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**IRREGULAR MIGRATION FROM EASTERN TO CENTRAL EUROPE:  
CAUSES, DETERMINANTS AND MODI OPERANDI**

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Since the year 2000, apprehensions of illegal migrants on the EU's Eastern borders have been dropping. By means of a stepwise regression analysis we test the determinants behind this phenomenon. We find little support for traditional policy measures, such as increasing the number of border guards, in terms of efficiency. In light of only ambiguous evidence that irregular immigration would be harmful to economic development, maybe it is time for policymakers to reconsider the optimal allocation of resources to border control?

The mobility of people between national borders is viewed in general as beneficial access to human capital and essential contribution to economic development. At the same time, *unwanted* migration often tends to be a problem for migrant sending as well as migrant receiving governments. Areas of concern typically include the fiscal costs of the destination country, whether or not immigrants take jobs from native workers, whether there is a brain drain in the source country, and whether exploitation, people smuggling and political motives are involved in the migration process. In the literature there is not much, or ambiguous, evidence that the former three have detrimental effects on economic development and welfare – even when considering the irregular aspects of migration.

What remains clear, however, is that European governments tend to address the irregular aspects of migration rather differently, reflecting their own political agendas as well as diverging interpretations of economic research. There are those governments with very liberal migration regimes, such as Sweden's, to those with considerably stricter, such as Belarus's, or even Finland's and Denmark's. Whatever the reason might be: fear of negative externalities such as crime, upholding of territorial sovereignty, protection of local labour markets, the struggle against traffickers and people smugglers, or a belief that immigration is harmful for sustainable economic development, governments seek to restrict unwanted immigration by various means. Investments in technology and border guards are increasing on both the national and supra-national level [1, 2]. The EU has intensified its control of external borders by means of guards, watchtowers, fences, concrete and state-of-the-art technology such as infrared scanning devices, motion detectors, and video surveillance [3]. Generally, of the various policy measures that governments have at their disposal, border enforcement in particular has been receiving more and more funding and, at the same time, a lot of criticism for not working as planned when it comes to preventing illegal entries. This has also been true for the American context, where [4] investigated whether the migration decisions of unauthorised Mexican immigrants to the USA were influenced by stronger US border enforcement and found that this was not the case. An increase in border enforcement can even induce an increase in the equilibrium flow of illegal immigrants [5]. Other researchers have argued that efforts to control illegal immigration in sectors where migrants traditionally find employment may also trigger the formation of networks supporting clandestine foreign workers in new locations and occupations where the probability of detection is relatively lower [6]. As for people smuggling, [7] found that the effect of border enforcement on illegal markets was small. Even though enforcement along the Mexican–US border had tripled during the period studied, the price of smuggling services had increased by at most 30%.

As for the European Union, there is a clear trend according to which the number of recorded border apprehensions by agencies rose sharply for the region during the 1990–ies, reached a peak in the year 2000, and has since then been dropping [8]. An array of hypotheses has been presented trying to explain the rationale behind this phenomenon. According to the ICMPD, in some cases the decrease is thought to be the result of declining migration pressures in the source countries. *Development* is thought to have played a role, where the progressive stabilisation of most Post–Soviet states could have reduced migration pressures from these areas. In other cases it has been suggested that the achievement of *improved border management* and other migration policy instruments throughout the region, and also in third countries such as Ukraine, could have lowered the incentives for migrants to enter the EU illegally. Another explanation could be that the *definition* of "illegal border crossings" has simply changed. The incorporation of the new member states into the European Union in 2004 has undoubtedly led to a large-scale normalisation of what was earlier termed illegal immigration from these areas [9].

In the last couple of years there has also been an increasing trend to shift from illegal crossings between border checkpoints to illegal crossings *at* border checkpoints [8]. Furthermore, contemporary people smuggling tends to be run by professional and highly organised networks, operating on an international basis [10–12]. With the tightening of border controls, the use of *people smugglers* and facilitators has increased [13]. Overall, people smuggling networks are very skilled at adapting their modus operandi in response to changed conditions [9, 14].

In this article we focus on irregular migration from four NIS countries: Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova, to the countries of Central Europe. We set out to test the abovementioned hypotheses by ICMPD, as well as a few complementary ones, about whether and why the number of recorded border apprehensions has been dropping since the year 2000. More specifically, we examine the importance of the following variables: The number of apprehended people smugglers, the number of employed border guards, the border authority's budget, the GDP per capita growth (in real terms) of the respective NIS country, the impact of Central Europe's EU accession in 2004, the impact of implementing the Schengen treaty in 2007, the importance of readmission agreements that the receiving countries have signed with the sending countries, the number of illegal immigrants that have been removed earlier by respective na-

tionality and state ('deterrence effect'), and the number of visas issued to respective nationality by each state.

Our primary data set comes from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development's (ICMPD) yearbooks on illegal migration, published since 2000 (i.e. [8, 9] and the rest). This data was complemented with statistics from individual border agencies, acquired through correspondence or official reports published on the Internet, in order to simplify presumptions and adjust for national definitions. For example: The dependent variable, the number of illegal immigrants apprehended, by NIS citizenship, is defined as those migrants caught on the border when trying to enter, not within the country itself.

The analysis was carried out by means of a stepwise regression with backward elimination.

Due to data limitations, only Poland and the Czech Republic could in the end be used as migrant receiving countries. The following table sums the results from the regression, where a positive sign indicates statistical significance on the 0,05 level:

Table – 1: Statistical significance

Country / border violators	Readmission agreement	Border Police	Smugglers	GDP per capita growth (annual %)	EU accession	Schengen accession	Number of removed persons	Visas issued
Czech Republic, Ukrainians	+							
Poland, Ukrainians			+	+	+	+	+	
Poland, Belarussians			+				+	
Czech Republic, Russians		+	+	+				+
Poland, Russians						+		
Poland, Moldovans						+	+	
Czech Republic, Moldovans				+	+			

As can be seen from table 1–1, in the seven combinations of countries/apprehended nationalities, the variables smugglers, annual GDP per capita growth, Schengen accession and number of removed persons each appear three times. Judging by the signs and size of their  $\beta$  coefficients, EU and Schengen accession seem to have had a radical impact on border apprehensions. For example, the strengthening of the external Schengen border has resulted in less recorded apprehensions. What is more interesting is that the number of removed persons in all three cases shows a positive relationship with the dependent variable. The possibility exists, however, that those people removed were the same ones that were arrested. As for GDP per capita growth in the source countries, this seems to have resulted in less border apprehensions in the destinations. Another observation is that the more people smugglers caught, the fewer migrants were also apprehended. To conclude, we find support for some of ICMPD's hypotheses, but not necessarily for all of them. For example, an increased number of border guards seems to have reduced apprehensions only of Russians, and only in the Czech Republic. This lends support to the body of research showing that border enforcement might be costly and inefficient, especially since the negative effects that irregular migrants have on economic development and welfare are ambiguous.

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