



EMN INFORM

Practical Measures to Reduce Irregular Migration¹

1. Aims

The EMN Study on *Practical Measures to Reduce Irregular Migration* provides an overview of existing approaches, mechanisms and measures to reduce irregular migration to the EU and Norway. It is structured according to measures taken prior to a migrant's entry in the EU (pre-entry); on entry (i.e. at the border), during stay (i.e. to reduce overstay and irregular employment) and in providing pathways out of irregularity.

The Study identifies practical measures that have proved effective and proportionate in addressing the issue of irregular migration within the overall EU migration policy framework and thus serves to inform policymakers' understanding of possible ways forward in reducing irregular migration. Statistics on irregular migration populations can demonstrate the effectiveness of policies and practices and give some indication of the scale and scope of the issue.

2. Key findings

- Reducing irregular migration is a policy priority of the EU and its Member States, as well as for Norway. The EU recently outlined its strategic priorities for reducing irregular migration in a Strategy Paper and almost all (Member) States have introduced changes to legislation and/or policy to reduce irregularity in recent years.
- A common EU approach is a major influence driving the implementation of Member State measures to reduce irregular migration. Indeed many of the key measures highlighted in this study involve cooperation between EU Member States and Norway.
- Complementing the EU joint approaches, (Member) States' policies also respond to their specific national needs. The different regions of the EU have different experiences of irregular migration. Those at the EU's external borders have greater numbers of irregular entrants, whereas other (Member) States have a greater problem with overstay and misuse of legal routes into the EU. Practical measures are thus responsive and measured, targeting specific actions with specific objectives.
- Measures necessarily take into account that third-country nationals enter into an irregular situation for a range of reasons, and hence cannot be conveniently brought together into one group towards which one policy can be targeted. It is therefore essential that policy and practice are effectively targeted to address the wide range of individual circumstances that may result in an irregular situation.
- Overall, statistics suggest that irregular migration is in decline in many (Member) States; although in some it has risen or stayed the same.

¹ This Synthesis Report of the study, along with the National Contributions from 22 Member States (**Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom**) and Norway is available from www.emn.europa.eu under "EMN Studies".

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- Different (Member) States continue to experience different migratory pressures, with Southern EU Member States consistently receiving high levels of irregular migrants and recent major inflows of irregular migrants. The rising volume of "mixed migration" flows² and the situation in some third countries (including political unrest and economic recession) may represent future challenges to addressing irregular migration to the EU.

3. Overall Findings

Some Member States have estimated the number of irregular migrants present; however they employ a range of methods, which makes it difficult to compare the results.

At least two Member States updated previously published estimates and found that the stock of irregular migrants has decreased in recent years. Others have also shown a decline, although studies in at least one Member State showed that numbers grew from 2007 to 2010. It is impossible, however, to produce accurate estimates of irregular migration, since the hidden character of irregular migration makes any quantification difficult and estimates will always be based on a variety of different methodologies which produce results of varying quality and comparability.

(Member) States highlight the importance of taking a proactive or preventative approach to tackling irregular migration prior to the migrant's arrival.

Member States highlighted that the provision of information on the legal requirements for entry – e.g. through national or EU-level websites (e.g. the [EU Immigration Portal](#)) – help prevent third-country nationals from migrating irregularly due to a lack of understanding of the *legal* requirements for entry. Information campaigns on the risks of migrating irregularly also prove effective when they have specific goals and target particular 'at-risk' groups (e.g. unaccompanied minors) as part of a wider strategy of prevention. Repeated campaigns may also be more effective.

All (Member) States report that an effective visa management system is a key preventative measure in reducing irregular migration. Consular representatives issuing visas can detect potential irregular migrants before they leave and detect false documents and fraudulent claims to migration (e.g. false declarations of marriage or of parenthood). They, as well as Immigration Liaisons Officers, have an essential communicative role in reporting back to Member State authorities to inform risk management and planning processes.

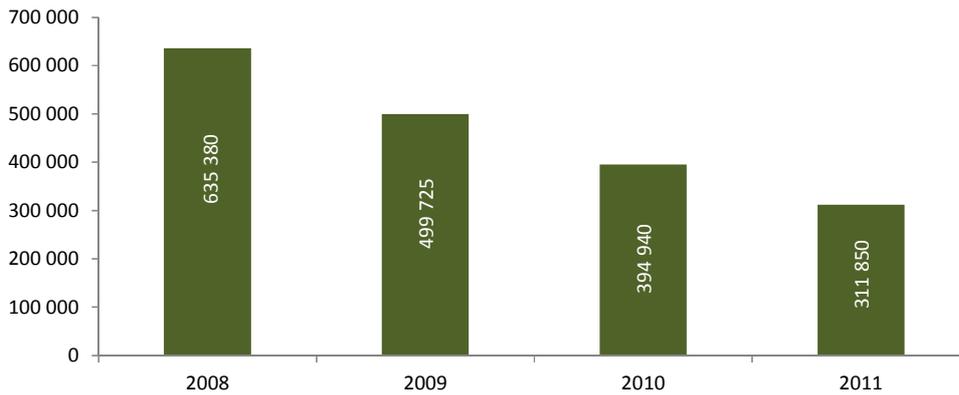
Cooperation with carriers (airlines and shipping companies) and training of their staff has also proven particularly effective in preventing irregular migration. In addition to carrier sanctions (provided for under Council Directive 2004/82/EC) some Member States have introduced incentive schemes and fostered a closer working relationship in order to encourage compliance.

Ongoing analysis of migration routes and other intelligence gathering to inform risk assessments are important measures for forward planning of practice at the border and planning of long-term policy in light of any trends or upcoming risks. The Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN) is highly important in this regard.

The number of refusals at the border has decreased year-on-year from 2008 to 2011 due in part to effective practices at the border.

As shown in [Figure 1](#) below, the number of refusals at the border halved from 635 380 in 2008 to 311 850 in 2011. This overall decline was in spite of a rise in refusals at the Eastern Mediterranean border in Greece 2010 to 2011.

² Understood to refer to migratory flows consisting of *inter alia* economic migrants, asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, trafficked and smuggled persons.

Figure 1: Refusals at the border (Member States and Norway total)

Source: Eurostat

Border measures include the checking of advanced passenger information and visa applications against EU databases (e.g. [SIS](#), [VIS](#) and [EURODAC](#)). Use of the SIS is evidenced by a growth in number of refusals due to the issuance of an ‘SIS alert’.

Through the financial support of the External Borders Fund and the technical support of Frontex, Member States have also increased their surveillance of unofficial border crossing points. At the southern EU sea border, patrolling systems have saved lives and contributed to a major reduction (by tenfold) in irregular migrants arriving by sea. Along the eastern land border, surveillance has contributed to a decline in irregular migration flows from Ukraine.

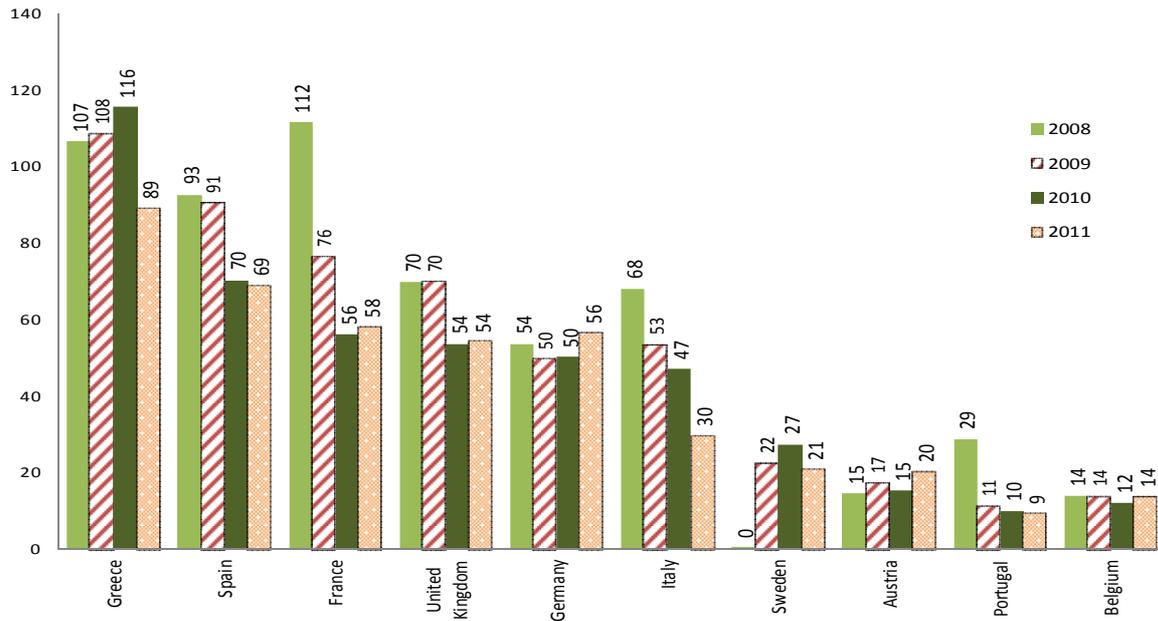
To support the detection of fraudulent documents at the border, Member States make use of shared resources and networked information, such as the Interpol database of false documents, the [FADO image-archiving system](#) and [FRAN](#). Some Member States have undertaken special investigations to detect and prevent the production of false documents – especially where linked to organised crime.

Cooperation at the internal borders between Member States and at external borders with neighbouring third countries also ensure that irregular migration is reduced not only on the EU side, but at the country of origin also.

To reduce irregular migration during stay, most practical measures are focused on better tackling abuse of legal migration channels including preventing irregular work.

Some (Member) States carry out ad-hoc checks (e.g. of hotels, transport links and other travel hubs) to identify irregular migrants. Statistics on apprehensions (third-country nationals found to be irregularly present) show there has been a notable decline throughout the EU. In the Southern Mediterranean, the number of apprehensions decreased overall between 2010 and 2011; indeed the numbers decreased in some (Member) States by 23 % and 36 % (see [Figure 2](#) overleaf). Member States cite EU enlargement as one reason for the decrease in apprehensions. Other Member States consider that it is due to more effective measures – e.g. improved training of the state border guards and other relevant authorities.

Many more Member States carry out inspections of workplaces. In some, inspections that target particular sectors on the basis of intelligence and analysis, have proven particularly effective. However, ad-hoc checks and inspections may be costly in terms of time and staff resources and, unless these are targeted, do not always lead to many successful identifications. In addition, ad-hoc checks may sometimes infringe on the fundamental rights of migrants.

Figure 2: Apprehensions, ‘top-ten’ Member States, in 1 000s

Source: Eurostat

Note: Figures given in 1,000s. Figure for Sweden in 2008 is below 1000 (440) and is therefore represented as a 0 in the graph above.

(Member) States have also invested in measures to prevent misuse of legal routes, e.g. to detect and investigate marriages of convenience and to prevent misuse of the ‘student route’. Others have created alternative opportunities for legal residence for migrants who risk becoming irregular.

The swift and sustainable return of irregular migrants is a priority for all Member States. However, return is often problematic and cannot take place.

Return cannot take place, for example, if the third-country national is particularly vulnerable or there are difficulties in organising a return flight. Authorities in the countries of return may also refuse to accept the returnee or to issue necessary documentation. In these cases, Member States value Readmission Agreements as important instruments. However, many (Member) States have tended to focus on bilateral readmission agreements over EU ones, and many have not yet established protocols for the implementation of EU readmission agreements.

Several Member States report that the Return Fund has helped improve the overall quality of returns. It has funded assisted voluntary return (AVR) schemes in a number of Member States and covers the costs of charter flights in others. In some, it has been used to train border authorities in the treatment of returnees and in others it has been used to fund projects encouraging cooperation with countries of return and follow-up activities with returnees in the country of origin.

Following transposition of Directive 2008/115/EC (“Return Directive”), several Member States introduced new concepts and measures (e.g. “return decision” and “entry ban”) and have made improvements to provisions concerning the fundamental rights of returnees. In addition, it has led to the strengthening of AVR, by improving conditions for AVR in some Member States and introducing it as a concept in others.

4. Further Information

Should you have specific questions or require further details, please contact the EMN via HOME-EMN@ec.europa.eu.

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