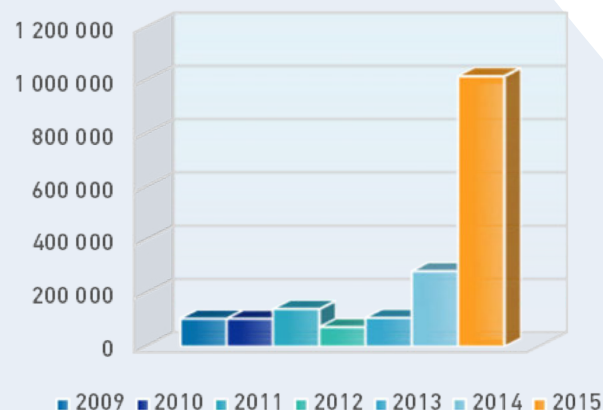


Irregular Migration and Europe's Border Controls

An ethnographic analysis

The refugee issue, and especially migration across the Mediterranean Sea, dominates Swedish and European policy debates as never before. Approximately one million people arrived at Europe's southern shores in 2015, and at least 3,700 migrants lost their lives. The need for a better understanding of the situation at Europe's borders, and of European countries' handling of refugee and border issues, is greater than ever.

The aim of this report is to analyse how the EU and its member states have conducted border policy since the Schengen agreement abolished internal borders in the 1990s. The study analyses the "fight against illegal immigration" (in this report, "irregular migration"), which since the 1990s has unfolded at and beyond the external borders. It provides answers to the questions of how, why, and with what consequences certain types of migration increasingly have come to be treated as a security and border problem. The trend towards this "border security model" is not only European, but global, as the study shows with reference to research on the border between the US and Mexico. However, the European case is today perhaps the best example of the profound problems that this model has created. In the Schengen area, the report



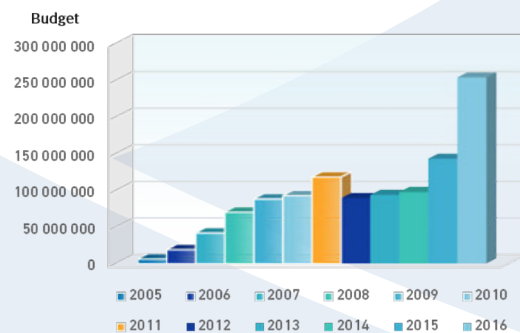
Estimated number of irregular migrants and refugees at the EU's external maritime and land borders, 2009–15.

Source: Frontex (2009–2014) and UNHCR (2015).

shows how more border security has been used as a substitute for a genuine common migration and asylum policy, despite the fact that "securing the borders" has been shown to worsen the situation by contributing to increasingly frequent border crises over the past ten years.

The study is based on a doctoral thesis and several years of qualitative research. Extensive empirical material has been collected in Spanish-African border zones using ethnographic methods, as well as through short research visits to other border areas. Interviews with several hundred border guards, migrants, aid workers, policy experts and other relevant groups have been carried out. Based on this material and on the growing scientific literature on irregular migration, the study shows how the daily work at the borders has become not only more security-focused but also more costly for taxpayers. Yet the fight against irregular migration has not succeeded in the way that politicians have often promised. Stronger border patrols, more surveillance and enhanced police cooperation with non-European states have rather created more dangerous routes and entry methods, which in turn has generated larger profits for increasingly professionalised smuggling operations. These negative effects have moreover led to a *strengthening* of the border security model and the development of an entire border industry (or "illegality industry"), which the report explores in depth. Border agencies, the police, the military, defence groups and non-European "partner states" have gradually strengthe-

ned their positions and resource base in the "fight" against migration, creating new security initiatives after each successive border crisis in southern Europe in collaboration with European politicians. In other words, the failure of border controls has led to a larger market for ever more controls.



An example of border costs: budget for Frontex, the EU's border agency
Source: Frontex, 2005–16 (Euro).

An important aspect of this vicious cycle concerns cooperation with non-European countries. In the cases of West and North Africa, which the report explores in detail, security-focused collaborations have worsened rather than improved the situation for migrants, refugees and border communities. Meanwhile, states in the region (such as Libya, Morocco and Mauritania) have used the threat of more migration as a bargaining chip in relations with the EU and European governments, a process which is now being repeated in the Turkish case.

The report concludes with a number of policy recommendations that take into account the strong political constraints within refugee and border issues in many European countries today, including in Sweden. In the short term, it proposes harm reduction initiatives – including, not least, legal routes as an alternative to the risky, smuggler-facilitated journeys which have developed in the absence of other entry channels. In the longer term, the report proposes concrete steps away from Europe's short-term border security model towards a global, UN-supported model for mobility characterised by pragmatic and positive cooperation among EU member states, countries in the neighbourhood and other regions. This global model or strategy should consider these four interlinked points, which address the destructive aspects and incentives at work within the border security model:

1. A de-escalation of political rhetoric is an important first step in replacing the crisis treatment of migration at the external borders with a more positive and pragmatic alternative. Such a shift – which would involve politicians discussing migration in an evidence-based manner, rather than reinforcing the panic and promising "closed borders" as a simple response to citizens' concerns – must be accompanied by a redistribution of EU resources from border security to initiatives that normalise migration management. Vast reception and detention centres, border fencing and large-scale deportations have contributed
2. Positive collaboration with non-European countries should replace today's security-based cooperation. This is crucial for purely pragmatic reasons, since police raids and violations of human rights in Europe's neighbouring countries have made it more difficult for refugees and migrants to normalise their lives in these countries. Such a shift is also of great strategic and diplomatic importance for EU member states, since reworked cooperation – including the creation of legal migration channels – undermines the incentives which now exist for governments to use the threat of more migration as a means to put pressure on Europe.
3. A normalised treatment of migration must also be created within the EU. Rather than simply persevering with top-down and negatively framed attempts to impose quotas and "share burdens", which has mainly served to create discord among EU countries, financial tools should be used as a positive incentive to get governments, citizens, migrants and refugees to see the value of a common European strategy, not least concerning asylum. A shift away from the security-focused treatment of migration should simultaneously

to more drama at the border, including in border areas within Europe. Funding for creative reception and integration initiatives, for instance as regards the design of smaller-scale accommodation, may help to counteract this negative trend.

take place in Brussels, moving it away from the Directorate-General for Home Affairs to other DGs that can create more positive kinds of cooperation in the area of mobility and migration.

4. If politicians were to take steps in these three directions, the EU and countries in its neighbourhood would be able to generate significant "goodwill" internationally, which in turn would contribute to the creation of a genuinely global mobility strategy. This kind of strategy, within a UN framework, should be focused on creating joint responsibility for refugees, moving away from today's default position of undue responsibility taken by countries in physical proximity to conflict zones. It should also take heed of mixed migration flows which are not covered by the Refugee Convention, not least with regard the great need for protection of the migrants who have been subjected to reprisals and repression in conflict-torn Libya.

To motivate the long-term and difficult process of moving towards another model for mobility, it is necessary to have a better understanding of and insight into the humanitarian, economic, political and social costs of the current border security model. Deaths have risen markedly in recent years, and the study also shows other negative effects of the fight against irregular migration. Similarly to the "war on drugs", which has recently been debated and criticised in the context of the UN meeting of April 2016, the fight against irregular migration has created large costs. Besides investment in manpower, security technology and cooperation with third countries, the border security model has also generated large indirect costs (externalities) arising from the controls-induced and largely avoidable chaos in border areas. For this reason, the report calls for more research and public debate on expenditure and externalities; more transparency from EU member states concerning investment and spending; as well as an independent evaluation of how much the counterproductive border security model actually costs.



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