

At the fringes of Europe: transit migration in Ukraine and Turkey

Synopsis

Focusing on migrants and refugees, civil society organizations and government agencies, this study aims to explore the interrelation between transitory movements, refugees and legal restrictions, in order to identify the conditions that determine transit migration.

Background

Migrants and refugees transiting Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkan, South East Europe and Northern Africa, often illegally, on their way to EU territory have become a major policy concern. Simultaneously, the conditions of migrants stranded in transit countries, or losing their lives in desperate attempts to depart from such countries raise serious human rights concerns. For various reasons transit migrants—even whilst upholding the aspiration if not myth to move on - often turn out to be in de-facto immigrants. Thus, the validity of the concept of transit migration is not always given. Nevertheless, EU policy concerns are very real. As a consequence, the EU and its neighbours – the latter often responding to EU policy pressure – aim to enhance immigration controls and either stop transit migrants, or, once they managed to enter EU territory return them to the transit country.

The externalisation of controls does to a large extent target transit migrants. On the other hand, migrants are increasingly jeopardising their lives by choosing dangerous deviations to reach their final destination. For a number of reasons, the issue is as politicized as it is blurred and categories such as: forced migration, illegal migration, smuggling, trafficking and immigration, are often confused.

Aims and objectives

The COMPAS programme on the 'Migration-Asylum Nexus' aims to clarify the concept of transit migration, challenge present misinterpretations, political bias and methodological shortcomings and instead offer an evidence-based approach. Sitting within this programme, this particular project focuses on the expansion of the European migration regime, from core countries to their immediate neighbours, thereby prolonging the 'New Asylum paradigm' thread. This project aims to investigate six key areas:

- (1) Social, economic and political conditions that encourage or force migrants to leave their first country of destination and move on, or that prevent them from reaching their final destination, specifically, interactions between migration controls and immigrants' strategies.
- (2) Decision-making processes in course of complex migration trajectories, changing aims and directions and the particular timing of decision making.

Cont.:

- (4) Historical links, migration networks and systems, in particular overlapping systems that link together previously separate sub-systems and facilitate transit migration.
- (5) Living and working conditions; interaction with host society, citizens and agencies; survival strategies in transit countries, and potential social and human rights.
- (6) The nexus between transit migration and asylum, as well as between irregular migration, smuggling and trafficking.
- (7) The expansion of the EU asylum and migration regime, key actors and policy processes, and the implementation and enforcement of advanced migration control policies, including practices of detention and deportation in transit countries.

Methods

This is a multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary case study based on mixed methodologies. Overall the approach will be qualitative, beyond literature and document survey, expert interviews and in-depth semi-focused narrative interviews with migrants will be conducted. Field work shall be conducted in at least four countries, two transit countries, Ukraine and Turkey, and two receiving countries, Sweden and Germany.

The following methods will be used during the project:

- (1) Expert interviews in Ukraine and in Turkey.
- (2) Interviews with relevant NGOs, dealing with potential transit migrants, refugees and other migrants.
- (3) Interviews with government agencies on policy making and enforcement.
- (4) Analysis of database from the Migration Research Programme at Koc University, Istanbul, and secondary analysis on interviews with African migrants identified as transit migrants.
- (5) Interviews with migrants in Ukraine - self-identified as transit migrants.
- (6) Interviews with successful transit migrants in their countries of final destination, namely Sweden (Iranians) and possibly Germany (Africans).

Work in progress

Düvell, Franck (forthcoming, 2006). At the Fringe of Europe: Transit Migration in the EU's New Immediate Neighbourhood. Working Paper. Oxford: COMPAS

Düvell, Franck (2006). Ukraine – Europe's Mexico? Country Profile. Oxford: COMPAS.

Düvell, Franck (2006). Questioning Conventional Migration Concepts: The Case of Transit Migration. Paper presented to workshop on 'Gaps and Blindspots of Migration Research', 25/6/2006, Central European University, Budapest.

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Timetable: A 'State of the Art' work will be produced in the autumn of 2006; One year of fieldwork will start September 2006; Analysis, Reports, Publications will begin in October 2007.

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