

MirreM Data Collection – Country Context

NETHERLANDS

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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 Dutch government, through the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), is systematically collecting and compiling data on indicators on the enforcement of migration legislation that is then transmitted to Eurostat. It has also recently¹ provided a [national quality report](#) outlining the sources of data, collection methods, and quality assurance framework.

As for the available data on irregular migration stocks in the country, the quality is generally high as indicated in the excel sheet. However, the indication that there may be other data potentially relevant for estimation, and recent events including COVID-19 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, suggest it may be high time for the government to conduct a similar study.

Also, most of the data available pertain to a specific set of irregular migrants namely, failed asylum seekers, or those who come in contact with the authorities. This means that available data may not adequately capture other groups including irregularly-staying family migrants (third country nationals who do not or not yet, or, in some cases, no longer, meet the admission requirements for legal family migration), and labour migrants (individuals who are engaged in relatively unattractive, low-paid and low-skilled sectors like agriculture, domestic work, and construction).

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

Some data on irregular migration for example, data on returns and border apprehensions, are included in the *State of Migration*, an annual report co-produced by the Dutch Ministries of Justice and Security, Social Affairs and Employment and Foreign Affairs. This report is sent to the Parliament to serve as basis for further development of migration policy. The national authorities interviewed also indicated that data available to them are routinely used to identify policy priorities and action points.

¹ While no date is indicated on Eurostat, we received correspondence upon inquiry from CBS in May 2023 that they were in the process of preparing the quality report.

During the validation workshop with different stakeholders (conducted in Nov. 2023), it appeared that irregular migration data, while referred to when asked, is not systematically used for policymaking. The (stock) estimate produced by the government in 2020, for example, is often quoted, also with NGOs, but also while expressing doubts about its reliability. The estimate, therefore, seems to function more as a benchmark, but beyond this, it is taken and identified primarily as the outcome of a study.

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

Primarily by desk review, and then through interviews/consultations with different stakeholders including national and municipal authorities, as well as civil society organisations. Data from Eurostat was crosschecked with data from CBS and those published in government reports. Data that are not available from Eurostat was collated from government websites, press releases, and annual reports.

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

Interviews with different stakeholders affirmed that apart from those transmitted to Eurostat and published in the *State of Migration* report, most data relating to irregular migration in the Netherlands are either classified or not systematically collected.

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

Statistics on other indicators, such as births and deaths in irregularity, are in principle available from the municipalities because of registration requirements mandated by law, but they are not systematically collected (Interview #1; Interview #2).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many organisations provided services to migrants with irregular status including testing and vaccination. This client data may be an indication of the size of the irregular migrant population, but different providers had different registration processes and while there has been an attempt to collate them, it has not yet been successful (Interview #1). Also, at some point when vaccines became more available, some organisations opened 'walk-in' facilities where everybody can get vaccinated with any form of identification so disaggregating the data by residence status is not always possible.

The national authorities interviewed have indicated that there are also currently no reliable data available on visa overstaying and secondary movements within the Schengen area.

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.

We have also reached out to councillors in certain municipalities known to have big irregular migrant populations but unfortunately have not heard back. This is the same for some organisations known to be providing support to irregular migrants.

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?

This point is not an easy to address given the issues and gaps outlined above. In any case, perhaps it is worth mentioning the example of the LVV in the Netherlands, which arguably is the most reliable data for irregular migration in the country. Program-derived data proved to be quite encouraging and authorities have decided to implement it in more cities in 2024.

The National Immigration Facilities (LVV) is a pilot program for irregular migrants launched in five cities (Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Groningen, Rotterdam and Utrecht) aimed at reaching a sustainable perspective for the participants in the form of either legal stay in the Netherlands, onwards migration, or return to the country of origin. The program is run as a cooperation between the IND, DT&V, the police, and civil society organisations working under the direction of municipalities. While the program is selective and the number of participants is very small relative to the stock estimate of irregular migrants in the Netherlands, data from the LVV is the most reliable in terms of inflows (participants) and outflows (solutions found).

The LVV pilot ended in 2022, and a final evaluation of the program indicated that as of 01 July 2022, a ‘solution’ has been found for 1,258 or nearly 60% of the total 2,092 participants. Of these, a semi-permanent solution was found for 41% in the form of another asylum application, and for the remaining 18% a permanent solution including a residence permit, return to the country of origin, and onward migration (Mack et al., 2022). Participants who could not reach a sustainable perspective at the end of the LVV trajectory were obliged to leave the shelters and ‘find their own way’ (Regiegroep Ongedocumenteerden Amsterdam, 2022). While the LVV has not exactly resulted in more returns, the provision of shelter and counselling has led to an improvement in the well-being of participating migrants with irregular status, and an increased sense of safety and public order for residents. And while there are certain elements in the LVV program that could be developed further pertaining to the uniformity of the work process, conflicting views about return, and selection and identification of participants (Mack et al., 2022), it has been deemed a ‘success’ and a national roll-out is planned for 2024 (Interview #2).

References

- Mack, A., Buimer, L., Rog, J., Witvliet, M., & Pluijm, M. (2022). Eindevaluatie Landelijke Vreemdelingenvoorziening. In: Regioplan beleidsonderzoek.
- Regiegroep Ongedocumenteerden Amsterdam. (2022). LVV Amsterdam Introduction to the LVV for participants. In R. O. Amsterdam (Ed.).