, and seems that will not change it in the near future. What has changed is the volume of newcomers, which is on the rise, as a result of the development of large migrant networks in Brussels and the intensified pendular migration.

In the case of Bulgaria, the EU enlargement is also not considered as a factor, which will influence the personal migration behavior. The difference in comparison with Polish migrants is however, that the undocumented Bulgarians tend to “settle” in Brussels and to avoid pendular migration in order to reduce both the risks of unsuccessful shuttle migration and the cost of migration.

The paper will conclude by providing a summary of the main research results and advancing the argument that irregular migration is a structurally determined phenomenon, which cannot be reduced by the state application of restrictive or penal measures, when there are strong motivations from migration and powerful push-factors operating in the countries of origin. As a final line and an introduction of further research necessity, the preliminary results about the undocumented Romanians, Moldavians, and Russians in Brussels will be introduced.