

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

BELGIUM

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Instructions:

Reflecting on your deskwork and fieldwork, please provide a brief snapshot (1 – 3 pages in total) of the overall picture of irregular migration data in your country. For each question, please address stocks, flows and indicators (or indicate N/A).

Questions:

1. What is your overall assessment of the quality of irregular migration data in your country?

The quality of irregular migration data in Belgium has certain limitations and concerns that need to be addressed. The data is publicly available and electronically accessible without the need for special permissions, which is a positive aspect. However, there is limited information available regarding the data sources, collection methods, and overall data quality. This lack of documentation can make it challenging to assess the reliability and accuracy of the data.

Additionally, there are concerns about the validity and reliability of the data. It appears that the data may be selective and contain internal contradictions, which raises doubts about its accuracy. To enhance the credibility of the data, addressing these issues is crucial. Furthermore, the study primarily presents the data without providing a clear methodology for analysis. A well-documented methodology is essential for understanding how the data was collected and analysed.

The study relies on a single data source, which can be a limitation. Using data from multiple sources can help validate findings and improve data quality. Lastly, there is an acknowledgment of uncertainty in the data, with the authors noting that the central estimate may change due to ongoing tests. It would be beneficial to provide a range of estimates to account for this uncertainty.

In summary, while irregular migration data in Belgium is accessible, it appears to have significant limitations in terms of documentation, validity, reliability, and methodology. Addressing these issues and incorporating data from multiple sources could improve the overall quality and credibility of the data.

2. How is irregular migration data generally used in policy making?

Information and Prevention Campaigns: Belgium recognizes the importance of raising awareness about the risks and consequences of irregular migration. It is used to inform dissuasion campaigns aimed at discouraging irregular migration and combating false rumours. Information and prevention campaigns are organized to discourage individuals

from engaging in irregular migration at specific nationalities. These campaigns aim to inform potential migrants about the dangers and difficulties they may face, as well as legal avenues for migration.

Policy Formulation: Irregular migration data provides policymakers with crucial insights into the scale, trends, and characteristics. This data is used to develop policies, update legislation and strategies to address diverse problematics such as for example related to human trafficking and smuggling. For instance, in 2022 a special parliamentary commission was established to assess the current fight against human trafficking and smuggling, and to evaluate the applicable legal provisions. The data is used to inform the development of tools

Border Control: The data assists in the management and enhancement of border control measures. The data is used to strengthen operational capacity in combating irregular migration and controlling external borders. It also informs the development of digital border management systems such as the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS).

Asylum and Refugee Policy: Belgium uses irregular migration data to make informed decisions about asylum seekers and refugees. The data is used to guide the development of projects aimed at providing support to irregular migrants. For example, Fedasil initiated small-scale Shelter and Orientation projects for homeless migrants who have been living in an irregular situation for a prolonged period.

Resource Allocation: Policymakers rely on irregular migration data to allocate resources efficiently. This includes determining the need for detention facilities, legal support services, repatriation programs, and other resources aimed at addressing irregular migration issues. For instance, the data can inform decision on the allocation of funds for expanding reception capacity, such as the €200 million allocated by the European Commission to Belgium to support the Belgian reception network. The data can also guide the recruitment and deployment of additional staff to manage the influx of migrants. For example, the Council of Ministers approved an additional budget to recruit, train, and deploy additional staff members in 2023. Moreover, the data can inform decisions on the allocation of resources for the development of new reception centers and the expansion of existing ones

International Cooperation: Belgium collaborates with other countries and international organizations on addressing transnational migration issues. The data can inform bilateral and multilateral dialogues and agreements aimed at managing migration. The data can also guide the development of joint projects with partner countries. Moreover, the data can inform the participation in international initiatives aimed at combating human trafficking. For example, Belgian actors have responded to the challenge of transnational criminal networks engaged in human trafficking by encouraging the creation of and participation in Operational Task Forces to better coordinate efforts with European partners.

Evaluation and Adjustment: the data can inform the evaluation of existing legislation, policies and make adjustments as needed based on the findings, including the effectiveness of information and prevention campaigns, tools and trainings can be evaluated and adjusted based on the data on irregular migration.

3. How did you go about the data collection process?

I collected data for Belgium through desk research, focusing on sources such as the EMN Annual reports on migration and asylum, IOM Data portal, OECD international migration outlooks, and CGRS stats. These sources allowed me to extract relevant information about the most significant political and legislative developments and debates in Belgium, as well as estimates and indicators of irregular migrants within the country.

4. Were there any specific difficulties you experienced during this process? How did you address them?

During the data collection process, several challenges emerged. The absence of range information made it difficult to assess the precision of estimates, and much of the data was descriptive rather than quantitative, limiting the availability of specific numerical figures. Inconsistent reporting of data collection methods raised concerns about data reliability, and the scarcity of data before 2016 hindered the analysis of long-term trends. Furthermore, some sources contained duplicated or contradictory information, complicating the data reconciliation process. To navigate these issues, I adopted a cautious and rigorous approach, focusing on the most reliable sources, cross-referencing data from multiple sources, using qualitative analysis when necessary, and emphasizing the most recent and comprehensive data available while being mindful of trends before 2016.

5. What were the main gaps in the evidence base (i.e., unmet user needs) that emerged during your data collection process?

During the data collection process, several notable gaps in the evidence base became apparent. These included a lack of historical data before 2016, limiting the analysis of long-term trends. Additionally, the data often lacked detailed demographic breakdowns, such as age, gender, or nationality, which could have provided a more nuanced understanding of irregular migration patterns. The absence of range information in many sources posed challenges in assessing the precision of estimates and understanding uncertainty. Inconsistent and non-transparent data collection methodologies further complicated the reliability and comparability of data across sources. Finally, there was a need for more comprehensive and up-to-date data on the outcomes of irregular migration, including repatriation rates and the impact of policy interventions.

6. Were there any meetings with producers or users of irregular migration estimates and indicators that you were unable to secure, but sense that endeavouring to do so in future may be worthwhile? If so, please provide contact information for this person/entity and explain why you think such detail would be helpful. NO

7. Please point to an example of good practice estimating irregular migration and/or making use of estimates of irregular migration in policy-making that you came across. Why did you select this example? You can answer the question about good practice in estimating irregular migration and using these estimates in policy-making as follows:

An example of good practice in estimating irregular migration and utilizing these estimates in policy-making that I came across is the website of the Belgian Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS). The CGRS website presents figures from 2018 in a

clear and user-friendly manner, providing not only statistical data but also essential background information and a policymaking perspective. The website allows users to download a PDF document containing comprehensive categories and subcategories related to irregular migration, ensuring that the information is easily accessible and well-organized. However, one aspect that could be improved is the presentation of data in terms of percentages, as it may not provide the accuracy required for certain policy exercises. Nevertheless, the CGRS website serves as a valuable example due to its transparency, accessibility, and the depth of information it provides, making it a useful resource for policymakers and researchers in the field of irregular migration.