

Crossing the Mediterranean sea by boat: Mapping and documenting migratory journeys and experiences



Tuesday 16th February 2016

16.00 - 17.30

(followed by a networking reception)

The University of Warwick Brussels Office

Avenue d'Auderghem 22-28
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1040 Brussels

What are the impacts of recent policy developments on migratory journeys and experiences across the Mediterranean?

'Crossing the Mediterranean by Boat: Mapping and Documenting Migratory Journeys and Experiences' is a research project that assesses the impact of policy on those that it affects most directly: refugees and migrants themselves.

The **University of Warwick** would like to invite you to a discussion organised with the **Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy - ELIAMEP (Greece)** and the **University of Malta** that will present findings from the first phase of our research, carried out across three Mediterranean island arrival points in autumn 2015. We aspire that these findings will serve as a **basis for discussion with EU policymakers and non-governmental organisations regarding recent policy developments**, as well as, **steps that can be taken to improve policy responses over the coming months.**

Agenda:

- **16.05** Welcome by moderator **Mr Richard Tuffs**, Director European Regions Research & Innovation Network
- **16.10** Introduction to research – **Dr Vicki Squire**, Associate Professor of International Security, Associate Editor, Citizenship Studies, Department of Politics and International Studies, The University of Warwick
- **16.20 - Case study: Greece** - **Dr Angeliki Dimitriadi**, Research Fellow at the ELI AMEP, and **Dr Dallal Stevens**, Associate Professor of Law, The University of Warwick
- **16.30 - Case study: Malta** - **Dr Maria Pisani**, Lecturer from the University of Malta, and **Professor Nick Vaughan-Williams**, Head of Department of Politics and International Studies, The University of Warwick
- **16.40 – Case study: Italy** - **Dr Vicki Squire** and **Nina Perkowski**, Researcher, The University of Warwick
- **16.50 till 17.30** – Policy debate with our panellists:
 - **Anne Bathily**, Senior Policy Officer, European Council on Refugees and Exiles
 - **Dr Paolo Cuttitta**, Researcher, Law Faculty (Migration Law), University of Amsterdam
 - **Veronika Bilger**, Senior Research and Programme Manager International Centre for Migration Policy Development

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

- **Replace deterrent border control policies with interventions that address the diverse causes of irregular migration:** Our findings challenge the assumption that restrictive measures such as detention, deportation, and anti-smuggling are effective deterrents of irregular migration, and affirm the need to address diverse migratory causes across source, neighbouring, and transit regions. We therefore propose that deterrent policies are replaced by interventions that improve livelihoods and educational opportunities across source, neighbouring, and transit regions.
- **Revise migration and protection categories to reflect the multiple reasons that people are on the move:** Our findings indicate that current protection mechanisms do not reflect (i) the diverse forms of violence and conflict that people seek to escape, (ii) the multiplicity of sites that people flee and (iii) the fragmented and fluid journeys involved. We therefore propose that the categories of ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration are rejected in favour of diversified categories that are based on a deeper appreciation of international refugee and human rights law, and are more reflective of reality.
- **Open safe and legal routes for migration, and improve reception conditions and facilities:** Our findings demonstrate that current Search and Rescue mechanisms do not address the vulnerabilities of those migrating across the central and eastern Mediterranean, and that the relationships between those migrating and those facilitating migration are diverse and often ambiguous. We therefore support calls to open safe and legal routes to the EU and to improve reception conditions and facilities at all arrival points across the EU, to ensure that human rights and international protection obligations are met in full.
- **Improve rights-oriented information campaigns across neighbouring, transit and arrival regions:** Our findings indicate that the level of knowledge about migratory routes differs widely across different arrival sites. Regardless of this, new arrivals have little understanding and information on procedural processes and reception conditions either before or after entering the EU. We therefore propose the development of rights-oriented information campaigns that mobilise social networks in order to offer clear and accurate information on admission and asylum processes across neighbouring, transit and arrival regions.

Project Overview

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Current policy interventions urgently need assessing in light of unprecedented levels of migration and a catastrophic increase in deaths across the Mediterranean. While refugee and migrant deaths *en route* to the European Union are by no means new, the level and intensity of recent tragedies is unprecedented. Over 3700 people were believed to have drowned in the Mediterranean during 2015.¹ Alongside these tragic developments, increasing levels of migration along the Balkan route have been met by border closures within the EU, with growing tensions exacerbating humanitarian challenges across the wider region. EU Member States have struggled to adopt a unified approach to handling the issue. It is in this context that the European Agenda on Migration, proposed in 2015, needs to be assessed. How effective are the policies associated with this Agenda at addressing contemporary migratory dynamics? To what extent are such policies able to address the humanitarian challenges that the recent ‘crisis’ involves? And how might policies be developed most effectively in order to address the tensions and tragedies that characterize the current situation?

PROJECT FOCUS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat seeks to address these questions by assessing the impact of policy interventions on those that they affect most directly: refugees and migrants themselves. It produces a timely and robust evidence base as grounds for informing policy interventions. The project asks:

- How do refugees and migrants negotiate their journeys? What understanding do they have of current policies? How do they narrate or express their expectations and experiences of movement and arrival?
- How are routes and methods of travel affected by policy developments? What legal and social challenges arise in the context of current policies? In what ways might policy engage migration more effectively?

The project addresses these questions across different geographical sites and through the lens of different

¹ <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>

migratory routes, and seeks to pay attention to the experiences of diverse groups and individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat undertakes 225 in-depth qualitative interviews with migrants and refugees, in two phases. This briefing paper is based on Phase 1 of research, conducted in late 2015/early 2016, which involves 150 interviews across three island arrival sites: Kos (Greece), Malta, and Sicily (Italy). As arrival points to the EU each of these island sites are diverse, with Sicily relatively established in dealing with new arrivals, with Malta effectively closed as an arrival point for boat arrivals currently, and with Kos experiencing dramatically increased levels of new arrivals over the past year. While there are overlapping migratory dynamics across these three arrival points, each also represents a unique migratory site and is analysed as such to provide a comparative perspective on challenges arising across the Mediterranean region more widely.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ON-GOING RESEARCH

This briefing paper provides an overview of research findings across each of the three sites in Phase 1, and proposes policy suggestions on the basis of the analysis to date. The research findings provide rich insights into migratory journeys and experiences across the three sites, and shed light on policy effects by addressing the knowledge and expectations informing migrant/refugee decision-making. The analysis will be developed in Phase 2 in order both to capture changing migratory dynamics as well as to deepen the understanding of policy effects by exploring their negotiation those migrating in their implementation over time. This briefing will be supplemented by further papers and organised events in November 2016 and again in the spring/summer of 2017.

GREECE – KOS ISLAND

CONTEXT

- The Greek maritime border has been on the receiving end of mixed migratory flows since 2013, mainly due to the closure of the land border with Turkey through the Evros fence. In 2013, 11,447 persons were registered entering the islands, with the number reaching 45,000 in 2014.

- Arrivals peaked in 2015: that summer, Lesbos registered the largest portion of arrivals (445,000) with Kos and Chios having 98,000 arrivals each. In total, 851,316 migrants and refugees entered the EU via Greece in 2015. In particular the number of Syrian arrivals greatly increased in 2014-2015.
- Kos is situated directly opposite Bodrum on the Turkish coast. Geographical proximity is a crucial factor since refugees and migrants are able to cross from Turkey to Greece without the need to be accompanied by smugglers. Departing from the coastline of Turkey, they cross to the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Kos, and Samos in inflatable rafts. The island of Kos has been in the spotlight because of the increase in arrivals and the absence of any organized structure by the municipality to receive the refugees.
- Greece functions as a transit site for the overwhelming majority of arrivals reaching the islands. Absence of reception facilities, infrastructure and preparedness on the Greek side, combined with unwillingness to apply for asylum in Greece or lack of knowledge about the possibility to do so, meant that the majority of refugees sought to continue their journey towards western or northern Europe.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- The first phase of the research took place on the island of Kos from September-November 2015. Interviews were conducted with new arrivals, prior to their departure for Athens. Most interviewees were planning to continue onwards through the Western Balkans to western and northern Europe, while some were still undecided.
- 84% of arrivals in Greece in 2015 came from the world's top ten refugee producing countries, namely Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea. Our interview sample reflects this.
- There were no official reception facilities on Kos; conditions were very poor with all interviewees having to fend for themselves, use their own resources and rely on minimal assistance provided by the host population or civil society organisations. Many were sleeping outside in parks and on the streets.

KEY FINDINGS

- Absence of legal means of entry to the EU, especially for asylum seekers, not only pushes people to undertake dangerous crossings but, perhaps more crucially, facilitates rather than combats smuggling. Many interviewees

agreed that anti-smuggling operations would be a positive step, but only if in parallel the EU provided legal channels for migration and asylum.

- In the choice to travel, the route of travel, and the destination, interviewees filtered diverse forms of information. Though presence of friends and/or family influences the choice of destination, the likelihood of an asylum claim being accepted is also crucial. Some knowledge of a country's attitudes towards refugees or migrants was influential as were fears that borders might close/were closing further along the route.
- Despite the large number of NGOs and volunteers on the ground, there was limited presence from international organisations (UNHCR, IOM) and the Greek Asylum Service. Interviewees' primary source of information on registration procedures and onward travel to Athens were fellow travellers, whereas official information by the police, international organisations, or NGOs was virtually non-existent. There was no coordinated process for either the management of the NGOs operating on the ground or for accessing information on asylum in Greece. There is also no asylum processing centre in the islands, forcing people to either reach Athens to apply for asylum or the island of Rhodes.
- Syrians were prioritized on arrival to receive registration papers that would enable them to reach Athens. In contrast, the registrations of sub-Saharan Africans, North Africans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and, to a lesser extent, Afghans, often took longer.
- Social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, but also free communication applications, such as Viber and WhatsApp, have played a unique role in this migration, enabling the instantaneous communication while *en route*, with information being passed rapidly about routes, border controls, reception conditions and asylum processing.

MALTA

CONTEXT

- An island of 316,000 square kilometers and population of 423,000, Malta is the most southerly EU Member State. Since 2002, more than 19,000 migrants and refugees have arrived 'irregularly' by boat across the Mediterranean Sea (UNHCR 2015).

- In the context of events in 2015, however, the Maltese case is anomalous: according to the UNHCR (2015) 105 refugees and migrants arrived 'irregularly' by boat in Malta in the period up to 21 December.
- Malta applied a form of mandatory detention up to 18 months if international protection is rejected. Criticism of this policy is well documented. In December 2015 the government published a new Migration Strategy reducing detention to 9 months.
- Despite the Dublin Convention, UNHCR estimates that since 2002 fewer than 30% of the total boat arrivals remain in Malta. Over 2,800 have been resettled to the United States or other EU Member States, while others chose to leave Malta on their own initiative either irregularly or after obtaining travel documents.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- Given the uniqueness of the Maltese case in terms of the sample frame, our strategy was to focus initially on 'irregular' boat arrivals to the island within the last 18 months (i.e. since 2014) and then to extend as far back as 10 years.
- The Maltese context illustrates the dynamic nature of migratory routes and the dangers of seeing the 2015 Mediterranean crisis as a homogeneous event across diverse sites.

KEY FINDINGS

- Research participants felt forced to leave their country of origin even if their intention was not always to reach Europe. Many recounted stories of corruption, violence, and war.
- Smuggling networks are complex and heterogeneous involving organised groups and informal contacts.
- Italy was the intended destination as a transit point to reach other European Member States. Rather than a particular destination, what mattered most was finding peace, security, and the conditions for a better life. The general expectation is that Human Rights will be protected in Europe, however, the majority of participants state that Europe has not met these expectations.
- We found a general lack of awareness of EU policies. Some interviewees indicated an awareness of search and rescue, but did not expect to be rescued. They were also unaware of the extent of deaths in the Mediterranean region prior to embarking.

- Duration in detention seems to have decreased over time, and access to information has improved – however, the majority did not understand the asylum process.
- Some interviewees who have international protection have been stuck in Malta as a result of the Dublin Convention for up to a decade. Rejected asylum seekers are effectively stranded in Malta with return not being an option and access to rights very limited.

SICILY

CONTEXT

- Italy is a long-standing arrival-point for migration to the EU, and serves both as a state of transit and settlement. Arrival figures have increased during the past few years, with a record of 170,100 in 2014, and 153,842 in 2015. Sicily is the main arrival point in Italy, receiving 71% in total during 2014 and 68% during 2015.
- In 2015, 138,422 of those arriving in Italy left from Libya, 11,142 from Egypt, 2,471 from Turkey, 940 from Greece, and 549 from Tunisia. A total of 12,360 unaccompanied minors arrived in Italy via boat in 2015.
- Italy has pursued a multilateral approach to migration governance since the 1990s. This involves cooperation with Tunisia (1998), Morocco (1998), Algeria (1999), Egypt (2007), as well as operational cooperation with Libya throughout the 2000s. Unrest in Libya in 2011 partially destabilized these relations.
- Highly publicised tragedies of migrant deaths at sea led to the Italian humanitarian-military operation *Mare Nostrum* in 2013, which involved search and rescue (SAR) operations beyond the Italian SAR zone. The EU Frontex Joint Operation Triton replaced *Mare Nostrum* in November 2014.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- Our research strategy involved an initial focus on arrivals post-*Mare Nostrum*, and was then extended to include arrivals during and pre-*Mare Nostrum*, focused on the years 2013-2014. Most interviewees were housed in formal reception centres of various kinds, with a minority finding themselves in an informal reception situation. Interviewees were between 16 and 43 years old, and included women as well as unaccompanied minors.
- In 2014, more than 42,000 Syrians arrived in Italy, but less than 500 applied for asylum in the country. Similarly, more than 34,000 Eritreans arrived in Italy in 2014, while less than 500

applied for asylum. By contrast, close to 100% of other nationalities apply for asylum in Italy, thereby entering the complex reception system. This is reflected in our interview sample.

KEY FINDINGS

- Those who arrive in Italy have left their countries of origin for a variety of reasons. Many point to conflict or persecution as the main cause of migration, with a sizeable minority emphasising personal or familial problems that posed a risk to their safety.
- The majority of interviewees were not informed about European policies and did not have explicit expectations about what to expect. Indeed, only a minority initially intended to come to Italy or Europe, with a significant proportion experiencing more fluid and fragmented journeys in search of peace and work. Several fled specifically conditions in Libya, having initially intended to stay there. Many of those travelling through Libya pointed to the closure of return routes and the violence faced by those seeking to evade the boat crossing.
- Relationships between those migrating and those facilitating migration are highly ambiguous across our sample, with a minority paying fees directly to enter the EU. A significant proportion of our interviewees were forced onto a boat to Italy, while some also reported being helped onto the boat without having any knowledge about where they were going.

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator



Dr Vicki Squire (Warwick) is Associate Professor of International Security at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick. She is author of *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum* (2009), *The Contested Politics of*

Mobility (2011), and *Post/Humanitarian Border Politics Between Mexico and the US: People, Places, Things* (2015). Dr Squire is currently Leverhulme Research Fellow on the project *Human Dignity and Biophysical Violence: Migrant Deaths across the Mediterranean Sea*, as well as PI on *Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat*.

Co-Investigators



Dr Dallal Stevens (Warwick) is Associate Professor of Law (Reader) at the University of Warwick. Her expertise is in the fields of refugee and asylum law, on which she has researched and taught for many years. Dallal has written widely on asylum law and policy in the UK, EU and Middle

East. Much of her work has revolved around the construction of the asylum seeker within a contemporary perspective, although she has also examined the plight of the refugee in a historical context. Dallal is regularly asked to undertake media and other public engagements on refugee and asylum issues.



Dr Nick Vaughan-Williams (Warwick) is Professor of International Security and Head of the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. In 2015 he was awarded the Philip Leverhulme Prize for outstanding research in Politics and

International Relations. His research, supported with grants from the British Academy, ESRC, and Leverhulme Trust, focuses on the relationship between sovereignty, subjectivity, and the spatial dimensions of security. He has published nine books as either author, co-author, or co-editor in the field of International Security and Border Studies. His latest single-authored monograph is *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond* (2015). His earlier book, *Border Politics: The Limits of Sovereign Power* (2009, 2012) was Gold Winner of the Association for Borderlands Studies Book Award.



Dr Angeliki Dimitriadi (Athens) is Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and currently a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin. Her research focuses on irregular and transit migration, securitisation of

migration and EU policies on migration and asylum. She was awarded with distinction her Ph.D. in Social Administration from Democritus University of Thrace (2009-2012), focusing on irregular transit migration to Greece. She has published in academic journals, participated in numerous research projects on migration and asylum and authored a monograph titled "Transit migration to Greece: the case of Afghans, Bangladeshi and Pakistan migrants". She is currently working on a book examining the governance of irregular migration at the external borders of the Union.



Dr Maria Pisani (Malta) is a Maltese academic, practitioner and activist. She is the co-founder and director of Integra Foundation, Malta. Maria is a lecturer with the Department of Youth and Community Studies, University of Malta. She also coordinates the Centre for

Critical Migration Studies with The Critical Institute. Maria has published extensively in international journals and contributed to edited texts. She is an Editorial Board Member on the International Journal Disability and the Global South and the Journal of International Humanitarian Action. Maria combines this work with her interest in critical pedagogy and engaging praxis as a project of social transformation towards social justice.

Researcher



Nina Perkowski (Warwick) joined Warwick University's Department of Politics and International Studies in November 2015 to work on the *Crossing the Mediterranean by Boat* project. Meanwhile, she is in the final stages of completing her PhD in

Politics at Edinburgh University. Her research interests revolve around analyses of and reflections on migration governance and the effects of border policies and practices. In her doctoral work, she explores the relationships between humanitarianism, human rights, and security in contemporary EU border governance, with a focus on Frontex. She tweets at @ninaperkowski.

PANELLISTS

MODERATOR



Anne Bathily is senior policy officer at The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE). She leads and develops ECRE's work and policy on integration, with aspects such as family reunification, access to the labour market, education, and social inclusion. She developed a pan-

European informal network of refugee communities in order to actively involve them in ECRE and in EU political debates. She co-produced the first ECRE documentary *How Much Further*, and co-founded a Belgian national platform of migrant-led organisations (Share). Aside from her ECRE work, she studied the long-term impact of immigration detention, and together with Dawit Friew (Ethiopian refugee) she is a guest lecturer at Kent University on international protection.



Richard Tuffs has been working in the regional dimension of European policy in cohesion and research for many years and worked for the Kent and the West Midlands offices in Brussels before joining ERRIN. He has been involved in numerous EU projects and is also a member of

the Smart Specialisation Mirror Group established by the European Commission. Richard has a degree in geography and social sciences and master's degrees in town planning, applied linguistics and business administration. His career spans town planning language and management training, university lecturing and research and education administration.



Veronika Bilger is a senior research and programme manager of ICMPD's [Research Unit](#). She has coordinated and worked in numerous comparative projects in the area of migration and migration policy. She has authored/co-authored various publications among others on

irregular migration, migrant smuggling, human trafficking, and methodological and ethical aspects of research involving vulnerable migrants. She has lectured at the University of Vienna for many years and has also provided trainings to civil servants, law enforcement and other professional groups. She is a Member of the European IMISCOE Network and Editorial Board Member of the *Vienna Journal of African Studies*.



Dr Paolo Cuttitta is a post-doc researcher at VU University Amsterdam, Faculty of Law. He has published extensively on migration management and borders (with a particular focus on the Italian-North African border), and, more specifically, on the following issues:

transformations of territorial and non-territorial borders, Euro-African relations, humanitarianism, integration, racism. His book publications include *Segnali di confine. Il controllo dell'immigrazione nel mondo-frontiera* (2007) and *Lo spettacolo del confine. Lampedusa tra produzione e messa in scena della frontiera* (2012). He is a member of Escapes. Laboratorio di studi critici sulle migrazioni forzate and of Kritnet. Netzwerk für kritische Migrations- und Grenzregimeforschung.