

Irregular Migration, Human Smuggling and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union

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Abstract

This article examines the consequences of the latest round of EU-Enlargement in May 2004 on irregular migration across Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on a unique collection of both quantitative and qualitative data related to irregular migration and human smuggling, the article first presents some long-term trends in irregular migration across the region before taking up more recent developments in 2003 and 2004. While border apprehensions have broadly declined since about 2000 there is ample evidence for an increasing role of human smugglers in facilitating irregular migration. In addition, there are noticeable changes in the modus operandi of human smugglers.

Keywords

Irregular migration, illegal migration, Central and Eastern Europe, human smuggling, EU enlargement

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Introduction

Following the political transformations in formerly socialist countries after 1989, the new freedoms of movement, deplorable social and economic conditions, rapid industrial restructuring of the formerly centrally-planned economies coupled with low incomes and high unemployment and escalating political and violent conflicts have all conspired to drive people abroad in the search for better lives, often via irregular means. While regular migration from East to West has quickly been contained by tighter entry restrictions of Western European states, irregular migration¹ and human smuggling to, through and from Central and Eastern European countries has grown considerably throughout the 1990s (Futo and Tass 2002; Koser 2001; Laczko, Stacher and von Koppenfels, 2002). By 2000, various authors had estimated the total volume of irregular entries to the European Union between 400,000 and 600,000 per year, the overwhelming part of it going through the EU's eastern borders and a large and growing share of it being facilitated by professional people smugglers (Heckmann and Wunderlich 2000; Laczko and Thompson 2000; Jandl 2005; Morrison and Crossland 2001; Müller-Schneider 2001).

At the same time, throughout the 1990s more and more countries in the region have stepped up their efforts of better controlling their own borders and generally improving their capacities for migration management, including their admission-, readmission- and asylum procedures. With few exceptions (such as Belarus) the prospect of eventually joining the EU or at least developing closer ties with it have provided a powerful impetus to enhance their capacities for border control and migration management including their efforts in tackling the growing significance of irregular transit migration through the region to Western European states. Meanwhile, border apprehension statistics indicate a sustained decline of detected irregular border crossings across the region since the turn of the century (Futo, Jandl and Karsakova 2005). These developments, however, which can at least partly be attributed to the deterrent effects of stricter border enforcement and other measures, have largely gone unnoticed by migration researchers and a hyped media, whose basic assumption continues to be an unrelenting increase of irregular migration from East to West.

The year 2004, then, marked the accession to the EU of ten new Member States, eight of which were former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to these countries who are now fully integrated into the structures of the EU even more states of the region have become involved in strengthening their cooperation with the EU through special partnership programs such as the EU Stabilisation and Association Agreements

¹ The terms „irregular migration” and „illegal migration” are used synonymously in this paper. Strictly speaking, the term „illegal migration” should refer only to the illegal crossing of borders, while the term „irregular migration” encompasses a wider range of irregularities in migration processes. However, this differentiation is not always followed in the literature and thus may not be understood by all readers. Moreover, as this article focuses on illegal border crossings, both terms can be equally applied in this context.

with states in South-Eastern Europe or the new European Neighbourhood Policy extending far into Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

Related to this latest, fifth, round of EU-Enlargement was a renewed fear of increasing flows of irregular migrants through Europe's "Eastern Gate" and of the resulting social and security problems associated with them. This article, then, will look at the consequences of the latest round of EU-Enlargement in May 2004 on irregular migration across Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on a unique collection of both quantitative and qualitative data related to irregular migration and human smuggling, the article will first give an overview of some long-term trends in irregular migration in 19 states across the region before taking up more recent developments in 2003 and 2004. In order to understand the nature of irregular migration in the region, much of which has by now become transit migration rather than migration originating from within the region, the analysis focuses on the source and transit countries of irregular migrants, their demographic characteristics and discernable patterns and trends of their movements. Finally, we will turn our attention to those facilitating illegal border crossings, i.e. the human smugglers, and their shifting modus operandi in light of their rapidly changing operating environment.

Irregular Migration at Europe's Eastern Fringes: A fragmented knowledge base

As systematic research on irregular migration and human smuggling to Europe has only begun from the mid-1990s onwards, the number of studies that can help to assemble the "larger picture" of irregular migration in the region, extending both in space and time, is still limited. Nevertheless, given the difficulties presented by irregular migration as a subject of research and the resulting lack of "hard" evidence for most aspects of the phenomenon, even studies with a limited geographical or thematic scope have contributed much to a better understanding of irregular migration and human smuggling phenomena across the region.

Some of these studies have dealt with irregular migration specific to various locations, for example to Poland (Okólski 2000), Hungary, Poland and Ukraine (Laczko and Thompson 2000), the former Yugoslavia (Mavris 2002), Turkey (Içduygu and Toktas 2002) or Ukraine (Uehling 2004). Another group of studies have devoted their attention to the ways and means of irregular migration and have focused on the dynamics and organizational structures involved in human smuggling in Europe generally (Müller-Schneider 2000; Alt 2001) or for specific nationalities involved (Finckenauer 2001). Others have examined migrant motives (Boswell 2002), the role of migrant networks (Crisp 1999), the socio-economic profile of irregular migrants (Elwert 2002) or the role of irregular labour markets (Lederer and Nickel 2004). There are also a few authors who have set out to develop theoretical perspectives, characterizing human smuggling generally as a "business" (Salt and Stein 1997) or more specifically as a "transnational service industry" (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl 2006).

What is largely missing in the literature, however, is a wider cross-country perspective on irregular migration in Central and Eastern Europe, based on empirical evidence. It is this

gap that the present article seeks to address. While irregular migration, by its very nature, is largely hidden from view, it has been argued that the phenomenon is traceable, to some degree, in official statistics and that these can be analyzed for trends (Heckmann 2004). More specifically, it has been demonstrated that a careful analysis of border apprehension data can reveal much about the main characteristics and trends in illegal border crossings in Central and Eastern Europe (Futo and Tass 2002).

The empirical basis for the subsequent analysis is provided by an annual survey of statistics and other data related to irregular migration, human smuggling and trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe, which has been implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development in Vienna. The survey has collected border apprehension statistics and other data from border services and associated national migration institutions in Central and Eastern Europe since 1997. Over the past few years the survey has been progressively improved and expanded to include more data and countries. The 2002, 2003 and 2004 surveys include detailed data for 18, 17 and 20 countries, respectively. In addition to detailed quantitative indicators on irregular migration and human smuggling, many border services regularly provide unique qualitative insights from their operational experience in dealing with irregular migration and human smuggling. The following sections will be limited to the main findings and regional trends emanating from the detailed country-by-country surveys. For further details reference is made to the annual publication of the Yearbook (Futo and Tass 2003; Futo and Jandl 2004; Futo and Jandl 2005).

Regional overview

On the basis of the data provided by the border management services and associated national migration institutions of Central and Eastern European countries over the years, the following general picture can be compiled: After rising throughout the 1990s, the total number of border apprehensions in 20 Central and Eastern European countries² plus Kosovo peaked at around 270,000 in the year 2000. Since then there has been a gradual (if uneven) decrease in aggregate border apprehensions to 238,000 in 2001; 189,000 in 2002; 157,000 in 2003 and 145,000 in 2004 (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

It must be noted that this pronounced decrease in aggregate numbers (by 47% over 5 years) was far from uniform. In 2004, for example, aggregate border apprehensions for the 20+1 decreased by 7.5% compared to the previous year, yet half the countries (10 plus Kosovo) actually registered increases in border apprehensions, while the rest noted decreases. While Turkey still remained the country with the highest number of border apprehensions throughout the region, out of the Top 10 countries of border apprehensions in 2004, six (Hungary, Czech Republic, Latvia, Slovakia, Poland and Slovenia) were

² These are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey and Ukraine

countries that acceded to the EU in 2004. Over the period 2000-2004, the 20 countries plus Kosovo registered a total of just under 1 million border apprehensions. Of these, the 9 countries of the region that acceded to the EU in 2004 made up just over 40 %.

In order to obtain a longer-term perspective on illegal border crossings in Central and Eastern Europe, we were able to compile border apprehension data for the last ten years for eight European countries. Five of these countries are located in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia) and three in Southeastern Europe (Croatia, Cyprus and Turkey). As can be seen from Table 2, border apprehensions have fallen significantly from their highest levels in all five Central European countries, yet the peak of border apprehensions differs somewhat – it was highest in the Czech Republic and Hungary in 1998, in Slovenia in 2000, in Slovakia in 2001 and has fallen continuously in Poland since 1995. Taken together, border apprehensions in the five Central European countries peaked in 2000 at almost 100,000 and have more than halved in the 4 years since then. In Croatia, border apprehensions have also dramatically declined since 2000 to a level last seen in the mid-1990s. In Turkey, border apprehensions have also fallen well below their highs but remained very high compared to the other European countries. The experience of Cyprus, however, has been somewhat different. While registering only a few hundred border apprehensions annually throughout the 1990s, the lifting of travel restrictions across the cease-fire line (“green line”) together with the approaching accession of the southern part of the island to the EU (which took place in May 2004) has resulted in an upsurge of border guard activities reflected in a five-fold increase of border apprehensions in 2003. In 2004, however, the number of border apprehensions reported by the authorities declined again.

Table 2 about here

Interpretation of the observed statistical trends

What do the observed falling trends in border apprehensions signify and how can they be interpreted? On the one hand, there is the plausible possibility that the number of migrants who tried to cross borders illegally has really decreased significantly across the region. If so, this could be attributed to two main complex sets of factors.

The first set of factors to be taken into account is the improvement in border control standards that have been instituted throughout the region over the last years, as border management agencies have gone to great lengths to improve their efficiency. Together, these may well have had the intended deterrent effect on irregular migration, making it more risky (and expensive, for those who use the services of human smugglers) to cross borders illegally (see also Futo, Jandl and Karsakova 2005). The same improvements in border control standards in Central and Eastern Europe may also have contributed to the (geographical) redirection of irregular migration movements via the southern borders of Europe and to a shift in the strategies of irregular migration facilitators to new forms of smuggling and document abuse (see below).

The second set of factors that has likely contributed to the imputed decline in irregular border crossings is the development in the political, economic and security situations in important countries of origin of irregular migrants. For example, in 2002/2003 the conflict in Afghanistan has slowly stabilized and the number of apprehended Afghans slowed down sharply. More surprisingly, the 2003 war in Iraq has initially led to lower volumes of apprehended irregular migrants in Central and Eastern Europe emanating from that country than in the years preceding the invasion (however, by 2004 numbers were on the rise again).

Third, there are some purely statistical factors that influence the recorded number of border apprehensions. For example, since 2002, nationals from Romania and Bulgaria have been visa-exempt in the countries of the Schengen area, but also in many countries of the region under survey, removing the need for most nationals of these states to cross borders illegally (except if facing a personal residency ban or similar restriction). On the other hand, in order to comply with EU and Schengen Standards, several countries of the region have introduced new visa requirements. In 2003, for example, Poland has introduced visa obligations for citizens of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine and Hungary has introduced visa requirements for citizens of Serbia-Montenegro and Ukraine. In such cases, some of the observed increases/decreases in border apprehensions are simply the result of a change in the definition of “illegal border crossing”. Moreover, in the coming years it is to be expected that recorded border apprehension trends will continue to be influenced by migration and visa policies. Romania, for example, has already started negotiations on the introduction of a visa regime for nationals of Ukraine, Turkey, Serbia-Montenegro and Moldova in order to bring visa policies in line with EU regulations in anticipation of its desired EU accession in 2007.

Finally, fourth, the observed decrease in border apprehensions may also be the result of new, and as yet unknown, strategies and tactics of irregular migrants and human smugglers, which may have led to a larger share of illegal border crossings remaining undetected. As will be elaborated below, there is some evidence for this latter interpretation as well. Basically, this type of explanation comes in two forms. First, there is evidence of a significantly increasing involvement of human smugglers in irregular migration projects, which on its own would diminish the chances of detection at the borders. Second, there is also evidence of a continuously changing modus operandi of smugglers, which is likely to lead to a lower rate of detection at the borders – at least temporarily until border management authorities have caught up with the new developments. These issues will be taken up again further below.

Directions of irregular migration flows

Looking more closely at disaggregated statistics of border apprehensions per country, a complex map of irregular migration flows emerges. This map draws on records of all detected irregular cross-border movements by border sections and directions of movements (in/out) for each country. When compiling this map, however, it quickly becomes apparent that irregular migrants have been apprehended on almost all border sections in both directions, albeit in various intensities, resulting in an almost

incomprehensible map of irregular cross-border movements throughout the region. Therefore, it makes sense to simplify somewhat and look only at the quantitatively most important flows of apprehended migrants and their directions. From this exercise, the following generalisation can be made for the region based on data for 2003 and 2004:

- First, the main direction of irregular migration flows is still from Eastern and South-Eastern to Western Europe.
- Second, the picture of recorded irregular migration flows does not conform any longer to clear-cut “migration routes”.
- Third, there is no clear-cut pattern emerging from the registered increases or decreases in border apprehensions across the region. If anything, the Central European “migration corridor” (Ukraine-Slovakia-Czech Republic or, alternatively, Ukraine-Slovakia-Austria) and the “Balkan route” (from Turkey over South-Eastern Europe to the European Union) seem to be less frequently used than in previous years.
- Fourth, the overall picture is further complicated by the fact that several countries of the region have also become major destinations for irregular migrants themselves, besides serving as transit countries for irregular migrants heading further on.
- Fifth, a substantial number of registered “illegal border crossings” take place in the form of return migration or re-admission of migrants who may previously have travelled legally and “overstayed” their visas and are apprehended or registered upon their return.
- Sixth, mapping irregular migration flows through border apprehension statistics is complicated by the fact that an increasing proportion of illegal migration takes place by way of false or falsified documents, often via direct flights from various destinations.

Thus, the geographical distribution of irregular migration flows in Central and Eastern European countries has become more complex over the years. Irregular migrants and their facilitators constantly develop new routes and ways, in response to changes in laws, visa regulations and stricter enforcement measures. As a result, “classical” routes of irregular migration have become more blurred and migrants often take wide detours in order to reach their final destinations.

Characteristics of apprehended migrants

Where did the migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing come from? This question can be answered for each country individually and for all countries together for a shorter or longer period. Depending on political, economic, security and legal developments in source and destination countries, the countries of origin of irregular migrants have varied between the countries where they were apprehended and over time. Over the last decade, there was a gradual shift away from South-Eastern European source countries to countries of the former Soviet Union, Asia and the Middle East. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more recently in Chechnya (Russia), all had a profound impact on the changing distribution over time. Looking only at the last two years, the most

important source countries of migrants apprehended at the borders of 19 Central and Eastern European countries were Moldova, Pakistan, Russia, Ukraine and Iraq (Figure 1).³

Figure 1 about here

While three out of the Top 5 countries of origin were countries of the former Soviet Union, the numbers of border violators originating from both Moldova and Russia have decreased substantially, while those from Pakistan and Iraq have increased sharply. On the other hand, further down the list border apprehensions of citizens of China, Turkey and India have decreased significantly in 2004. The share of Africa and of other regions is not significant in this context, with the notable exception of the growing number of apprehended Somali citizens (2,825 apprehensions in 2004 after 1,905 in 2003).

Having looked at countries of origin, we will now take a look at the gender composition of migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing in countries of the region. Like in many industrialized countries, statistics of the border management organizations in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrate that most apprehended irregular migrants are (still) single male individuals in their best working years (between 20 and 40 years old). In 2004, approximately one-fifth of the apprehended irregular migrants were female. This proportion had increased in the previous years and has stagnated in 2004 (Table 3).

Table 3 about here

Comparing the share of women with the main countries of origin in various states it can be concluded that when people flee the consequences of civil wars and lack any hope in the stabilization of their home countries, they are more likely to arrive with their families. A recent example is the arrival of Chechen nationals with many large families into Western Europe through CEE countries. This is especially valid for Hungary and the Czech Republic, where many illegal entrants have filed an asylum application immediately after crossing the border (instead of remaining clandestine) in the hope of obtaining asylum or at least temporary shelter.

In such cases migrants also often take their children with them. The share of minors within the overall number of irregular migrants depends on various factors. This indicator tends to be higher in those countries, where (a) labour migration is relatively low, and (b) relatively many long-distance migrants decide to interrupt their clandestine journey and approach the authorities for shelter and asylum. It is for the above reasons, that the number of registered children is relatively higher and still increasing in the Czech

³ Based on the apprehension reports of the following 19 Central and Eastern European countries, responding to the survey: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, and Ukraine. The table was computed on the basis of the statistical tables entitled "Number of border violators by country of origin" submitted by the responding states. Own nationals apprehended for illegal border crossing are included. Source: Futo and Jandl, 2005

Republic and in Slovenia. Across countries for which data are available, about one in 10 apprehended migrants was a minor in 2004.

Table 4 about here

Apprehensions of human smugglers

Migration authorities and border guard officials across Central and Eastern Europe are convinced that today the majority of migrants illegally crossing their borders use the help of human smugglers. For example, in 2003 the Hungarian border guard noted that, while in the middle of the 1990s only about 20 to 25% of illegal entrants were assisted in illegal border crossings by human smugglers, by 2003 this proportion already exceeded 70% (Futo and Jandl 2004: 78). And while in 2004 the overall number of border apprehensions has further declined in 10 out of 20 states, the number of human smugglers caught has increased in 9 out of 14 states for which data are available. In total, the number of apprehended human smugglers has increased from 3,737 in 2003 to 4,307 in 2004 in these 14 states, an increase of 15%.

Table 5 around here

There are three possible explanations for this observed trend, all of which are likely to be at work simultaneously:

- First, the proportion of irregular migrants using the services of human smugglers has increased faster than the decline in the overall number of border apprehensions.
- Second, modern border guard techniques and new modes of policing (e.g. in the vicinity of borders and within the country) have increased the efficiency of border guards and police authorities resulting in higher success rates in the detection and apprehension of human smugglers.
- Third, a shift in the modus operandi of human smugglers has led to a lower ratio of smuggled migrants transported per human smuggler, thereby raising the ratio of apprehended human smugglers to smuggled migrants.

It is to this last point that we will turn in the following section.

Modes of illegal border crossing

In general, irregular migrants and their facilitators use a wide variety of ways for illegally crossing state borders. However, statistics on apprehensions at various border types (disaggregated as follows: road border crossings, rail border crossings, at airports, green borders, sea borders, in the country and at other places) indeed show a shift in the preferred modes of illegal border crossings away from illegal crossings at the green border and towards official (road) border posts.

Thus, despite the general trend of fewer border apprehensions over the past three years, particularly on green borders, several states have recorded a noticeable increase in the use of official road border posts for illegal crossings. In these cases, more individuals and groups attempted to avoid border controls by concealing or hiding themselves in vehicles travelling in legal cross-border traffic, or by using falsified documents or documents of another person. This has been the case particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland. Looking at the broader region (all 9 countries⁴ for which complete data are available for the years 2002-2004), there thus appears to be a clear trend away from illegal crossings at the green border and towards illegal crossings at official state borders (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 about here

It is likely that this observed shift in border apprehensions is due to a changed modus operandi of human smugglers: Fewer migrants are smuggled in large groups across green borders; instead more migrants are smuggled through official border crossing points hidden in vehicles or through the use of false or falsified documents. This change in strategy then also implies the necessity of accompanying clandestine migrants (hidden in trucks or containers etc.), thereby raising the ratio of apprehended human smugglers to smuggled migrants.

Moreover, it appears that the aggregate shift in the modes of illegal border crossing towards official border posts is most pronounced in the Central European countries which have recently acceded to the EU:

- In the Czech Republic, groups of smuggled people have become smaller in comparison to previous years and there was an increase in the number of persons detected in the luggage compartments of private vehicles.
- In Hungary, organized attempts of illegal border crossings have been relocated to border sections with larger cross-border traffic, where migrants attempted crossings in small groups of two or three using false or forged official documents. Larger groups of irregular migrants crossing the green border on foot are not as common anymore as in previous years. Since 1 May 2004 there has been a 36% increase of detected irregular migrants hidden in vehicles at the Austrian (external Schengen) border.
- In Poland, the number of irregular migrants detected at official border crossing points has increased remarkably, especially with the use of counterfeit documents and visas or hidden in a car or truck, e.g. hidden behind the seat, or in the driver's cabin. Because of the detailed controls of vehicles crossing the external border, this method was used mainly at the internal EU border with Germany.

⁴ The figure is based on detailed border apprehension data for the following 9 countries: Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. For the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania: road border crossings include rail border crossings. Source: ICMPD

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- In Slovakia, there was a large increase in detected cases of irregular migrants hidden in trains or vehicles (896 apprehensions in 2004 compared to only 212 in 2003). The method used most often consisted in hiding in the shelters of passenger or freight trains going from Slovakia to Austria.

However, this growing tendency towards illegal border crossing through border checkpoints was not restricted to current EU Member States and was also observed in other countries (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Bulgaria).

False or falsified documents

During the last few years, border authorities across Central and Eastern Europe have recorded a noticeable increase in detected counterfeit and falsified travelling documents. By far the most commonly used method across countries appears to be the use of another person's passport falsified by an exchange of the photograph. This can be done by removing the protective film from the page containing personal information, replacing the photo, and sticking the transparent film back in its place. Other typical ways of falsifying passports are correcting the expiry date, forging visa stamps or chemically removing border crossing stamps.

The use of falsified passports of new Member States of the EU seems to be especially prevalent. After the 2004 enlargement of the EU, border crossing procedures for the citizens of new EU Member States have been simplified and border guards have faced an increasing challenge of identifying false documents. In many cases border guards do not check the data of EU citizens and their documents in the (electronic) databases, making it more difficult for them to detain persons wanted by law enforcement institutions for various offences or persons travelling with invalid, stolen or lost documents. Exploiting these loopholes, human smugglers are increasingly targeting travel documents from the new EU Member States for alteration and use in the smuggling of irregular migrants. On the other hand, when third country passports are used, they most often include an original Schengen visa or belong to nationals of countries that are visa-exempted.

Besides passports, a great number of other document types are forged or falsified for use in irregular border crossings such as: identity cards, residence permits, border stamps, visas, registration certificates, driving licences, "green" insurance cards, false documents of diplomats, forged Refugee Travel Documents issued by European countries and others. Besides documents with replaced photographs, these documents appear as complete forgeries, documents with erased or altered text, with replaced or torn-out pages, as documents of another person or as stolen documents. A growing number of cases involving forged documents concern migrants who have already been rejected for a certain period of time from the European Union.

The following information on increasing document abuse has been reported by new EU Member States:

- In the Czech Republic in 2004, authorities detected 712 persons crossing state borders illegally with the use of irregular travel documents (+23% compared to 2003). The majority of cases concerned citizens of Ukraine (333 persons) and Moldova (104 persons).
- In Hungary border authorities reveal around 2.000-2.500 cases of forged documents annually. In 2004, however, the number of revealed cases (3.181) showed an 18% increase compared to the previous year (after a 42% increase in 2002). At Austrian, Slovenian, Romanian and Ukrainian borders, the number of detected cases have risen by 22%. The number of detected forged identity cards multiplied by more than eight. Since the second half of 2004, the number of Ukrainian citizens with forged Italian residence permits has grown significantly (from 633 in 2003 to 1.255 or 40% of all cases in 2004).
- In Slovakia, a total number of 680 cases of document fraud have been registered of which 357 were counterfeit or falsified identity documents, mainly passports and identity cards used by citizens of Moldova and partially also Ukraine. Of the total, 407 cases concerned the exchanging of photos, followed by 93 cases of page exchange in travel documents, 61 cases of the use of travel documents by another person and 52 cases of data overwriting in the document.

Making this general trend towards increasing document abuse even more notable, it appears that the methods of counterfeiting and falsifying have further improved in quality. A stable tendency to improve the techniques of document falsification (for example by chemical and mechanical deletions or by splitting of pages in passports for falsification) has been observed, as a result of which – if the trend continues unabated – the identification of false documents will become ever more difficult.

At the same time older types of travel documents with lower security features are also often misused (e.g. old pattern citizen passports of countries of the former Soviet Union, especially from the three Baltic states now part of the EU). In those cases it is very difficult to detect misuse, especially the exchange of photographs.

Recent changes in the strategies of irregular migrants and their facilitators

In addition to these two pronounced shifts in the modus operandi of human smugglers that are at least indirectly related to the 2004 EU Enlargement, there has been one more important development that has directly influenced the migration strategies of irregular migrants and their facilitators.

Since in May 2004 10 new Member States have joined the European Union, the so-called Dublin Convention, backed up by the EURODAC fingerprint database, has entered into force in these countries, too. According to this Convention, an asylum seeker claiming asylum in several EU Member States along his/her journey can be returned from the border where she/he is apprehended back to the EU country of his/her first asylum application. Given the strong linkages that exist between irregular migration, human smuggling and the asylum system in Central Europe, therefore, it was to be expected that the widespread application of the EURODAC system in Central European countries would have a noticeable effect on irregular migration processes (Jandl 2004). Indeed, after May 2004 the number of persons who first crossed borders clandestinely and then deliberately approached the authorities in order to apply for asylum declined. For example, in the Czech Republic the number of Chechen people claiming asylum has decreased, while an increasing number of migrants have attempted to cross the country without getting into contact with the authorities in their attempts to reach Austria (previously a large share of Chechens have applied for asylum along their journey in several countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Austria). Qualitative research on human smuggling in Central Europe has shown that many smuggled migrants are often given detailed instructions by their smugglers on how to use the asylum system as part of their migration strategies (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl 2006), thus it can be assumed that smugglers have turned to recommend staying away from the authorities.

Besides the described changes in the technical operations of human smugglers as a reaction to changes brought about by the most recent EU enlargement and more efficient border enforcement measures, there are also other changes in migration regimes that can lead to a change in strategies, and even operational areas, of human smugglers. A few examples should illustrate this point:

- The lack of a visa policy in Kosovo since 1999 has prompted a significant number of irregular migrants to enter Europe directly via Pristina airport (Kosovo).
- Since Bosnia and Herzegovina has introduced a visa requirement for Iranian citizens in December 2000 and a stricter regime of entry for Turkish citizens through the airport in Sarajevo, an increasing number of irregular migrants from these countries have used other routes to Western European destinations.
- In Serbia, the application of a stricter visa regime for Chinese citizens since 2001 together with the discontinuance of direct flights Belgrade-Peking have quickly led irregular Chinese migrants to use alternative entry points to Europe.
- Since 2002 irregular migration from Albania to Italy through the Adriatic Sea has been made increasingly difficult due to joint efforts of Albanian and Italian authorities and due to the operation of the International Anti-trafficking Center at the Albanian port of Vlora. Consequently, an increasing flow of irregular migrants has been directed to the land route via Kosovo, Serbia, and further on to Western Europe.
- In Cyprus, the lifting of travel restrictions across the cease-fire line has led to a surge of irregular migrants entering the southern (Greek-Cypriot controlled) part from the northern (Turkish-Cypriot controlled) part of the island in 2003.

As these examples demonstrate, in a rapidly changing institutional environment patterns of irregular migration and human smuggling are in constant flux. Besides adapting their modus operandi, human smugglers are also induced to change their operating routes and transit countries for smuggled migrants in response to new migration or asylum regulations and to changes in visa regimes.

Towards a Common Market for Human Smugglers?

Drawing on the experience of border guard officials across Central and Eastern Europe, it appears that the basic features of human smuggling have become very similar across the region, adding further credibility to the theory that human smuggling today can be understood as a dynamic transnational service industry that stretches over many countries and borders (Bilger, Hofmann and Jandl 2006). For example, today smugglers across the region make extensive use of modern communication equipment. Communication is maintained among others through cellular phones, which are purchased especially for this purpose and are regularly exchanged. The whole process of transport from the rear regions to the border, harbouring and transfer of migrants from one smuggler to another is co-ordinated in cell phone conversations. After the operation SIM cards are exchanged among individuals, thus blurring traces. Increasing use is also made of the Internet as a means of communication.

Depending on the types of services offered and the type of functions performed, smuggling agents hire or purchase cars for transportation, purchase apartments for the sheltering of irregular migrants, obtain information technology as well as other equipment necessary to produce the best possible counterfeit passports, or spend large sums on bribes. For transport, smugglers often use rented cars or taxis, vans, minibuses, trucks, cargo space, containers or refrigerator semi trailers, motorboats and other means of transport. Along the borders, smugglers extensively use night vision devices, surveillance technologies, and radiophones. Forgers continuously update their equipment for forging passports and visas and other documents of different countries. Modern computer technology is used to improve the quality of document falsifications.

An important element in the calculations of illegal migration facilitators is the degree of risk associated with particular modes of operations. As noted above, the year 2004 saw an increase in general (legal) cross-border traffic, which human smugglers can exploit for their purposes. After EU enlargement customs controls have been abolished at internal borders and waiting times have decreased. Citizens of new and old EU countries can travel with the use of ID cards instead of only passports. At many border crossing points (especially EU-internal but also at EU-external borders) a “one stop” control system was introduced. Control procedures are carried out by border authorities of only one of two neighbouring states, thus facilitating the crossing of borders, especially for citizens of the EU. As a result, the border crossing of persons and vehicles has gathered speed, the time of inspection has shortened and traffic congestions have been reduced.

However, with the simplification of control procedures the frequency of using vehicles for smuggling migrants has grown as well. Migrants use vehicles with EU Member State number plates and forged or falsified EU travel documents for illegally crossing borders. In addition, illegal border crossings in passenger trains, buses and other types of public transportation are carried out in periods when large masses of regular travellers make detailed controls and document checks more difficult.

Conclusion: Irregular migration, human smuggling and EU-enlargement

This article has looked at the consequences of the latest round of EU-Enlargement in May 2004 on irregular migration trends across Central and Eastern Europe. The annual survey on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe, carried out by ICMPD in Vienna provides a unique opportunity to do so by collecting statistics and information from border guards and migration authorities in a standardized format. The region surveyed constitutes a continuous belt from the North-Eastern to the South-Eastern part of Europe and is thus broadly representative of irregular (transit) migration in Central and Eastern Europe.

The compiled data clearly show that the direction of irregular migration movements is generally from east to west. Although the overall trends of border apprehensions have declined significantly since about the turn of the century there is ample evidence for an increasing role of human smugglers in facilitating irregular migration. Their flexibility in responding to changed circumstances, such as those brought about by the enlargement of the EU, testifies to the ability of human smugglers to respond to new challenges and opportunities.

Besides enriching our understanding of irregular migration and human smuggling in Central and Eastern Europe, the compiled data also point to two new trends in human smuggling: The first is the increase in the use of official road borders for illegal crossings. As explained above, an increasing number of smuggling cases have been detected where smugglers were using trucks and cargo spaces for transporting smuggled migrants in concealed spaces. Such operations are either carried out in busy cross-border traffic or on foggy days and dawn time – conditions hindering efficient inspections by use of thermo-visual equipment or carbon dioxide detectors. At the same time this strategy may also be a reaction to a higher risk of detection at or near the green borders, where irregular migrants can be detected in shelters or at collection points. Instead, driving the migrants directly to the border and smuggling them through, thus reducing the time spent in the country, helps to reduce risks and costs and cuts out local helpers.

A second trend, also linked to the higher share of detections at official road borders, is the increasing use of false or falsified travel documents. A multiplication of cases involving smuggled migrants carrying false official documents of the 10 new European Union Member States has been observed particularly since May 2004. Document forgery is a crime bearing a rather low risk factor, as the detainment of the forger is typically difficult and lengthy due to the high level of conspiracy involved. The chances of apprehending the users of forged documents are reduced by the fact that forgers are using increasingly modern equipment and methods in the forging of travel documents, visas and residence permits.

Finally, the question should be posed how authorities in Central and Eastern European countries could more effectively address irregular migration and human smuggling to and through their countries and within the region. Here, possible intervention strategies can be directed at the demand, supply and intermediary (enforcement) sides.

Taking enforcement first, the upgrading and modernization of border control systems of many countries in the region is proceeding but still far from complete. This involves everything from demarcation and policing of green borders to the introduction of modern surveillance and detection equipment at official border posts. More important than upgrading controls at the borders, however, are measures directed at “deep” investigations against smugglers, ranging from the harmonization and sharpening of penal law against smugglers to cross-border investigations and the tackling of corruption. Moreover, upgrading document security and introducing biometric identifiers in travel documents will go some way toward combating document forgery.

As for the demand side, it should be noted that more and more states in the region are gradually becoming destinations for irregular migrant workers themselves. This calls for the introduction of comprehensive immigration policies in states that have in their recent past experienced mainly emigration and have simply felt no need for elaborate reception policies. This may involve both the creation of opportunities for orderly immigration channels linked to sectors with high labour demand as well as the introduction and enforcement of sanctions for employers of irregular migrants. On the supply side things are more difficult. Enhanced cooperation with source countries and other transit countries will be key in influencing future migration pressures and Central and Eastern European countries can certainly play an important role here in the wider Eurasian region. Effective readmission agreements, both with source and destination countries, can also help to influence overly optimistic expectations of potential irregular migrants. On the other hand, policies aiming at reducing the potential for irregular migration through the fostering of political stability, human security, growth and income opportunities in source countries can only be effective in the long run and require collective efforts of the richer states together. Thus, states should be prepared that despite currently declining border apprehension trends across the region, the issue of irregular migration will not go away anytime soon.

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Annex: Tables and Figures

Table 1: Number of border violation related apprehensions by place of apprehension

Place of apprehension	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	% change	absolute change
Armenia* (1)	253	253	253	130	376	49%	123
Azerbaijan (2)	5.672	7.640	8.299	3.846	2.904	-49%-	2.768
Bosnia-Herzegovina (3)	741	741	390	957	875	18%	134
Bulgaria	7.192	5.962	6.451	5.133	5.948	-17%-	1.244
Croatia*	24.180	17.416	5.861	2.915	2.590	-89%-	21.590
Cyprus*	456	182	725	3.726	2.559	461%	2.103
Czech Republic	32.720	23.834	14.741	13.206	10.695	-67%-	22.025
Estonia	5	10	51	53	62	1140%	57
Georgia (1)	107	107	107	114	100	-7%-	7
Hungary*	19.717	16.637	15.976	12.990	13.103	-34%-	6.614
Kosovo, Protectorate of the UN (1)	320	320	320	262	378	18%	58
Latvia* (2)	11.987	7.838	9.737	19.827	10.546	-12%-	1.441
Lithuania*	798	1.355	797	803	947	19%	149
Macedonia (4)	2.081	3.032	2.081	1.402	1.808	-13%-	273
Poland*	5.500	6.075	4.269	5.063	5.762	5%	262
Romania*	3.495	3.598	3.084	2.133	1.496	-57%-	1.999
Serbia-Montenegro **	3.788	1.278	907	862	1.053	-72%-	2.735
Slovakia	6.062	15.548	15.235	12.493	8.334	37%	2.272
Slovenia	35.914	20.871	6.896	5.018	5.680	-84%-	30.234
Turkey	94.514	92.364	82.825	56.219	61.228	-35%-	33.286
Ukraine	15.909	12.558	9.600	9.602	8.493	-47%-	7.416
Total	271.411	237.619	188.605	156.754	144.937	-47%-	126.474

Notes: *revised figures, ** S-M: foreign citizens only, (1) estimates for 2000-2002, (2) estimate for 2000, (3) estimate for 2000-2001, (4) estimates for 2000 and 2002
Sources: ICMPD 2001, ICMPD 2002, Futo and Tass 2003, Futo and Jandl 2004, Futo and Jandl 2005

Table 2: Number of border violation related apprehensions by place of apprehension										
	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Czech Republic	19.172	23.705	29.339	44.672	32.325	32.720	23.834	14.741	13.206	10.695
Hungary*	16.446	13.912	15.764	22.906	19.213	19.717	16.637	15.976	12.990	13.103
Poland	11.659	10.955	10.462	7.023	5.289	5.500	6.075	4.269	5.063	5.762
Slovakia	2.786	3.329	2.821	8.236	8.050	6.062	15.548	15.235	12.493	8.334
Slovenia (1)	3.000	5.000	7.000	14.000	17.000	35.914	20.871	6.896	5.018	5.680
Total CEE	53.063	56.901	65.386	96.837	81.877	99.913	82.965	57.117	48.770	43.574
Croatia* (2)	2.000	3.200	8.303	10.556	12.340	24.180	17.416	5.861	2.915	2.590
Cyprus*	122	229	60	52	231	456	182	725	3.796	2.559
Turkey	11.362	18.804	28.439	29.426	47.529	94.514	92.364	82.825	56.219	61.228
Total	66.547	79.134	102.188	136.871	141.977	219.063	192.927	146.528	111.700	109.951

* Revised figures; (1) estimate for 1995-1996 and approximations for 1997-1999; (2) estimate for 1995

Sources: International Police Cooperation Directorate Cyprus, Alien and Border Police Service of the Czech Republic, Croatian Ministry of Internal Affairs, Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality, Polish Border Guards, Slovakian Border Guards, Slovenian Border Guards, Turkish Ministry of Interior

Table 3: Irregular migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing in selected countries

Country of apprehension	Share of women (%)		
	2002	2003	2004
Azerbaijan	15	15	19,46
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1,03	2,61	n.a.
Bulgaria	29,53	23,14	24,11
Croatia	n.a.	12,9	11,96
Cyprus	5,66	3,68	2,54
Czech Republic	22,47	27,19	33,68
Estonia	n.a.	30,19	30,65
Hungary	14,29	24,93	28,58
Serbia-Montenegro	n.a.	n.a.	5,84
Slovenia	n.a.	12,56	11,07
Ukraine	17,39	17,05	14,8

Source: Futo and Jandl 2005

Table 4: Irregular migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing in selected countries

Country of apprehension	Share of Minors (%)			
	2002	2003	2004	2004
Armenia	n.a.	16,13	7,84	
Azerbaijan	n.a.	0,54	1,09	
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3,59	2,25	2,13	
Bulgaria	5,46	4,57	7,97	
Croatia	n.a.	7,14	12,29	
Cyprus	5,24	5	1,43	
Czech Republic	7,13	11,48	14,69	
Estonia	n.a.	11,67	7,46	
Serbia-Montenegro	n.a.	n.a.	9	
Slovenia	n.a.	7,33	10,34	
Ukraine	2,32	2,73	2,93	

Source: Futo and Jandl 2005

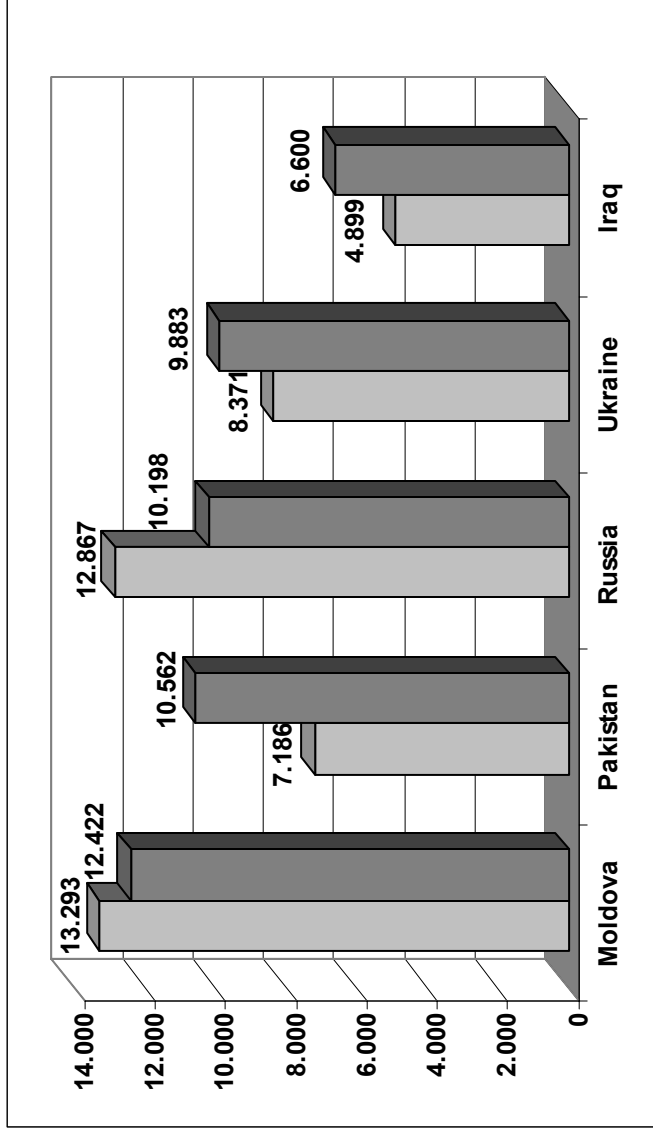
Table 5: Number of human smugglers apprehended in selected countries*

	2002	2003	2004
Armenia		6	12
Azerbaijan	8	11	6
Bosnia and Herzegovina		51	84
Bulgaria	126	131	166
Croatia	237	156	223
Czech Republic		584	680
Estonia		8	4
Hungary	496	519	660
Lithuania	6	30	26
Poland	172	221	500
Slovakia	228	198	322
Slovenia		744	606
Turkey	1.157	937	956
Ukraine	194	147	74
Total (14 states)	n.a.	3.737	4.307

* Including foreigners and citizens of own country

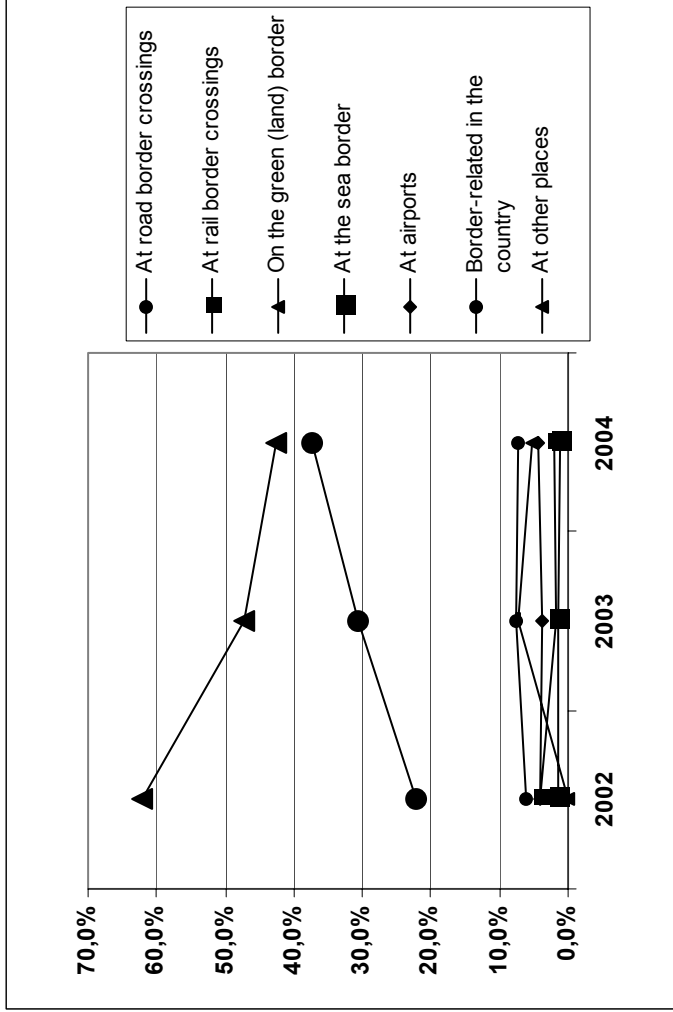
Source: Futo and Jandl 2005

Figure 1: Top 5 Source Countries of migrants apprehended for illegal border crossing in 19 CEE States in 2003 and 2004



Source: ICMPD

Figure 2: Place of border apprehensions in 9 countries* 2002-2004



* The figure is based on detailed apprehension data for the following 9 countries: Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania. For the Czech Republic, Poland and Romania: road border crossings include rail border crossings.

Source: ICMPD