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Security challenges and the composition of irregular resident
populations in Europe: overestimating the young men?

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Database on Irregular Migration (<http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net>)

This website aims at increasing transparency in the field of irregular migration. The database provides an inventory and a critical appraisal of data and estimates in the European Union. Quantitative information is accompanied by substantial background materials, both on issues of general concern and on the situation in individual countries.

The database was created in the context of "CLANDESTINO: Counting the uncountable – data and trends across Europe", a project funded by the European Commission, DG Research, Sixth Framework Programme (2007-2009) (<http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/>). The Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI) hosts the database and aims at expanding and updating it in the coming years.

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Table of content

1	Introduction.....	4
2	Estimating subgroups of the irregular foreign population.....	7
2.1	Theoretical considerations	7
2.2	Methods and data	9
3	Demographic characteristics of the irregular foreign population in Europe.....	14
3.1	Gender	14
3.2	Age.....	16
4	Final remarks.....	18
5	References	19

1 Introduction¹

Irregular migration is perceived as a threat to the European Union, and security concerns are almost automatically attributed to it. Unauthorized migrants are often perceived as criminals, violating not only immigration rules but disrespecting laws in general; irregularly working migrants are perceived as a menace to the labour markets taking jobs away from the native and the regular migrant population; asylum seekers and undocumented migrants are perceived as illegitimate users of the welfare system, living in publicly financed shelters and using services such as emergency health care while working in the shadow economy.

Researchers argue that the association between irregular migration and security is slackened during economic upturns (Schroever et al. 2008: 25). Accordingly, the recent economic downturn may create a prerequisite for an intensification of the discussion on irregular migration from a security perspective. The economic downturn will probably promote the image of young migrants willing to work in Europe under any conditions and traffickers channelling them into illegal work. It is difficult to assess the impact of the economic downturn on the scope of irregular migration. There are some attempts to project implications for male and female irregular migrants taking employment opportunities into consideration: Men employed in the construction sector are supposed to be more affected than women employed in private households where a structural demand for work force exists (International Organization for Migration 2009: 2; Frontex 2009: 25). This is one example for the need for a more gender-oriented approach in dealing with irregular migration.

Generally, irregular migration is embedded in a political debate largely structured in a bipolar manner (Bommes 2010: 157). From a humanitarian point of view, the severe life situation of irregular migrants has drawn much attention. Activists combine it with the call for guaranteeing them basic human rights. From a security point of view, irregular migration poses a challenge to the nation state, and all measures including the effective provision of human rights are regarded with respect to their effect on combating the phenomenon. This bipolarity does not seem to apply to all subgroups of irregular migrants in the same manner. Women are often perceived as 'violated innocents' whom the state offers protection while men are considered 'illegal immigrants' who the state mostly punishes (Schroever et al. 2008: 11). Thus, one could claim that the association between irregularity and security is highly gendered (Chock 1991 cited in Schroever et al. 2008: 25). Likewise, age particularities may impact on the perception of irregularity and security: the human rights of children and aged people seem to be more recognized than of migrants at working age. For example, both states and NGOs share the vision that children have a right to education irrespective of their residence status. In

¹ This paper was presented at the conference on 'Security, Insecurity and Migration in Europe' at the University of Leicester, 18-19. September 2009.

discussions about access to basic health care for irregular immigrants, the needs of vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, children and aged people are often portrayed.

Against this background, the need for more knowledge on the composition of the irregular migrant population for practical reasons becomes evident. State actors need to plan their expenditures for education, health provision and legal protection for irregular migrants, for implementation of regularization programs and legal changes. For instance, in many German states, school attendance is hampered by the obligation of school directors to report the irregular residence status of a child thus posing the whole family at risk of deportation. During an annual conference on the topic, researchers were encouraged to estimate the number of children living in irregularity in Germany, in order to facilitate political debates and to endorse legal changes². NGOs also need to plan their activities as regards information and service provision to irregular migrants. For scholars, gender and age disaggregated data give a chance for better understanding migrant experiences. Thus, it is worth understanding both challenges linked to individual subgroups and their quantitative relevance within the total irregular migrant population.

In a report prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration, the state of knowledge on both numbers and demographic and socio-economic profiles of irregular migrants is summarized as 'scarce, often unreliable and usually incomparable between states and over time' (Koser 2005: 7). According to the most common notion, the biggest group of illegal residents is 'males between the ages 20 and 30, who are young, mobile and willing to take risks' (European Commission 2004: 11). There is no indication of the source of this assessment. It may be assumed that the Commission's assessment relies on enforcement data as such data disaggregated by age and gender is available for all EU member states. Likewise, for a long time in the US the dominance of the young men had been widely accepted before being questioned in the 1970s (North & Houston 1976: 69).

As a by-product of the work of national authorities, the generation of enforcement statistics is highly influenced by control practices and organizational culture which may also impact on the data suitability for assessing the features of irregular migration. Therefore, one indicator should not be denoted as reliable enough and special attention has to be given to different indicators in order to obtain a more realistic picture of the demographic profile of irregular migrants.

The assessment of hidden population's structures is a difficult task due to the phenomenon's complex nature. It is even more challenging in a large geographic and politically diverging area

² Similarly, in a study about irregular migration in Hamburg, the number of irregular children below 16 years old was estimated (Vogel & Assner 2009: 139). The study triggered discussions at the local level and led to clarification of the legal framework for school access for irregular children. In an official letter of the senator for education to the school directors states that school directors are not obliged to check the residence status of children and to transfer data to the foreigners' authorities.

like the European Union where legal, political and economic developments may impact on the phenomenon. In section 2, theoretical expectations and methodological challenges in assessing the structure of irregular migrant populations are discussed. In Section 3, taking different indicators into account, tentative suggestions about the demographic features of irregular migrants living in the EU by gender and age are provided.

2 Estimating subgroups of the irregular foreign population

2.1 Theoretical considerations

For the purpose of this paper, irregular migrants are defined as irregular foreign residents (IFR) which are third country nationals without any legal residence status, and those whose presence in the territory – if detected – would make them liable to expulsion (Vogel & Kovacheva 2009: 5). A major challenge in measuring hidden populations like irregular migrants is the identification of the persons. In general, irregular migrants avoid contacts with public authorities, NGOs and even researchers – fearing detection by the police and deportation. Furthermore, it is difficult to access the group of migrants without legal residence status in the total population as it is comparably small. But it is even more challenging to access considerably smaller subgroups among them, e.g. children and elderly people. In addition, the visibility of these subgroups seems to be much lower. Elderly people as well as children who are not economically active stay at home and are rarely present in places where they can come in touch with public authorities, NGOs or researchers. Women working in private households are closely linked to their employers but not as publicly visible as men working in open spaces like construction sites.

Along with these difficulties in accessibility of the group, the interest in irregular migration in general varies among the EU member states which may impact on the knowledge about it. In the new EU member states where both immigration and its irregular forms are rather a new phenomenon, insights into the field of irregular migration started only recently and are of general character. In the old member states, there are more quantitative studies in this field which shed light on specific subgroups. On the EU level, there are hardly any attempts to develop more methodologically consistent approaches for reaching reliable assessments of the features of the irregular migrant population. In contrast, there are annual stock estimates and detailed analyses of irregular migrants with regard to age, gender, period of entry, country of birth and region based on a residual method for the United States (Hoefer et al. 2009). However, the residual method used in the US is not applicable for the EU due to the lack of suitable statistics.

In a situation of limited empirical data, theoretical expectations may give an indication about the distribution of gender and age cohorts among the irregular migrant population.

With regard to age distribution, both theoretical and empirical studies indicate working-age migrants as the most relevant group among the irregular migrant population. Migration in general is age-selective. Persons at a young working age are most likely to change their place of residence, particularly if they have no children or their children are still small (Wagner 1989). It is likely that irregular migration is even more age-selective, because it involves more risks, and

younger people are more likely to take risks than older people. This is particularly relevant for illegal entrants which undertake dangerous journeys to the host country. Migration policies provide working-age people with more legal opportunities to migrate (in the course of work programs, family reunification and for education purpose) than children and elderly people (mostly in the course of family reunification). It is assumed that more working-age people than children and elderly people run the risk of overstaying after legal residence. However, the effect on the share of aged people or children cannot be clearly predicted.

The assumption that irregular migrants are generally young goes also back to a great number of studies showing that the vast majority of people migrate for economic reasons. As migrants without regular status are generally excluded from the social system, they need to work in order to secure their existence. If they are not working, they need informal support by friends or relatives. With regard to children and old family members, the living conditions in illegality are assessed as 'very difficult' in some countries and therefore, it is difficult to take care of them (for Hungary, see Futo 2008: 40). In countries with exclusive policies like Germany, parents without a regular status usually leave their children in the country of origin (e.g. Alt 2003: 215-219). The number of children may increase with the openness of the migration policy (Vogel 2009).

In countries with a more liberal regime (Spain and Greece), a higher share of children in the irregular migrant population can be expected due to the access to education regardless of their residence status.

For instance, elderly migrants may join relatives living legally in the host country. In countries with few legal possibilities for family reunification, they arrive with the intention to stay because they need or want to live with their emigrated adult children. There have been indications by NGOs that they serve a small but increasing number of clients aged over 60 years (Vogel & Assner 2009). Theoretically, in countries with more restrictive family reunification policies, a higher share of irregular migrants can be expected.

There are also some theoretical expectations for the gender distribution of irregular migrant populations. One can make two assumptions: labour market opportunities are gendered, and irregular migration depends on labour market opportunities in the shadow economy. If this is the case, one can expect that the share of women and men among irregular migrants depends on their labour market opportunities. The gender dominance in certain economic sectors is linked to different possibilities for employment in these sectors. Thus, the labour market segmentation in individual countries defines differential demand for female and male migrant workers.

- Women are more likely to be employed in cleaning, child care and care for aged and disabled persons, and in the sex industry.

- Men are more likely to be employed in construction and similar jobs in which physical strength is an advantage. In agriculture in Southern Europe, men also dominate.
- Other fields for irregular work (work in restaurants or in small shops) do not seem to be clearly dominated by men or women.

Depending on the size of the shadow economy in these fields, a predominance of men or women can be expected. For instance in the Netherlands, one of the reasons of men's dominance in the irregular migrant population is that apart from cleaning, all the other sectors of the Dutch economy where irregular aliens can be found consist of "heavy" jobs suitable for men (van der Leun & Ilies 2008: 25).

2.2 Methods and data

In the situation of scarce EU data, estimation of demographic characteristics of the irregular migrant populations on a national level is worthwhile. There is a variety of data sources which may provide indications: enforcement data, NGOs data, regularization data, surveys and expert assessments. On the basis of these data sources, the share of different subgroups in the total irregular migrant population could be estimated showing whether male or female migrants prevail within the irregular migrant population and whether the share of children and aged people living in irregularity is substantial.

Being aware that most data sources are considerably biased, Vogel and Kovacheva (2008) argue that they may be used for assessing minimum and maximum shares of specific groups, not in spite of but because of the bias. The logic behind this approach is the following: If one subgroup of the population (e.g. men) is likely to be overrepresented in the data set (e.g. enforcement data), the share of men in the data set has to be considered as maximum share in the population. If a clear direction of the bias can be identified, minimum or maximum estimates can be calculated. However, an estimate indicating, for example, that there are at most 70 per cent men in the irregular resident population is not very instructive, as it can only rule out male shares of more than 70 per cent while any share between 0 and 70 per cent is equally likely. However, if data sources with different biases can be combined to get minimum and maximum estimates, this provides for a more reliable assessment of the share of a specific subgroup (Vogel & Kovacheva 2008). Obtaining compositional estimates based on different indicators may stand for a method that could reduce inaccurate assessments based on just one strongly biased data indicator and produce a more realistic picture of the composition of irregular migration.

The approach of transforming indicative data with unidirectional bias into minimum and maximum estimates has been used in the creation of a database on irregular migration for 12 European countries. In most cases, *only* a minimum or a maximum estimate was possible. This

paper explores and extends the database and elaborates on the consequences for the age and gender composition in Europe³.

Indicative data may stem from various sources: public authorities (enforcement data, regularization data), charity organizations, surveys and expert assessments. As they may only be suitable to a limited extent for assessment of certain demographic features, a sophisticated assessment and good understanding of data collection and data quality is needed.

Police data

Enforcement data disaggregated by gender and age is collected in all EU member states and can be used for inferences on the subgroups of irregular migrants on a national level. There are good reasons to believe that police data about apprehensions in the country is gender and age-biased (for gender see Jandl 2009: 8). Men and working-age people are generally more likely to be subject to police investigations than women and respectively children and aged people. The main argument is the selectivity of police controls for different subgroups of migrants. Children are not controlled by the police as often as adults are (Kraler et al. 2008: 31). The French situation in which police forces systematically arrested children without documents at the end of their school day (Courau 2008: 31), seems to be exceptional in Europe. Generally, youth and young adults commit more crimes than children and elderly people. Considering the gender, women are less likely to commit crimes than men. Furthermore, due to the gender selectivity of employment, women are less likely to be apprehended in the course of labour inspections. Women work more often in private households for which legal constraints exist limiting the scope for police controls. But, if there are intensified large-scale controls in the prostitution sector where women are overrepresented, this may impact on the gender distribution in the data. Consequently, young persons and men are more likely to be closely monitored by the police which increases their probability of being included in police statistics.

Against this background, one can conclude that women, children and aged people are underrepresented in internal police data, while men and working-age people are overrepresented. For the distribution in the irregular migrant population this means that the share of women, children and aged people is at least as high as in the data and the share of men at most as high. As enforcement data is probably the most frequently used for assessments in the field of irregular migration, it can be assumed that the perceived composition of the irregular migrant population is biased according to the bias of the enforcement data. This can explain the dominating picture of male migrants in the public discourse.

Vogel and Assner (2009:98-100) suggest to use the police criminal statistics on shoplifting for a closer examination of the female share in the irregular population in Germany. Generally,

³ Database on Irregular Migration, <http://irregular-migration.hwwi.net>.

shoplifting is the crime in which women are the least underrepresented. Thus, the share of females in data about suspects for shoplifting can be considered the highest possible minimum share in the irregular migrant population. In addition, a simple multiplier estimate is possible, indicating an approximate share of women in the irregular resident population. If irregular migrant women are underrepresented in the police statistics on theft in a similar way as German women, their share in the migrant population can be estimated.

Data from humanitarian organisations

Data collected by humanitarian organizations providing support to irregular migrants are another data source. One should be aware of the selective and non-representative nature of the migrants served by these organizations (Cyrus 2008: 24). But this can be a chance for more detailed inferences on gender and age cohorts for certain nationalities and regions if a NGO is specialized in certain nationalities and in a specific geographical area. Generalization about the total irregular migrant population would be misleading. Only in cases when the irregular migrant population is geographically concentrated in one region, local data can also be valuable for assessment on the national level. For instance, irregular migrants in the Czech Republic mostly live in Prague and surrounding Central Bohemia (Drbohlav & Medova 2008: 2). Thus, data at the city level may be used for conclusions about the national level.

With regard to data bias, there are good reasons to believe that health centre data is gender and age-biased (Vogel & Kovacheva 2008). Both men and women are exposed to serious occupational health problems and prone to accidents due to the sectors of occupation. Pregnancy and birth as typical reasons why women seek access to professional services, makes them more than men to consult health care centres. If women indeed have a longer duration of stay in a country may increase the probability of getting sick and thus the likelihood to contact health centres. Likewise, one can assume that persons with children and elderly persons are more likely to seek help from NGOs than other subgroups. Working-age persons, in their best years, are usually in case of need able to manage on their own or with the help of networks (Vogel & Kovacheva 2008: p.17). Therefore, the distribution of women, children and aged people among the visitors of health care centres is an overestimation and of men and working-age people an underestimation. For the distribution in the total irregular migrant population this means that the share of women, children and aged people is at most as high as in the data and the share of men at least as high. However, as the access to humanitarian organizations' data is often restricted, this reduces its application for assessments in the field. Thus, in most cases such data is used on a local level.

Data from regularization programmes

If regularization programs have general criteria like length of stay and are open for a wide range of irregular migrants without privileging specific groups, it can be assumed that the data

is not strongly biased with regard to age or gender. Therefore, such regularization data provides the most representative numerical information about the composition of irregular migrant population (European Migration Network 2007: 13). The composition of the applicants may be perceived as a suitable indicator for the features of the total irregular migrant population. If an amnesty targets special groups of migrants, it may impact on their participation likelihood and lead to a data bias. For instance, the 2002 amnesty in Italy primarily targeted undocumented household workers which lead to a great number of regularized women. As a consequence, the data rather mirror the special focus of the amnesty on female dominated sector than a real dominance of female over male irregular migrants in the country. In addition, children and aged persons who are not eligible for the program are not included in the data. As regularization programs mostly target economically active persons combined with good documentation of the individual data, they are of particular relevance for a detailed picture of the irregular migrant population at. One should be aware of a possible bias if an amnesty is open for certain nationalities dominated by either gender (e.g. female migrants come from Latin America, male migrants from Asia and Africa). For instance, the 2001 amnesty in Spain primarily regularized Ecuadorians. As migrants from Latin America are predominantly women (Gonzalez-Enriques 2008: 28), thus more women were regularized, which does not mean that generally more female migrants live in the country. Thus the groups favoured in an amnesty tend to be overrepresented in the data and their share in the total irregular migrant population is likely to be at most as high as in the data.

Data from surveys

Underlying data may also stem from surveys among migrants. Surveys which are based on sufficiently large representative samples can be used for conclusions about the phenomenon on a national level. For instance in Italy, using a centre sampling survey, scholars seek to eliminate the bias statistically by assessing the likelihood of inclusion of an individual in the survey (Blangiardo 2008). This survey is inappropriate for age distribution as it only targets migrants between 15 and 60 years of age but it provides for a reliable assessment of the gender composition on a national level. A bias with regard to the compositional criterion may occur if a survey covers irregular migrants working in gender dominated sectors or at a certain age. Due to possible self-selectivity of migrants participating in surveys, particular groups may be overrepresented. Therefore, if one can identify age or gender subgroups more likely to participate, the share of these subgroups in the irregular migrant population is at most as high as in the data set and vice versa for groups with a lower probability to participate.

Expert assessments

Individual experts or a group of experts in the course of Delphi studies can assess the demographic profiles of irregular migrants. As expert opinions are subjective estimations, they

can be strongly biased due to experts' specialization on specific age and gender groups. Expert assessments are highly valuable if experts are likely to oversee a certain group in a certain space and they refer to first and second hand experiences (Vogel & Kovacheva 2008: 13). In big countries with large migrant populations, it is more difficult to oversee the situation and generally, expert assessments are more useful on a local level or for specific nationalities. In small countries with low levels of migrant populations, experts may possess the potential to assess the situation for the whole country. In both cases, the direction of the bias should be known in order to provide for minimum or maximum estimates. Otherwise, the Delphi results display the results of a discourse among experts.

All these data sources may be suitable indicators for demographic characteristics of the irregular migrants. Whether available data is suitable needs to be decided on a case-by-case basis after careful scrutiny of the data. Furthermore, a data observation over time is required in order to avoid using annually distorted data. For instance, enforcement data for 2006 shows a balanced gender ratio of irregular migration in Austria but the overall development of the data indicates a clear dominance of men over women⁴.

Due to their particularities, biased data may indicate a different composition of the irregular migrant populations with regard to age and gender. At this stage, a clear direction of data bias can be identified in police criminal data and health centres data, so one can conclude about the share of specific subgroups in the total irregular migrant population. Vogel and Kovacheva (2008) suggested a combination of enforcement and health care data in order to obtain both minimum and maximum estimates for age and gender cohorts. Showing a value below or above which the true value is unlikely to be, increases the reliability of the assessment. Therefore, a combined minimum and maximum estimate can be classified as having a medium quality while only a minimum or a maximum estimate allows for assessment of a low quality⁵.

⁴This observation was made by Albert Kraler in e-mail correspondence on May 22 2009.

⁵For more about quality criteria (documentation, reliability and validity of estimates) and quality classes (low, medium and high quality) see Vogel (2008) and Vogel and Kovacheva (2008).

3 Demographic characteristics of the irregular foreign population in Europe

As shown in section 2, drawing conclusions on the basis of just one indicator, e.g. enforcement data, leads to a biased picture of the composition of irregular migration. Thus, it makes sense to look at different indicators that shed light onto the demographic profiles of the irregular foreign population. Due to a lack of European data, a country-by-country approach will be used in order to conclude about the situation on the EU level. The results in this chapter are based on country reports for 12 EU member states delivered in the frame of the CLANDESTINO project⁶. The 12 countries cover the majority of the EU population (83 per cent in 2007) and the foreign population (87 per cent in 2007) so that the observations allow for some tentative conclusions about the demographic characteristics of the irregular migrants in the European Union.

3.1 Gender

In this chapter, an overview of gender ratios among irregular migrants in individual countries will be given showing the main data sources used for estimation and the level of reliability of the estimates.

Enforcement data which tend to overestimate men and underestimate women is mostly used for assessment of the gender composition. In Germany, it indicates that 70 per cent are men and 30 per cent are women in 2006, and in Slovakia, 75 per cent are men and 25 per cent are women in 2008. The data shows even more explicitly a dominance of male migrants in Austria (84 per cent vs. 16 per cent), in the Netherlands (85 per cent vs. 15 per cent) and in Greece (95 per cent vs. 5 per cent). Using data on migrants in detention centres, the gap between the gender ratios becomes much larger showing almost complete predominance of male irregular migrants: 92 per cent for France (Courau 2008) and 94 per cent for the United Kingdom (Vollmer 2008). Only in the Czech Republic, labour inspection data is suggested as an indicator showing that 68 per cent of irregular migrants are men and 32 per cent are women (Drbohlav & Lachmanová 2008). Considering the gender bias of enforcement data, it can be assumed that in the total irregular migrant population the share of men is lower and of women is higher than enforcement data shows.

Health care data, overestimating women and underestimating men, is available in few countries. In Germany, a health centre in Berlin indicates that 60 per cent of the clients are female and 40 per cent are male migrants (HWWI 2009a). However, as this local centre collects data of a small-scale population, a generalization of the assessment to the national level

⁶ CLANDESTINO covers Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, the United Kingdom. The project website is <http://clandestino.eliamep.gr/>.

should be treated with caution. In Italy, a NGO offering free health care to irregular migrants in Milan conducted interviews with more than 40 thousands migrants and detected a slight dominance of women (54 per cent) over men (46 per cent). Although the survey involves a large number of irregular migrants, the generalization is limited because of the geographical scope and self-selectivity of the migrants interviewed (Fasani 2008: 26). A chance for a more reliable assessment for Italy could give data on the so-called STP card which provides undocumented migrants with the right to free health care at state facilities on a national level (European Migration Network 2005: 27). Likewise, since 1999 a French national program (State Medical Aid) may potentially reach a large share of the undocumented migrants in the country (e.g. 192 000 in 2006). A survey conducted among the migrants who took advantage of state health care services shows that in 2007 50 per cent of all people were women (Courau 2008: 30). One can consider the distribution with enough reliability as being reasonably close to the national values and being an overestimation of women.

In countries with large-scale regularization programs, the gender relation among applicants is considered as an indicator. The regularization programs in Spain (2005) and in Italy (2002) were open for applications particularly of domestic servants in which women are overrepresented. Due to the gender selective application rates, the estimates should be treated with caution: males (56 per cent) are rather underestimated and females (44 per cent) overestimated. However, the Italian case is worth mentioning as three data sources (regularization data, migrant survey based on centre sampling technique and health centre data) show a similar gender composition – male migrants slightly dominate with 54 per cent (considered a maximum estimate), in comparison to 46 per cent female migrants (considered a minimum estimate).

In some countries, there are expert assessments based on different indicators. For Hungary, the proportion of men is assessed on the basis of different indicative data (border enforcement data, asylum applications and survey among irregular migrant workers) (Futo 2008: 39). However, there is not a clear explanation how different indicators merged into one estimate of a male share of up to 80 per cent. For Greece, the composition of the most similar regular group is suggested as an indicator for the composition of irregular migration (Maroukis 2008: 53). Accordingly, the gender relation of the regular migrant population shows a slight dominance of men (54 per cent) over women (46 per cent). For Poland, experts assessed a high number of female migrants without quantifying their share among the irregular migrant population (Igllicka & Gmaj 2008: 24).

It is worth mentioning that the gender distribution may vary in relation to the country or continent of origin. For Italy, Fasani (2008: 3) differentiates “traditional men-led” (North Africa), “women-led” (Eastern Europe) and more “gender balanced” (Latin America) migratory systems. Likewise in Greece, men come from Asia, women from Eastern Europe. In Spain, Latin

Americans working in the domestic sector are predominantly women while North Africans and Eastern Europeans working in the agriculture are predominantly men (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2008: 28). In Hungary, mostly female irregular migrants came from Romania and worked in private household which after the EU accession are not considered irregular residents anymore.

In few countries, police apprehension data and data from health care centres can be combined in minimum and maximum compositional estimates. While national police data is available, the utility of health care data for estimates on a national level is much more problematic. For Germany, compositional estimates indicate that irregular migrant population is rather gender balanced (40 to 70 per cent men and 30 to 60 per cent women) (HWWI 2009a). For France, there is a weighting towards male irregular migrants (50 to 92 per cent men and 8 to 50 per cent women) (HWWI 2009b).

Although both estimates do not give the exact share of male and female irregular migrants, they show a range where the real value is likely to be. Thus, in France and Germany there are probably as many women as men in the irregular migrant population. A multiplier calculation based on police data on shoplifting in Hamburg confirms this impression: If irregular women are underrepresented among shoplifters in the same way as German women, their share in the irregular migrant population in Hamburg is approximately 45 per cent (Vogel & Assner 2009: 100). Balanced gender distribution is probably true for Italy and Spain considering regularization data and a migrant survey. For the rest of the countries, where only enforcement data is available, there is rather a distorted picture and a high overestimation of men. Considering the available national data, it may be concluded for the EU that a balanced gender ratio is just as likely as a slight dominance of men. A considerable dominance of male migrants as often assumed seems rather implausible for the EU.

3.2 Age

Age structures of irregular migrants are still under-researched but some tentative conclusions may be drawn on the basis of indicative data.

Enforcement data, presumably overestimating youths and adults and underestimating children and elderly people, is used in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany and Slovakia. These data indicate a small share of children (between 1 and 5 per cent) and old people (between 2 and 4 per cent) living in irregularity. In various EU member states, enforcement data indicate that youths and adults (15-60 years) make up 93 to 97 per cent of the total irregular migrant population. In the Netherlands, observing different age cohorts, the share of children and youths (0-20 years) accounts for 14 per cent while the share of adults aged 50 and over remains at a rather low level of 2 per cent. For Slovakia, there is a clear dominance of working-age migrants (15-64 years) estimated at 95 per cent (Divinský 2008).

Regularization data (for Spain and Italy) and a migrant survey (in Italy) do not allow for assessment of children and aged people as the amnesties respectively the migrant survey particularly targeted adults. However, these data sources allow for a more detailed picture of the working-age irregular migrants showing that most undocumented migrants belong to the younger population (18-40 years).

In some countries, experts suggested administrative data by public authorities as an indicator for gender composition. For Hungary, Futo (2008: 40, 69) considered the proportion among legal resident migrants and assessed about 80 per cent youths and adults, and at most 8 per cent children and 12 per cent elderly people. Likewise, in Spain, demographic features of irregular migrants are roughly similar to those of the whole third country foreigners' population, but with a smaller percentage of dependant persons (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2008: 27). In Greece, using census data as an indicator children account for 19 per cent, aged people account for 3 per cent and the biggest group of 78 per cent are youths and adults. One explanation for the high share of children in Greece could be the legal possibility for children to attend schools regardless of their residence status.

The available school statistics in Greece allow for an application of the residual method comparing school statistics with data on regularly resident children. Thus, scholars estimated at least 26 000 undocumented children in Greece, which constitutes 13 per cent of the total irregular foreign population in 2007 (Lianos et al. 2008; Maroukis 2008). Biffi (2002 cited in Kraler et al. 2008: 32) estimated 5 000 to 7 000 undocumented children attending school in Austria in 1999. On behalf of the French government, an estimate of between 10 000 and 20 000 undocumented children, or between 3 and 10 per cent of the irregular foreign population, was provided without a close explanation of the applied method (Courau 2008). A relatively high number of irregular children are supposed to live in the Czech Republic. There are 30 000 irregular dependants in 2003 and most of them are probably children, which account for 15 per cent of the total irregular foreign population (Drbohlav 2003). For Germany, Vogel and Assner applied a multiplier technique in combination with qualitative information and estimated the number of irregular children between 6 and 15 years in 2008 between 0.6 and 6.9 per cent of the total irregular foreign population (Vogel & Assner 2010: 19).

For the rest of the countries (France, Italy, Poland and United Kingdom), there are hardly any quantitative indications of the age structure of the irregular migrant population. However, it can be assumed that the age composition of the irregular migrant population is roughly similar to the other EU countries. On the European level, there is a clear quantitative dominance of youths and adults and not negligible relevance of children and elderly people.

4 Final remarks

In the EU member states there still seems to be a prevailing image of predominantly young male irregular immigrants posing a threat to the national state which is additionally fuelled by media discourse:

“The presence of ‘young single men’ in the clandestine networks of migration is also strongly supported by the written and oral press. Every show, every interview that addressed the issue almost categorically focuses on these ‘young single men’, thereby suggesting their overrepresentation and the potential danger that they represent for the ‘young single French men’ that are seeking employment” (Courau 2008: 30).

Although it is often talked about the young men in irregularity in the EU, there are surprisingly few discussions about the plausibility of this statement. This paper draws on research primarily undertaken within the framework of the CLANDESTINO project for 12 EU countries. It has systematically reviewed information on shares of gender and age groups in the irregular migrant population, interpreting them as minimum and maximum shares according to theoretical and empirical considerations. It is particularly useful if one data set considers a maximum share and another data set a minimum share of a group. For example, the share of women in police apprehension data can often be interpreted as minimum share and their share in health care data as maximum share.

According to observations that can be derived from the available data on a national level, some tentative suggestions for the EU can be made. The conventional perception is certainly correct that irregular migrants are generally young adults. However, the number of children and elderly people without a regular residence status is not negligible. The claim that the vast majority of irregular migrants are men cannot be confirmed. Data sources in 12 EU countries indicate that this may only be true for certain sectors, regions and nationalities, while women dominate in others. Women seem to be overrepresented in the private household, in certain cities and in many Asian, European and Latin American nationalities. At the European level, a balanced gender ratio is just as likely as a slight dominance of men. Thus, one can assume that almost the half of the estimated 1.9 to 3.8 million irregular migrants living in the EU in 2008 is female (source of EU estimate: Vogel & Kovacheva 2009: 10). These findings raise the question whether the humanitarian challenge may also be underestimated compared to the threat posed by irregular migration, if the common image of predominantly male irregular migrants is misperceived.

5 References

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