



POLICY BRIEF

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Transit, migration and politics: Trends and constructions on the fringes of Europe

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Summary This policy brief is the culmination of papers presented at the IMISCOE conference (Irregular) Transit Migration in the European Space, which took place 18-20 April 2008 at Koç University, Istanbul (for more information on this workshop see bottom of p. 8).

The concept of transit migration is dynamic and loaded

Transit migration has become political code for unwanted

Learning what transit migration really is can help policymakers

Policy recommendations:

Differentiate between mixed flows of migrants

Highlighted are the following points about transit migration:

- The concept is dynamic and for this reason can pose problems when creating policies to deal with transit migration.
- Politically loaded agendas and competing ideologies blur the concept further.
- There is public discomfort with mobile people and/or populations, particularly those in search of a viable new home.
- Journeys and trajectories considered unconventional tend to make the public uneasy.
- The very term 'transit migration' has become a political code for unwanted, often irregular immigration into and/or within the EU.
- Besides irregular migration, many other forms of migration characterised by circuitous movement fall under the rubric of transit migration.
- This includes: transit, transit migration, temporary immigration, forced stay, on-migration, continuous trajectories, as well as a certain level of mental unrest as the common denominator to the various movements.
- In order to better understand transit migration and the possible negative effects of its current use, the concept must be teased apart from normative beliefs about what migration is or should be.
- Learning what transit migration is – and what it is not – can help policymakers refine migration measures.
- Better policies could alleviate the stigmatisation of migrants and transit countries.

This policy brief makes the following recommendations:

- To differentiate between mixed flows of migrants – refugees, labourers, family reunification candidates – and accordingly apply adequate policies to each separate flow.

Address lack of protection

- To address the lack of protection for migrants and refugees on the move.
- To more generously resettle migrants and refugees to safe countries, especially if they belong to vulnerable groups (e.g. minors, single mothers, families) and are unsafe in the country of their present stay.
- To reconsider policies that drive migrants and refugees to pursue hazardous paths.

Minimise policies' negative effects

- To introduce mechanisms that enable refugees to reach a safe country.
- To consider the problematic consequences of policies addressing transit migration and, in this light, to minimise policies' negative effects on transit countries (e.g. burden-sharing, shifts in internal balances of power, reinforcing anti-immigrants sentiments).

Support non-EU countries as new destination countries

- To urge non-EU countries to acknowledge that they, too, are destination countries for migrants and refugees; as such, they should implement according international laws and introduce adequate national legislation and provisions.
- To urge traditional immigration countries to support, if not encourage, new destination countries to implement adequate legal frameworks.

The term transit migration is used for various forms of migration

Defining transit migration Transit migration is a synthetic concept that merges transit and migration. The concept is as dynamic as it is scientifically blurred, being both ideologically and politically loaded. Frequently, transit migration gets conflated with irregular and circular migration as well as shuttle migration and refugee-seeking. The term as it will be used in this policy brief refers to certain forms of supposedly temporary immigration and to migrants who keep moving from country to country, either because it was intended from the outset or in response to changing conditions, rising pressures or new incentives. More generally, the term also refers to both real and imagined long journeys and complex odysseys. Often they are long in terms of distance and time, can continually change direction and, at times, may be hazardous.

It is an umbrella term as well as a political code for unwanted immigration to the EU

On the one hand, transit migration is an umbrella term. It covers very different categories, such as refugees and labour migrants, though is generally applied to mixed flows, regular and/or irregular migration and temporary immigration. The concept refers to types of migration that are not straight-line one-off moves, but involve various stages including forced interruptions of journeys, on-migration after a longer stay in a country other than the final destination and separate trajectories. Sometimes, transit migration more abstractly refers to identity processes and related ambitions (or mere dreams) of aliens who wish to move to an EU country without ever making practical efforts. On the other hand, the term has become a political code for unwanted, often irregular immigration to the EU. Notably, the EU holds nations labelled 'transit countries' responsible for unwanted migration from

poor distant countries. As such, ‘transit migration’ resembles a war cry being directed at those neighbouring countries of the EU that are expected to keep undesired migration off EU territory.

Transit migration emerges from various sets of circumstances

Diverse realities of transit migration: mixed flows Transit migrants and refugees emerge from various sets of circumstances. They can originate from the neighbouring regions of their destination country or from distant lands. In some cases when migrants find that they cannot obtain a visa, a certain proportion turns to irregular strategies and/or informal agents. Those who come from distant countries experience long journeys that might involve crossing intervening countries. For instance, a Nigerian migrant may first fly to a Northern African country that borders the EU. Once landed, he may then try to cross the border illegally via boat, on foot or by hiding in a container. In other cases, a refugee may not have the financial resources to book a travel package entailing a flight and a visa; she may therefore turn to cheaper means of transportation (e.g. lorries, coaches, trains) and have to rely on all-land routes instead. Some migrants have to work while on the go so as to finance their next leg. Visa regimes and class aspects thus determine modes of migration and the occurrence of transit migration.

Transit migrants move in many different ways

Transit migrants move in many different ways. Many follow traditional migration routes, some of which are considered ancient such as those across the Sahara. They often move within established migration systems, for example, those of the Russian-speaking countries. Transit migration can overlap with emigration and circular migration from the transit country. As observed on the Iberian peninsula, Ukrainian migrants in Portugal sometimes move jointly with national labour migrants to new destination countries: notably Spain. And in Poland, Ukrainian migrants are observed who join flows of Polish workers to the UK. Migrants often move within certain networks, often ethnically defined, and research suggests that inter-connected transnational communities across various countries provide safe corridors through which people cross countries and borders. Irregular agents, also dubbed as smugglers, can either assist migrants for short, difficult sections of a journey (e.g. across an individual border) or they can prepare the whole journey, determining routes and budgeting stopover lengths in interim countries. Migrants can also get ‘stranded’ in non-EU countries because they have run out of money, failed to cross a certain border, or because they are abandoned by their smuggler. Various aspects of such journeys can be regular or irregular. Usually, some leg – whether the exit from country of origin, the entry into, stay in or exit from a transit country, or the entry into an EU country – will be regular while other legs will prove otherwise.

Many follow traditional migration routes, move within established migration systems and certain networks

Various aspects of a journey can be regular or irregular

A different case is represented by migrants and refugees who intend – or are even prepared – to remain in a certain country, yet find that

Migrants can be compelled to move to other countries due to economic circumstances

legal conditions make their refugee status unobtainable or that socio-economic conditions are hostile. In such instances, they may try their luck in yet another country, as has been seen in Turkey and Ukraine. Sometimes immigrants in non-EU countries are faced with the deterioration of economic conditions and/or political climate. This often compels them to move to other countries, as was observed during the collapse of socialism in Balkan countries and, more recently, in response to deteriorating conditions of Sudanese and Somali refugees in Egypt. In another scenario, there are migrants who plan to merely transit a country (e.g. Malta), yet get apprehended and find their journeys forcefully interrupted if not terminated. Others get trapped by dead-end-roads, for instance, in Cyprus where onward journeys to Greece are basically blocked. Finally, certain EU regulations, notably the Dublin II Convention, result in refugees being returned from a present host country to the first EU country of arrival. Under such circumstances, it is likely for such individuals to repeat efforts to reach their choice country. It's no wonder, thus, that refugees are effectively kept on the move.

Migrants can find their journey forcefully interrupted

EU regulations can keep migrants on the move

Time, intention, law and identity frame transit migration

Four dimensions frame transit migration: time, intention, law and identity. The amount of time spent somewhere between departure from origin and final destination can last from just a few days to several years. This makes it difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between temporary and permanent migration. On-migration may be either intended or forced; sojourns in other en route countries may be planned or forced.

Transit migration implies uncertainty, impermanence and continuous mobility

From these diverse realities it can be concluded that transit migration is an umbrella concept. Under it come various phenomena such as: transit, transit migration, temporary immigration, forced stay, on-migration, continuous trajectories as well as a certain level mental unrest. In general, transit migration thus implies a state of uncertainty, impermanence and continuous mobility.

Transit zones: Saharan Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe

The geography of transit migration: zones and hubs

Contemporary transit migration corresponds with certain transit zones. The more notable are found in Saharan Africa, the Middle East and some Newly Independent Countries (NIC) in Eastern Europe. Four quadrants of transit migration can be identified: the Eastern quadrant (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan), the South-East European quadrant (Turkey, Cyprus, the Balkans), the Central Mediterranean quadrant (Mali, Libya, Tunisia, Malta) and the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic quadrant (Morocco, Algeria, Mauretania). Once inside the EU, migrants often keep on travelling. Evidence shows that migrants and refugees transit almost all EU countries e.g. from Greece to Italy, from Italy to Switzerland, from Hungary to France, from Austria to Portugal, from Spain to France or Germany and from France to the UK.

Categorising countries involved in transit migration	<p>Countries involved in transit migration may be categorised as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● countries of origin; ● countries that serve as stages along the road (e.g. Russia, Yemen, Mauretania, Senegal, Mali); ● countries that serve as stepping stones to the EU (e.g. Ukraine, Serbia, Turkey, Libya, Cape Verde, Morocco); ● first- EU countries that is entered (e.g. Slovakia, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Spain); ● EU countries that are passed <i>en route</i> (e.g. Austria, Germany, France); and ● final destination countries in the EU, North America or elsewhere.
Countries can change status; from transit to destination	<p>This, however, is not a rigid typology. Given the dynamic nature of migration patterns (especially when irregular), a country can serve simultaneously as an EU entry point for some migrants and a final destination for others. Furthermore, the status of such countries can evolve, for example, when transit countries such as Italy or Spain become destination countries. Likewise, notions of ‘final destination’ may well change over a migrant’s journeys and/or post-settlement experiences. A country initially considered to be a place of temporary stay may become a country of settlement, and vice versa. The perceptions and intentions of migrants themselves are thus fluid.</p>
Certain hubs act as significant cross-roads	<p>In the geography of transit migration in and around the EU, certain hubs seem to act as significant crossroads. These include Moscow and St. Petersburg in Russia; Kiev and Uzhgorod in Ukraine; Van, Cesme and Istanbul in Turkey; Tamanghasset in Algeria; and Tangier and Rabat in Morocco. In this regard, certain islands have also come on the radar, notably, the Canaries, Malta and Lesbos. Other particular spaces identified with transit migration include: refugee reception centres (Debrecen in Hungary and Humenne in Slovakia), detention centres (Edirne in Turkey and Pavchino in Ukraine), street markets where migrants and refugees work in order to safe for financing their next leg (Shulavska in Kiev), and ramshackle settlements (Oujda in Morocco and Patras in Greece).</p>
Changing state measures and migrants’ strategies constantly transform transit routes	<p>Ever-changing political environments, intensifying controls and migrants strategies make all such processes subject to constant transformation. Established ports of departure become policed and flows dry out. New opportunities arise and fresh paths are paved. These paths lead to new ports of departure and arrival. A case in point: migrants no longer depart from the Moroccan Mediterranean region, but instead set forth from Mauretania’s and Senegal’s Atlantic coasts. To give another example, in Turkey, migrants have been avoiding the Turkish-Greek land border, seeming to prefer the country’s southern Aegean sea borders. And in Ukraine, the Hungarian border gets increasingly chosen over the Slovakian. Meanwhile, evidence from Central and</p>

Eastern Europe as well as Turkey suggests that irregular transit migration peaked in 2000, but is now decreasing. Data from sub-Saharan Africa shows that only 10-20 per cent of migrants in the region actually transit the Sahara to move north.

The origin of the term 'Transit migration'

The term is often used for unwanted and irregular migration

Transit countries are part of a European policy framework of control

Non-EU countries can be perceived as buffer zones

Human and refugee rights violations of transit migrants

The politics and discourses of transit migration Transit migration, as a concept, has had its own evolution. The term was coined during the 1990s and publicised by certain institutions, notably International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Centre for Migration Policy Research (ICMPD), the Council of Europe and various UN agencies. References to transit migration have often taken the form of exaggerated, even alarmist reports referring to 'waves', 'masses' or 'millions' of migrants heading North and West. In the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which is based on a mutual security agreement, transit migration – particularly of Arab, Iranian and Chechen people – is considered a security problem. Since 2001, it has become associated with terrorism. Finally, non-EU countries sometimes label refugees 'transit migrants' in order to justify their own neglect of such populations, as has been observed in Ukraine, Turkey and Egypt. Occasionally, too, labour migrants who are no longer in-demand are relabelled 'transit migrants' and subsequently removed, as witnessed in Libya.

Countries that are transited by migrants are successively integrated into a wider European policy framework of migration control. Concerns over transit migration inform migration policymaking, some notable measures being the European Neighbourhood Policy, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the Barcelona Process and the Söderköping Process. Readmission agreements between the EU and its neighbouring countries are a direct outcome of such dynamics. This expansion of the EU's policy agenda is sometimes analysed as the internationalisation or externalisation of migration control.

On the other end of the spectrum, non-EU countries are sometimes perceived as 'buffer zones' or 'dumping grounds' for migrants unwelcomed in the EU. Sometimes the burden of migration control is seen as being shifted – rather than shared – among EU and non-EU countries. Some nations subsequently question why they should support migrants or stop them from moving on whose intention is not to stay, but to move on to an EU country.

International organisations frequently note that people labelled 'transit migrants' suffer human and refugee rights violations. This often takes the form of unlawful or violent return (*refoulement*), as observed in Greece, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Morocco. Human rights agencies emphasise that refugees are often found among such flows, and they should not be treated as 'illegal immigrants' without access to refugee status determination procedures. Other NGOs argue that journeying migrants are vulnerable: they rarely have access to public services, a

legal status is unattainable and they fall between the cracks of protection.

Defining a country as a transit country is loaded with political consequences

In the contemporary political geography of migration management, the act of defining a given country as a ‘transit country’ is loaded with political consequences. A nation perceived or, for that matter, self-dubbed as such enters into an implicit understanding with the EU (and all its member states). Such labelling thus facilitates state access to financial and technical aid in support of migration controls. The emphasis on transit migration therefore generates a new strategic environment, which modifies the set of incentives and costs, opportunities and conditionalities shaping political relations among the EU, its member states and neighbouring countries.

Consequences of emphasis on transit flows:

At the same time, the excessive and uncritical emphasis on transit flows entails a number of problematic consequences for countries.

Neglect of economic immigration

a) It may alter established policy priorities of an EU neighbouring country in the field of migration management, downplay or neglect the importance of economic immigration (as in the case of Libya) or emigration (which seems to be the case in Morocco) and have a negative impact on overall domestic migration policies.

Disturbed relations with distant countries

b) It may negatively affect political and/or economic relations with distant (and usually poorer) countries. For example, there is growing pressure on members of the Economic Community Of Western African States (ECOWAS) to further limit freedom of circulation within the alliance and to prevent emigration directed towards the EU.

Internal political unbalances

c) It may have a negative impact on internal political balances and dynamics in non-EU countries. This is because EU funding for migration control is often allocated to security agencies (internal affairs or military ministries), which can negatively affect the degree of internal political stability and pluralism of recipient states.

Conclusions:

Conclusion The concept of transit migration is problematic. On the one hand, it functions as a purposefully introduced political concept and, as such, has developed considerable discursive power. Its evocation indexes a certain level of public discomfort with people and/or populations who are mobile. It also reflects a general unease with journeys and trajectories that are considered unusual. Thus, inevitably informing the discussion are normative beliefs about how migration should be – direct, limited and managed – and how people should migrate – regularly, with a visa and through pre-booked travel packages.

Transit migration is a term influenced by normative beliefs

As a sociological concept, the term covers a complex set of types of migration

On the other hand, transit migration is a sociological concept that aims to cover a specific though complex set of types of migration. A problem lies in the tension between the two applications and its very different purposes. There is danger that the popularity of the concept of transit migration and the scientific blurring this involves will under-

More in-depth research is needed

mine its intended heuristic value. What does remain clear is that there are migrants who travel through various countries and, intentionally or not, stay there for some length of time before reaching a final destination and/or returning to their country of origin. This fact alone calls for more in-depth research of migrant journeys and all the trajectories contained therein.

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Source The IMISCOE conference ‘(Irregular) Transit Migration in the European Space’ took place from 18-20 April 2008 at Koç University, Istanbul. The event united 26 experts from Russian-, French- and English-speaking scientific communities and PhD students from the US, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, France, Italy, Turkey, Libya and Estonia. Participants presented papers on the cases of Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Hungary, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Malta, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Morocco, Spain and Portugal. Topics covered included EU migration, asylum politics, migrant strategies and smuggling, as well as research methods and ethics. Various perspectives were presented, notably from sending countries (Moldova, Senegal), stage posts (Mali, Malta), transit countries (Ukraine, Turkey, Morocco) and receiving countries (Spain, Portugal). To consult individual papers see:

www.compas.ox.ac.uk/events/past_conferences_events.shtml.

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