

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat: Mapping and documenting migratory journeys and experiences



Dr Vicki Squire
Dr Angeliki Dimitriadi
Dr Maria Pisani
Dr Dallal Stevens
Professor Nick Vaughan-Williams
Dr Nina Perkowski
Dr Vasiliki Touhouliotis

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

- **Replace deterrent border control policies with interventions that address the diverse causes of irregular migration:** Our findings challenge the assumption that restrictive measures are effective deterrents of irregular migration, and affirm the need to address diverse migratory causes along migratory routes. We therefore propose that a deterrent agenda is replaced by an approach that effectively addresses ‘push factors’ across source, neighbouring, and transit regions, while respecting the rights of those who are compelled to escape unsustainable living conditions.
- **Revise migration and protection categories to reflect the multiple reasons that people are on the move:** Our findings indicate that current protection mechanisms do not reflect the diverse forms of violence and conflict that people seek to escape; the multiplicity of sites that people flee; and the fragmented and fluid journeys involved. We therefore propose that the categories of ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration are rejected in favour of diversified categories that are based on a deeper appreciation of international refugee and human rights law, and that are more reflective of the realities of current migratory journeys and experiences.
- **Open safe and legal routes for migration:** Our findings demonstrate that European practices of border management and search and rescue not only fail to address the vulnerabilities of people on the move in precarious situations, but often also intensify these through exposing people to violence *en route* by various authorities as well as by some facilitators of irregular migration. We therefore stress the importance of opening multiple safe and legal routes to the EU.
- **Invest in reception facilities and halt policies that violate rights:** Our findings expose a failure to provide adequate reception conditions at arrival points across the EU, as well as differentiated treatment and delays in the processing of asylum claims. Moreover, those unable to leave Istanbul following the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement faced inadequate conditions and severe workplace exploitation. We therefore propose investment in reception facilities and asylum processing, as well as a commitment to policies that ensure human rights and international protection obligations are met in transit and on return, as well as on arrival to the EU.
- **Improve rights-oriented information campaigns:** Our findings indicate that the level of knowledge about migratory routes differs widely across different arrival sites. Regardless of this, new arrivals have little understanding and information on procedural processes and reception conditions either before or after entering the EU. We therefore propose the development of rights-oriented information campaigns that mobilise social networks in order to offer clear and accurate information on admission and asylum processes across transit and arrival sites.

Project Overview

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Current policy interventions urgently need assessing in light of unprecedented levels of migration and a catastrophic increase in deaths across the Mediterranean Sea. The 2015 European Agenda on Migration and subsequent measures such as the European relocation system, the ‘hotspot’ approach, the EU-Turkey Statement, and Valletta Plan regional development initiatives address the situation by preventing or deterring entrance, sharing the distribution of arrivals across the European Union, and facilitating returns. Yet whether these policies prevent the tragedy of border deaths and create a genuinely just and humane approach based on a commitment to the protection of rights is highly questionable. In a context following the United Nations New York Declaration in September 2016, the European Agenda needs to be assessed as to whether it is fit for purpose to save lives, protect rights, and share responsibility for people moving in precarious situations. How effective are the policies associated with this Agenda at addressing contemporary migratory dynamics? To what extent are such policies able to address the humanitarian challenges that the recent ‘crisis’ involves? And how might policies be developed most effectively in order to address the tensions and tragedies that characterise the current situation?

PROJECT FOCUS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat seeks to address these questions by assessing the impact of policy interventions on those that they affect most directly: refugees and migrants themselves. Critically, it addresses people who have undertaken the precarious journey toward Europe as those who are best placed to provide insight both into the challenges that policy interventions need to address, as well as into ways in which policies can be renewed to address such challenges. By examining the journeys, experiences, understandings and expectations or demands of people on the move, the project thus produces a timely and robust evidence base as grounds for informing policy developments. It asks:

- How do refugees and migrants negotiate their journeys? What understanding do they have of current policies? How do they narrate or express their expectations and experiences of movement and arrival?

- How are routes and methods of travel affected by policy developments? What legal and social challenges arise in the context of current policies? In what ways might policy engage migration more effectively?

The project addresses these questions across different geographical sites and through the lens of different migratory routes, and seeks to pay attention to the experiences of diverse groups and individuals.

METHODOLOGY

Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat has conducted over 250 in-depth qualitative interviews with migrants and refugees, in two phases. This briefing paper is based on Phase 2 of research, which involved 121 in-depth qualitative interviews with a total of 131 participants, carried out during May-June 2016 in Athens, Berlin, Istanbul and Rome. As reception points within the EU, Athens, Berlin and Rome are diverse sites both in terms of the routes through which people arrive as well as in terms of the localised reception policies that have an impact on arrival experiences. While many of the people we interviewed aimed to pass through Rome and the majority aimed to pass through Athens to other sites across Europe, the majority of those that we interviewed in Berlin saw this as their destination. Arrivals to Rome had all passed through the Central route, mainly via Libya, while arrivals to Athens and Berlin had passed via the Eastern route via Turkey. By focusing on these diverse arrival sites, the research thus explores migratory journeys and experiences along both the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes. In addition, analysis of the journeys and experiences of those considering the possibility of travelling from the pre-arrival site of Istanbul facilitates consideration of policy effects beyond the EU. While there are overlapping migratory dynamics across these four sites, each also represents a unique migratory site and is analysed as such to provide a comparative perspective on challenges arising for the European Agenda on Migration as well as across the Mediterranean region more widely.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ON-GOING RESEARCH

This briefing paper provides an overview of research findings across each of the four sites in Phase 2, and proposes policy suggestions on the basis of the analysis to date. The research findings provide rich insights into migratory journeys and experiences across the four

sites, and shed light on policy effects by addressing the knowledge and expectations that inform refugee and migrant decision-making. The analysis is developed from the findings in Phase 1, which are available on the project website: warwick.ac.uk/crossingthemed. In Phase 2 we provide insight into the ways that migratory dynamics change over time in relation to shifting policy developments, and we explore the negotiation of policies by those migrating through highlighting contested understandings of the migratory journey. This briefing will be supplemented by a report and further events in 2017.

ISTANBUL– TURKEY

CONTEXT

- With a population of 81 million, including temporary residents, Turkey shifted post-2010 from a country of emigration to a country of positive net migration. Istanbul hosts 19% of the country's population, and is an important migratory destination and transit point.
- The first Syrian refugees arrived in 2011. In 2014, Turkey became the world's largest refugee host country. As of 30 June 2016, UNHCR reports 2,733,044 Syrians registered in Turkey, out of whom 256,300 were hosted in refugee camps, and 2,476,744 were residing in host communities.
- Turkey retains a geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, denying refugees from non-European countries the possibility of long-term legal protection in Turkey.
- In 2013, Turkey adopted the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), establishing a legal framework for asylum. However, the geographical limitations remain in place. The new law also established the Director General of Migration Management (DGMM), the designated agency responsible for the registration of asylum seekers and status decisions. In October, 2014, the Temporary Protection Regime (TPR) was established under the LFIP, providing a legal framework and procedure for the reception and registration of Syrian nationals and stateless persons seeking "temporary protection" in Turkey.
- The EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan adopted on 29 November 2015 required Turkey to open its labour market to Syrians under temporary protection (Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection), to introduce new visa

requirements for Syrians and other nationalities, to enhance security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and to improve information sharing. In return the EU committed 3 billion Euros towards a Facility for Refugees in Turkey.

- On the 7th March 2016, Turkey agreed to the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece and to accept all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters. Operations to dismantle smuggling operations were also stepped up. Implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement 1 for 1 return policy (where the EU agreed to resettle 1 Syrian refugee for each Syrian returned to Turkey from the islands following irregular entrance) began on 18th March 2016.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- Data collection commenced following the EU-Turkey agreement. This influenced recruitment procedures: smugglers were no longer operating openly in the streets, as such, refugees and migrants were not easy to access. Recruitment was therefore conducted through local contacts (NGOs and personal connections).
- 30 interviews were conducted with a total of 30 participants, including 17 Syrians, 8 Afghans, and 5 Iraqis. Interviewees were 18 to 63 years old, with the majority being between 18 and 35. The sample included 9 women. Participants had arrived in Turkey since 2011, with the majority having arrived since 2014.
- Interviews took place in a range of neighbourhoods, from the more affluent central districts to working class neighbourhoods on the outskirts of the city. This reflects the different spaces in which people who aspired to reach Europe lived in, worked in, and passed through. Across these diverse neighbourhoods, interviews were concentrated in two kinds of sites: in public spaces, such as cafes, and in private rented apartments, some of which housed up to 26 individuals.

KEY FINDINGS

- The protracted war in Syria, closed borders and visa restrictions all contribute to **highly fragmented journeys** for participants who we interviewed. For some Turkey initially offered temporary shelter, for others it was a point of

transit. Over time the situation for many had become more desperate, with their experiences compounded by a sense of hopelessness, and no durable solution. For many, the dispersal of family members along with the lack of possibility for reunification or meeting due to visa restrictions was a source of deep distress.

- Participants across nationalities highlighted the significance of **barriers to accessing protection**. Findings highlight a lack of information and transparency, long delays, opportunity costs (loss of wages), and lack of trust in the authorities as reasons for failed or failure to access to protection. Afghani nationals specifically highlighted the lack of protection available to them.
- Even those registering for temporary protection claim that rights do not translate on the ground. Regardless of status, access to healthcare is generally poor, housing is expensive and participants report **widespread discrimination in work and services**. For non-Syrians a lease contract is required for registering for asylum – often leading to homelessness. Participants widely report exploitation and poor working conditions – largely in textile factories within the city.
- **Plans to travel have been put on hold** for various reasons by the majority of participants, including: all legal options having been exhausted; knowledge of poor conditions in Greece and closed borders as reason for delay; fear of travel by boat; depleted funds and massive increase in smugglers fees; perception of relocation as lengthy and inaccessible. Whilst the majority of participants expressed a desire to leave Turkey, they had largely given up hope of attempting any crossing or finding a legal avenue for travel in the short-term.

ATHENS – GREECE

CONTEXT

- The de facto humanitarian corridor of 2015 through the Western Balkans came to an official close on March 9th 2016. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia announced in early January it would allow only Syrians with valid travel documents, Eritreans and Iraqis to cross. When Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia introduced tight restrictions in March, the route became effectively impassable.

- This led to 61,096 arrivals being stranded in Greece. On October 5th 2016, the Greek government reported the number of migrants in Greece to be 60,105. A total 8,699 are sheltered in camps in Attiki and 2,388 in informal camps in Athens.
- In line with the European Agenda on Migration, between February and March of 2016 four hotspots were set up on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos and lastly, Kos. Roughly 15,000 are currently located in the hotspots on the islands, having arrived since March 20th, after the EU-Turkey Statement 1 for 1 return policy was put into action on 18th March (see Istanbul case context for further details). Since the EU-Turkey Statement, Greece is called to process individualised claims and return those who either did not apply for asylum or whose claims are found inadmissible or manifestly unfounded to Turkey.
- In partnership with NGOs and local municipalities, UNHCR set up an accommodation scheme for those participating in the relocation program. Rented apartments are offered to recipients of international protection until their departure to another EU Member State.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- A total of 30 interviews took place, with 10 Afghans, 19 Syrians and 1 Iraqi. Participants were between 17 and 56 years old, with the majority being between 25 and 35. The sample included 9 women. Most participants had arrived in Greece in February or March 2016, with one having arrived in August 2015.
- Interviews took place in the old airport of Eliniko, which is an unofficial 'hosting' space for roughly 2,500 migrants mainly from Afghanistan; at the informal camp in Pireus (before it was shut down in late July 2016); at the City Plaza Hotel near Victoria Square (squatted by activists and refugees); as well as at a UNHCR rented apartment for participants in the relocation scheme. The range of sites enabled diverse feedback from participants, since many had spent weeks or months moving between them (eg. From Pireus, to Eliniko, to City Plaza Hotel).

KEY FINDINGS

- Participants reported **limited access to official information** regarding documents and asylum

procedure on arrival. Participants highlighted the role of civil society in supplementing the absence of official information on arrival.

- The closure of the Western Balkan route transformed Greece **from a transit into a place of strandedness**. This is evident in experiences of increased delays in registration, asylum application processing, and the relocation mechanism.
- Many Syrian nationals in particular have been forced to undertake the dangerous journey to Europe due to **significant delays in family reunification** through the embassies but also in the asylum processing in EU states.
- Many who could have utilised the **legal pathways** from Greece to other EU Member States either by applying for family reunification or relocation are not able to do so, because of significant delays. Moreover, many participants highlighted how residence policies across EU states led to family reunification being too slow as a legal pathway.
- Participants highlighted the problems of the **differentiated treatment of nationalities**, where Syrians are prioritised for registration and the issuing of documents, while Afghans, Iranians and other nationalities face delays on registration and asylum processing. The failure of the European relocation mechanism to apply in many cases was deemed unfair by many non-Syrian participants.
- **Limited reception capacities** in Athens were highlighted by all participants as a critical challenge, particularly given the extreme temperatures during summer (and impending winter) months. The conditions for participants located in informal camps are sub-standard, and alternative options for accommodation, subsistence, and medical support are limited.

BERLIN – GERMANY

CONTEXT

- From 2014 onwards, asylum applications in Germany rose due to migration along the so-called 'Balkan corridor'. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees reports that Germany received 173,000 asylum applicants in 2014, 442,000 in 2015 and 643,000 between January and September 2016. Germany is a destination country for many and formed a key arrival and reception site.

- Applicants are divided evenly between 16 federal states and sent to accommodation facilities and emergency housing throughout Germany, including Berlin. Formal registration can take several months. Asylum seekers are entitled to benefits but only in the town or district to which they are sent. They require permission to move elsewhere.
- Under German Law, there are five possible outcomes for an asylum applicant: constitutional asylum (political persecution by state actors); refugee status under the Refugee Convention; other forms of protection, such as subsidiary protection or ‘*Duldung*’ (tolerated stay) that prevent removal (*Abschiebungsverbot*); removal on safe third country/Dublin Regulation grounds; and refusal.
- In 2015, the vast majority of Syrians, Eritreans and Iraqis were granted full refugee status. Following further asylum restrictions in 2016 (Asylum Package II), applicants are increasingly granted subsidiary protection (1 + 2 years) with a restriction on family reunification for 2 years.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- In June 2016, 31 interviews were conducted with a total of 34 participants, including 16 Syrians, 8 Afghans, 5 Iraqis, 3 Palestinians from Syria, and 2 Iranians. Participants were 16 to 63 years old, with the majority being between 20 and 30. The sample included 5 women.
- All participants had passed through Greece between May 2015 and February 2016, prior to enforcement of the EU-Turkey Statement. Most had travelled along the Eastern Mediterranean and then across the Western Balkan route, arriving in Germany after October 2015.
- Interviews in Berlin were carried out in three sites housing new arrivals: an initial reception centre and two emergency accommodation facilities.
- All participants were in the asylum process and mostly awaiting the asylum hearing. In December 2015, personal interviews replaced paper decisions, slowing down the asylum process. The few granted residence permits were unable to find housing in Berlin due to lack of available accommodation, forcing them to remain in the facility.

KEY FINDINGS

- Journeys were very varied. Many participants faced **ill-treatment by smugglers but also by some officials and police**; others travelled from Greece to Germany without significant issues. There were differing accounts of the availability and support of NGOs, civil society and the public on the journey.
- **EU rules on fingerprinting were not followed in transit EU countries**: these were largely ignored, applied in an *ad hoc* manner, or applied differentially without clear pattern. Evidence of misinformation about the purpose of fingerprinting, with many fingerprinted in Greece being told they were ‘criminal fingerprints’ with no effect on asylum claims.
- Participants gave evidence of **enduring trauma and growing desperation** (the most serious being 1 attempted suicide and 1 miscarriage) due to: poor reception conditions, including minimal privacy, lack of showers and insufficient toilets; use of facilities intended to be temporary housing of 3-4 nights being extended to several months; slow, bureaucratic asylum procedures in Berlin; lack of information generally; and delayed family reunification.
- **Poor administration and treatment** by security and other staff at LAgeSo (Landesamt für Gesundheit und Soziales – [State Office of Health and Welfare], responsible for registering asylum registrations and related requests) was a widespread concern for participants. Berlin was repeatedly identified by participants as providing poor reception and processing facilities. Examples of this include cases of passports being removed (e.g. by the police) with potential serious consequences for the applicant.
- Participants stress a **sense of unfairness** due to what are perceived to be arbitrary or political policy changes (e.g. a lack of clarity on timings of the granting of status, with more recent arrivals granted permission to remain before others); and discrimination between nationalities with Syrians being treated more favourably (Afghans frequently expressed this concern).

CONTEXT

- Despite a shift of focus to the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2015, the on-going strategic importance of the Central Mediterranean route has recently been emphasised by the EU Council, while United Against Racism recently called it the ‘most dangerous route in the world’ with IOM reporting 3,643 deaths in 2016 on 1 November 2016.
- The central route is the focus of intensified border security and anti-smuggling measures. For example, Frontex Joint Operation Triton, launched in November 2014, aims to ‘control borders and save lives’ on the route, and since June 2015 Operation *Sophia*, formerly EUNAVFOR MED Task Force, has targeted traffickers and smugglers.
- Between January and May 2016 UNHCR reports 47,851 ‘irregular’ arrivals in Italy by boat 70% of whom were from West African countries and the Horn of Africa.
- Italy, alongside Greece, was the first EU Member State to introduce the new ‘hotspot’ approach announced as part of European Agenda on Migration in May 2015.
- Currently there is no uniform reception system in Italy. A two-tier system exists, involving Regional Hubs and emergency reception centres (CAS), managed by the Ministry of Interior and Prefectures, alongside reception facilities provided by the System for Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), managed by local municipalities. Emergency centres and hotspots further diversify the reception environment in Italy.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH

- In May and June 2016, 30 interviews were conducted in Rome, a major urban hub in the Lazio region of Italy. A total of 37 participants of 14 nationalities were interviewed, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of migratory dynamics across the central route.
- All participants arrived ‘irregularly’ by boat between September 2015 and June 2016. The age of the sample ranges between 17 to 39 years, and includes 6 women.
- Interviews took place at two sites: an emergency accommodation facility (CAS) and around the

informal street camp ‘Baobab’. Until its eviction in October 2016, ‘Baobab’ was a key contact point for those outside the reception system and seeking to travel to other EU countries. Residents of the CAS had entered the Italian asylum system and were awaiting their hearing.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Reasons for leaving countries of origin are multi-faceted, but reveal systemic exposure to various forms of violence.** This includes political violence (e.g. Boko Haram) and gendered violence (e.g. rape, FGM), as well as situations where there is no access to basic protection and rights.
- The idea of a single, linear, migratory ‘route’ across the central Mediterranean is a misnomer; **journeys are fragmented, involve multiple transit countries, and the destination is often unclear.** Many journeys are long and include years of work and often forced labour, imprisonment, and kidnapping. Physical abuse and psychological distress are endemic. Italy is rarely perceived as an ultimate destination *en route*.
- Deterrent border security measures miss their target: **prior knowledge about military operations in the Mediterranean region, the ‘hotspot’ approach, and deportation is scarce;** misinformation contributes to a lack of awareness of conditions and border closures.
- The ‘success’ of the hotspot approach has been asymmetric: the EU Council claims that 99% of arrivals have been identified, fingerprinted, and registered, yet access to information and protection is systematically denied and **fingerprints are often obtained by coercion or force.**
- Informal settlements in Rome demonstrate the inadequacies of both the hotspot and relocation approach at EU level as well as the national response. Some participants were stranded due to the Dublin Convention, and **basic access to information and support was largely dependent upon NGO and volunteer activities.**
- Participants **demand more information and opportunities to integrate** – from access to education to the ‘right to stroll’ in public space.

RESEARCH TEAM

Principal Investigator



Dr Vicki Squire (Warwick) is Reader of International Security at the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick. She is author of *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum* (2009), *The Contested Politics of Mobility* (2011), and *Post/Humanitarian Border*

Politics between Mexico and the US: People, Places, Things (2015). Dr Squire is currently Leverhulme Research Fellow on the project *Human Dignity and Biophysical Violence: Migrant Deaths across the Mediterranean Sea*, as well as PI on *Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat*. She tweets @vidkowiaksquire

Co-Investigators



Dr Angeliki Dimitriadi (Athens) is Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP). Her research focuses on irregular transit migration and EU policies on migration and asylum. She has published articles in refereed journals, and authored a book on

“Transit migration to Greece from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan”. She regularly comments in the international and Greek media on current migration issues.



Dr Maria Pisani (Malta) is a Maltese academic, practitioner and activist. She is the co-founder and director of Integra Foundation, Malta. Maria is a lecturer with the Department of Youth and Community Studies, University of Malta. She also coordinates the Centre for Critical Migration Studies with The Critical Institute. Dr Pisani has published extensively in international journals and contributed to edited texts. She is an Editorial Board Member on the *International Journal Disability and the Global South* and the *Journal of International Humanitarian Action*. Dr Pisani combines this work with her interest in critical pedagogy and engaging praxis as a project of social transformation towards social justice.

Dr Dallal Stevens (Warwick) is Reader of Law (Reader) at the University of Warwick. Her expertise is in the fields of refugee and asylum law, on which she has researched and taught for many years. Dr Stevens has written widely on asylum law and policy in the UK, EU and Middle East. Much of her work has revolved around the construction of the asylum seeker within a contemporary perspective, although she has also examined the plight of the



refugee in a historical context. Dr Stevens is regularly asked to undertake media and other public engagements on refugee and asylum issues.



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

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

Researchers



Dr Nina Perkowski (Warwick) is the lead researcher on the *Crossing the Mediterranean by Boat* project. She is based in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, and co-coordinates the ESRC's wider Mediterranean Migration

Research Programme. Meanwhile, she is in the final stages of completing her PhD in Politics at the University of Edinburgh. In her doctoral work, she explores the relationships between humanitarianism, human rights, and security in contemporary EU border governance, with a focus on Frontex. She tweets @ninaperkowski.



Dr Vasiliki Touhouliotis received her PhD in Anthropology from The New School for Social Research in New York City. Her dissertation research on cluster bombs and the temporality of war in South Lebanon has been supported by the National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren

Foundation and the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation. Her research interests revolve around war as a form of global governance. She joined the “Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat” project to learn more about regimes of mobility and their relationship to war. Currently, she is part-time faculty at Eugene Lang College and Hunter College in New York City.