Identifying and Assessing the Development of Populations of Undocumented Migrants: The Case of Undocumented Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels

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Summary

The stocks of undocumented migrants residing on the territory of Europe and the continuous flows of clandestine migrants are currently one of the "hottest" social and political topics. Even though the issue of irregular migration is on the top of many political and academic agendas the knowledge about who the undocumented migrants are, how they can be identified and how their population in a country develops numerically, remains limited. In this context, the aim of the current paper is twofold. In the first place, snowball sampling will be introduced as a technique for identifying undocumented migrants on the territory of a country and in the second, the empirical results from sampling and assessing the stability of the populations of undocumented Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels will be presented.

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The stocks of undocumented migrants residing on the territory of Europe and the continuous flows of clandestine migrants are currently one of the "hottest" social and political topics. Even though the issue of irregular migration is on the top of many political and academic agendas the knowledge about who the undocumented migrants are, how they can be identified and how their population in a country develops numerically, remains limited. In this context, the aim of the current paper is twofold. On the first place, snowball sampling will be introduced as a technique for identifying undocumented migrants on the territory of a country and on the second, the empirical results from sampling and assessing the stability of the populations of undocumented Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels will be presented[i].

Who are the undocumented immigrants?

The issue of undocumented immigrants in Europe begins to attract close political and scientific attention since the beginning of the 1990s when the European countries become aware of the consequences of the termination of the official workers recruitment policies on the one side, the immigration reality created by the ethnic and political conflicts in Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, some Latin American countries on the other, and finally by the general poverty and deteriorated living conditions in many other parts of the world from where large masses of asylum seekers and economic immigrants originated.

Before proceeding with discussion of how undocumented populations could be identified and recruited as research respondents we would like touch upon the question of who are the undocumented immigrants, this being of primary importance especially for a research conducted in Belgium where the term "undocumented immigrant" has no legal definition and is not used in the legislation or for precedents. As it will be indicated below, the term "undocumented immigrant" refers only to the administrative situation of particular person or group of people, thus fails to encompass the wide range of circumstances under which one becomes undocumented and the diversity of immigrants' life histories and survival strategies after immigration as resulting from precisely the different ways of becoming undocumented.

Even though the meaning of "undocumented migrant" seems to be rather obvious at least on intuitive level, examining the literature on undocumented migration as well as the content of the policy measures towards managing undocumented migration in the European Union reveals that there is no unanimity in the adopted definitions and related terminology, which is often resulting from pursuing specific research goals or policy objectives. Among the main approaches attempting to create a typology of the undocumented migrants, one could distinguish between subjective, structural, and legal perspectives, the first two in fact offering no more than an account for the reasons why one becomes undocumented. The subjective approach, which in its essence does not differ from the classical push-pull factor theories of migration (Todaro, 1969), views the irregular migration as a result of one's economic aspirations and the impossibility to

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achieve them in the country of origin. Related factors, generating undocumented flows, are the deteriorated quality of life, the reduced job opportunities, the low salaries, the malfunctioning health system to mention just a few (*e.g.* Chiswich, 1980; Rivièra & Goodman, 1982). Opponents of the subjective approach advance the critique that it does not take into account structural factors such as labor market segmentation and the need for undocumented working force in particular sectors which are highly labor consuming and low paying for which no native employees could be contracted (Moulier-Boutang *et al.,* 1986). The structural approach focuses therefore on the sectors where undocumented migrants are recruited and on the current vital importance of the clandestine work for certain sectors, such as confection and reconstruction, which would otherwise be unable to compete on the market (Slimane, 1995).

The legal approach however is the only one offering a formal definition of "undocumented migrant", a definition based exclusively on the possession or the lack of sojourn documentation as required by the state legislation (Böhning, 1984; Kagné, 2000; Bouckaert, 2001). It could be argued that all classifications of undocumented immigrants which do not take into account the legal basis for being undocumented indeed do not contribute to the conceptualization of the term "undocumented migrant" since it is only the judicial factor which transforms a foreigner to an undocumented migrant. The subjective motivations, the existing push and pull factors, and the market needs cannot produce undocumented migration by themselves. What creates undocumented migration are the legal restrictions towards entry, residence, and settlement of third country nationals. The most vivid evidence for this fact is the undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States, which is probably the most comprehensively studied case of clandestine migration for the past 60 years and is nevertheless proven to be the outcome of nothing more than the imposed legal restrictions on entry, or as Ellwyn Stoddard asserts (1976, pp. 158):

> *…the patterns and practices of illegal immigration from Mexico have been operative ever since the arbitrary bi-national boundary* between the U.S. and Mexico *was established.*

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In the context of strict legal criteria that define when a person is an "undocumented migrant", special attention should be given to the phenomenon of undocumented work, which does not necessarily involve only undocumented migrants. The category "undocumented workers" is much larger than the one of "undocumented migrants" since it refers to all those people (nationals or foreigners; residing legally or illegally) who are gainfully employed without entitlement to working rights or who are working clandestinely more than the legally allowed hours. In any of these situations, the income of the undocumented workers is not reported to the tax authorities. As far as the existence and the perpetuation of undocumented working practices is concerned, the impact of the previously described structural, subjective, and other push-pull factors can be clearly distinguished. Being an undocumented worker can be a consciously chosen strategy for increasing the personal or family income (e.g. earning extra money, avoiding taxes, avoiding the payment of social security contributions). It can be reinforced and by market and industry needs such as the need of cheap and flexible working force, which remains cheap only if kept undocumented. In the case of the undocumented immigrants, it testifies for the fact that no legal provisions for the employment of third country nationals' exist. There are however less clear-cut situations in which the undocumented working practices are the result of the interaction of subjective, structural and legal factors. An immigration related examples are the cases of people who have residence documents, such as false students, false tourists, or false spouses, but who have abused the entry system just to get a legal access to the target country and then work illegally in sectors relying heavily on undeclared work.

Taking into consideration all of the abovementioned issues, the undocumented immigrants could be defined as people who are not in possession of a valid residence permit delivered by the competent authorities in the country where they live. When referring to undocumented immigrants one could distinguish between two different ways of becoming undocumented: firstly via irregular entry and secondly via irregular residence. These two forms are however not mutually exclusive, as illegal border crossing does not necessarily lead to illegal residence and irregular residence does not always presuppose illegal entry. The undocumented immigrants who got an access to a

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country via irregular entry are for example the victims of human trafficking; the smuggled migrants; the people who have entered the country with false documents; those who have entered without valid documents and have avoided border control; the "false" asylum seekers or the economic migrants who have abused the asylum system in order to get an access to the territory of the destination state, etc. On the other hand, as undocumented residents one could consider all the people who remain in the country more than the usually allowed period of three months; immigrants whose residence permit has expired and has not been renewed; people who entered a state with a tourist visa and prolonged their stay; students who did not return to their countries after finishing their studies and who failed to renew their residence documents; family members who do not fall under the category of family reunification but who remain in the country; foreigners who have lost their diplomatic or consular status; former au-pairs; former athletes; rejected asylum seekers who have not left the host country upon rejection of their application; and last but not least those who are in procedure of requesting an extension of their residence permit or visa *after* the expiry date of their documents. The irregular immigrants who are also involved in economic activities without obtaining the needed authorization could also be defined as "undocumented workers". It should be noted however that the category "undocumented worker" does not include only undocumented immigrants who are gainfully employed but also otherwise documented people who are not entitled to working rights. In the latter category fall for example all working "false students", tourists, and working permit holders who exercise lucrative activities for which the working permit is not valid.

Creation of undocumented migration from Eastern to Western Europe[ii]

Having outlined the content of the term "undocumented migrants" we would briefly touch upon the primary factor responsible for the creation of undocumented populations from Eastern Europe in the West.

The major reason for the development and persistence of undocumented migration flows and stocks could be deduced from the new political reality created after the fall of the Iron Curtain in the late 1980s. Before the transition from totalitarian regimes to democracy and market economies commenced the main way of achieving settlement

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abroad was trough requesting political asylums in the destination country and by definition requests filed by Eastern Europeans were approved.

With the country borders finally open many people had a chance to travel abroad for the first time. The East-West migrations augmented only for a few years immediately after the beginning of the transition period (1990-1992/1993) while the Western European countries were still formulating a migration policy corresponding to the new political reality (UN, 2002a). The Western European response was however not delayed and the enthusiasm of potential immigrants was quickly extinguished: The beginning of the transition periods in Central and Eastern Europe (hereafter CEE) in the 1980s transformed the former positive and welcoming attitude towards asylum seekers from CEE to one of complete rejection, especially after 1992 when the European Union introduced a visa regime for the citizens of all newly created states after the disintegration of former Yugoslavia (except for Slovenians). The Cold War was over and the former communist countries became "safe countries of origin" thus the possibility for requesting asylum in the West based on political reasons, unless in exceptional cases, was eliminated at once. The closure of the asylum channel, the introduction of strict visa regimes for Central and Eastern Europeans together with the practically non-existing possibilities for legal economic migration did not stop immigrants but just redirected their moves (Morokvasic, 2002). Potential migrants were forced to employ alternative ways of migration such as entering as a student or a trainee, trough marriage (false or genuine), using the services of smugglers, or falling in the networks of traffickers. Undocumented migrations become the natural response to the sudden lack of provisions for legal migrations. Other new forms of migration such as pendular migrations, using the tourist visa for gaining entry abroad and later on working without documents (usually overstaying the allowed period as a tourist) and petty trade across the border became developed rapidly and gradually became the prevailing migratory pattern from CEE. Generally speaking, after 1990 the previous permanent migrations gave place to temporary movements both regular and clandestine.

To summarize, with the more stringent immigration conditions continuously introduced in Europe (e.g. the Schengen system, the Dublin agreement and Eurodac) the potential migrants who cannot longer freely enter and settle in the EU countries were

forced to exploit new migration channels, or already existing one which were not pronounced in the past such as trafficking, smuggling, commuting for working clandestinely under the provisions of tourist visas or legally allowed periods of residence without a visa for a short time, to mention just a few examples. Phenomena such as undocumented migrations, various practices of undeclared work abroad and human trafficking are among the major new forms of migrations originating from CEE replacing the traditional in the past long-term and permanent migrations. Employing these new paths of migration, unanimously perceived as undesired by the all states, could be viewed as the natural response of potential immigrants to the lack of channels for legal migration, the limited provisions for economic migration and the no longer existing possibility for migration trough the asylum system.

Identifying and sampling undocumented Bulgarian and Polish migrants in Brussels

Considering the nature of the phenomenon undocumented migration e. g. falling out of the scope any official system for migration recording, one of the primary issues to be resolved is how a researcher in the field of irregular migration can gain access to potential respondents and guarantee that the identified migrants are representative for their population in a given city. In the current paper, we will attempt to provide an answer to that question, and to present the empirical results from sampling undocumented Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels in the period 2003-2005.

Considering the definition of "undocumented migrant", one could conclude that identifying and sampling undocumented populations cannot be a subject of probability sampling procedures since all the assumptions underlying the implementation of probability sampling: 1) knowledge about the size of the studied population; 2) sample size specified in advance; 3) equal probability for being included in the sample (Black & Champion, 1976) are violated.

In the particular case of research on undocumented Polish and Bulgarian migrants in Brussels, and in light of the fact that the present day systematic knowledge about the size and the origins of the undocumented migrants is still in a rudimentary stage of

development (Paspalanova, 2005) the identification and the sampling of undocumented migrants is also a subject of the abovementioned restrictions on applying probability sampling procedures. The primary question under such circumstances is therefore how to get an access to the undocumented population and secondly how a sample from this population can be drawn so that at least certain level of representativity is achieved.

The specific characteristics of the undocumented Polish and Bulgarian populations in Brussels: e.g. high invisibility, non accounted for, unregistered by any state authority, high mobility between countries of origin and Brussels, have directed us towards selecting the snowball sampling method as the most appropriate for identifying potential research respondents[iii]. In the literature snowball sampling is described as a sampling technique, which is applied mainly in two research situations. One the one side, snowball sampling is recommended for obtaining knowledge about diffusion of information and informal social relations and in a small group or in a small organization (Denzin, 1970; Black & Champion, 1976). On the other side, snowball sampling is considered the only technique suitable for sampling "hidden" populations. The term hidden populations, synonymous of *very rare human populations* or *hard to reach populations*, is used to refer generally to populations about which no official information exists or which represent less than 2% of the population (Sudman, 1972; Eland-Goossensen *et al*., 1997; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997). In other words, because of their rarity, these populations are difficult to identify, to reach, and to recruit for research purposes, due to the often-attributed social stigma, their legal status, and the consequent lack of visibility of their members. From the so-presented definition it is clear that the hidden populations are the ones for which there is no suitable sampling frame and which cannot be a subject to probability sampling methods and to most of the non-probability sampling techniques either. Conducting a research with members of those populations is a cumbersome process and scientists working in the field are often satisfied with merely being able to locate their respondents (Eland-Goossensen *et al*., 1997). Snowball sampling is considered in this context as providing efficient and economical ways of finding cases that otherwise are difficult or impossible to locate and contact (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

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In both of the described cases - conducting a research on the informal social networks in a small group or organization or studying hidden populations - the core of the snowball sampling procedure is based on yielding a sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In brief, the procedure is based on asking individuals from an organization or group to identify and to provide contact with their friends, associates, or people with whom they share a common characteristic under study. The technique however, should not be misinterpreted as being simple and self evident procedure summing up "to start rolling through a personal contact or through an informant and then simply sit back and allow the resulting chain to follow its own course" or put in other words it is not "a self-contained and self-propelled phenomenon, that once started somehow magically proceeds on its own" (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The utilization of the snowball sampling method encompasses a number of interrelated methodological problem areas such as finding respondents and starting a referral chain; verifying the eligibility of potential respondents; engaging respondents as research assistants; controlling the types of chains and numbers of cases in every chain; and controlling the speed of chains developments and the data quality (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The main problematic issue is however the non-random character of the snowball sampling technique. If not controlled the snowball sampling could yield biased results depending highly upon the subjective choices of the originally selected respondents and their sincerity in providing reliable information about their contacts. Generalizability of the obtained results under such circumstances is therefore difficult if not impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, in the following paragraphs we would illustrate how the representativity of the sample could be substantially increased if the researcher controls for the characteristics of the first or the primary respondent of each referral chain and takes measures to guarantee well-informed participation of the respondents, as well as their anonymity.

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Snowball sampling in practice

Applying snowball sampling, we have identified and recruited for research purposes 90 undocumented Bulgarian and 90 undocumented Polish migrants in Brussels in the period 2003-2005.

The first potentially creating bias issue, which we had to overcome, was how to identify the potential respondents and to start a referral chain. The complication stemmed from the low social visibility of the studied population and the already discussed lack of systematic information on Polish or Bulgarian migrants in Brussels making the use of any already available sampling frame impossible. Further on, the more sensitive the topic under study, such as in the present research, which focuses to a great extent on "illegal" working activities and undocumented sojourn in Brussels, increases the probability that potential respondents would be unwilling to reveal their presence and respectively hinder the sampling procedure.

The anticipated mistake in the sampling procedure would be to identify only one group of undocumented migrants sharing equal characteristics, which is not necessarily representative for the entire population. In order to achieve maximum representativity of the sample population we have devised and complied with a *principle of maximum diversity of the primary respondent*, which should guarantee coverage of the whole variety of immigrants' legal and occupational statuses in Brussels, (e.g. immigrants who reside legally but work illegally, unemployed immigrants residing illegally, immigrants in process of regularization, documented immigrants who exercise working activities in the gray economy, false students, an so on). The sampling method should allow us also to reveal the precise geographical distribution of the immigrants group in Brussels and to assure that the studied population is identified as accurately as possible.

To implement in practice the maximum diversity principle we have initiated diverse respondents' chains, in each of which the primary respondent had unique combination of legal status, demographic characteristics, family status, and municipality of residence in Brussels[iv]. For the Bulgarian population altogether 17 referral chains have been initiated and the principle of "maximum diversity" of the first informants has been strictly followed (See Table 1). The first respondent of each referral chain has been

selected to have a different residence status (undocumented, false student, documented, and naturalized immigrant), different marital status (married, divorced, and single); residing in different municipality in Brussels (the primary respondents are residing in one ten from the 19 municipalities in Brussels); and different ethnic origin (Bulgarian, Bulgarian Turkish and Turkish-Belgian). There are municipalities in Brussels, where no primary informant with an undocumented status or an informant who knows an undocumented migrant has been identified and therefore no referral chain from this municipality was possible to initiate.

The same procedure was followed in the case of the undocumented Polish migrants, in which we have initiated 18 referral chains.

A second methodological problem in our sampling procedure potentially creating bias and reducing the representativity of the sample is how to guarantee the eligibility of potential respondents since it is not self-evident that all identified respondents from Poland and Bulgaria fall in the category of undocumented migrants or undocumented worker. One major obstacle is how to distinguish between "false" and genuine students. As "false" students, we have defined those migrants who have used the studies as only a way for a legal migration to Belgium and not as a primary goal for coming to the country. All false students are working and use the studies to prolong their residence in the country[v].

Another related problem is that respondents might present in an imprecise way their status in the country or misreport the reasons for their stay in Brussels. One example are the "false" students who fail to verbalize their precise motivation for migration. A misreport related to the working status of the undocumented Poles and Bulgarians in Brussels is also the case when a person cohabits with an EU national in Brussels but performs economic activities without entitlement to a working permit or when a person enters the country as a tourist and resides in the country within the legally allowed period of three months but is again involved in working activities. Those few examples point at the necessity of careful screening of the referred respondents and verification of their actual status in the country. Once the people who are not eligible for the study are identified, another problem arises. Rejecting those respondents could stop the

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development of an initiated referral chain. Rejected respondents who are able to refer to other immigrants might refuse to further cooperate in our study. We have minimized the effect of this obstacle by presenting the eligibility criteria and the objectives of the study as clear as possible thus assuring maximum cooperation even from the rejected respondents.

The so discussed problem is closely related to the next potential obstacle: engaging the respondents as research assistants**.** Using snowball sampling, inherently means, that we are relying mainly on immigrants in Brussels to connect us to other immigrants trough providing contact details or trough contacting potential respondents on our behalf, presenting the research structure and guaranteeing participation or at least agreement of the potential respondent to meet or talk personally with the researcher.

The vital issue is therefore the extent to which we can trust those people to present our research to others in acceptable and serious manner. For that reason in the course of sampling immigrants were invited to provide a further contact only after completing a research interview and thus being familiar with the research questions and the research goals. To increase the participation probability and the level of trust, we have ensured each participant the study is anonymous and no personal information will be revealed to third persons. Information revealing too much personal details such as second name, exact address of residence in Brussels or in the country of origin and exact date of birth has not been collected at any stage of the research. The respondents have been assured of the solely scientific nature of the research and lack of connections between the researcher and the state authorities of Belgium. Each respondent has also been well informed about the ways of obtaining a contact with him or her. Interviews have been tape recorded only after obtaining an explicit agreement of the respondent and in all other cases the information has been written down by hand.

A further consideration was the process of pacing and monitoring the referral chains and the data quality in order to provide the most extensive and at the same time the most relevant information for our study. On the first place, the speed with which referral chains are initiated and developed was to be deliberately controlled. The simultaneous process of adequate evaluation of the respondents' eligibility, the interview process, and the timing of initiation of referral chains should be well balanced in order to extract

maximum information without deteriorating the data quality. One problem for example is posed by the fact that if the referrals are not immediately followed up important contacts might be lost or the whole referral chain might be destroyed. The situation aggravates especially if several referral chains develop simultaneously with the same speed. The solution for avoiding such complications was to schedule well in advance the start of each referral chain and to explain the research goals to all interviewees supposed to provide further contacts. The opposite problem e.g. lack or insufficient length of the referral chains was avoided by always assuring an adequate replacement of the missing respondents by active search for new possibilities for starting a referral chain.

How stable is the so identified population of migrants?

The outcome of applying and controlling the snowball sampling technique resulted in identifying a sample of 180 Polish and Bulgarian undocumented migrants in Brussels. To be more precise, we have sampled 1) 90 Poles (36 men and 54 women) from which 26 persons are non-commuters, 59 are commuters, and 5 are false students; 2) 75 undocumented Bulgarians (47 men and 28 women) and 15 Bulgarians who are in process of regularization (7 men and 8 women). Within the category "undocumented migrant", 49 Bulgarians are non-commuters, 12 are commuters and 14 are false students.

Having sampled 180 Polish and Bulgarian undocumented migrants in Brussels our next question is to what degree the so identified research population remains stable over time and respectively to what degree it is representative and allowing for generalizations. The relevance of such question is understandable not only due to applying a non-random sampling procedure but also considering the fact that the main characteristics of the present day undocumented migrations from Eastern to Western Europe is circularity or pendular migration between country of origin and destination as well as high rotation migration in the case of the Polish migrants. The undocumented migrants run further on the risk of being deported and deportations can be expected to change the profile and the structure of the undocumented population in Brussels.

To assess the stability of the sample, we have re-contacted each identified respondent three to four months after the interview has been conducted and then a second

time some three months after the first follow-up call. In the case of the Bulgarian population we have successfully re-contacted all women and 49 of the men.

Among the Polish population we have re-contacted 23 men and 38 women during the first follow up and 26 men and 40 women during the second follow up. From the remaining 24 migrants we have reached 16 "new" Polish migrants who are using the telephone number of the principal respondent, and who are commuting to Belgium as participants in a rotating migration: in other words we have reached the relative, the family member, the friend or the colleague of the principal respondent, who are working in Brussels while the principal respondent has returned shortly to Poland. We have failed to re-contact 12 respondents who used to commute between Poland and Brussels.

Secondly, even though evaluating the representativity of the identified population is hard to achieve due to factors such as lack of systematic research on undocumented migrants in Belgium, in the case of the Polish undocumented migrants we have compared the characteristics of our sample with the fragmentary results obtained in three other studies focusing on Polish migration (Frejka, Okólski & Sword, 1998; Jablonski, 2001; Verleyen, 2003). In this process, we have revealed that our research population originates from the same regions in Poland identified by T. Frejka *et al.* (1998) and P. Jablonski (2001) or from the most rural and economically deprived regions such as Podlasie, Opole and Lublin. The tendency of feminization of the Polish migration described by T. Frejka *et al.* (1988) is also outlined in our case, in which the female undocumented population identified by snowball sampling is nearly two times bigger than the male population. The geographic concentration of the undocumented Poles in the central Brussels' municipality Saint-Gillis, described by Verleyen (2003) has been partly supported by our research results (20% of the sampled Poles reside in Saint-Gillis). Nevertheless, our research results suggest that the undocumented Polish community is concentrated in more than one municipality and more precisely in Brussels, Anderlecht, Saint-Gillis, St. Joost ten Noode and Schaarbeek, or in other words, the Poles are settled in all central municipalities of the city (See Map 1).

A next step towards assessing the stability of the so identified population was exploring the potential impact of deportations on the size and the structure of the

undocumented migrants. Even though migrants take all possible precautions to remain undiscovered by the police or the social inspectors controlling working sites, the risk of being discovered and deported is high, especially for the men, who are illegally employed at construction sites or for both sexes working in the ho-re-ca sector, where the majority of the inspections are executed. Recent data suggest that the Bulgarians and the Poles are indeed the first and respectively the third most often deported group of foreigners from Belgium (Perrin, 2005). The major question when studying the Polish and the Bulgarian undocumented populations in Brussels would be if the deportations of these groups change significantly the profile of the migrants and if any undocumented population identified by snowball sampling could be viewed as representative of the whole population in question. Seeking an answer to these questions, we have investigated what proportion of the sampled migrants had experience with police or social inspection controls, what have been the outcomes of those controls and how this has influenced the migratory behavior of the respondents.

Contrary to our expectations, we have discovered that deportations and exercised police controls have limited or no long-term effect on the undocumented migrants. We came to this conclusion after identifying that 27 Bulgarians (26 men and 1 woman) and 19 Poles (12 men and 7 women) have been caught by the police while working and have been deported (and have respectively returned to Belgium) or have received an order to leave the territory of Belgium in three days. The deportations and the orders for leaving the territory of Belgium indeed did not bring the expected outcome: removing illegally residing foreigners from Belgium. In the cases of deportations, the migrants returned to Belgium in the first days after being deported and were not stopped by border control officers at any land border or at airports[vi]. In the cases of receiving an order to leave the country, the migrants did not obey the order and did not leave the country for at least six months. Some of the people from the latter group traveled to their countries of origin later on (by bus and a few Bulgarians – 4 persons - by airplane) and have not been identified by the border control officers as migrants with a history of detention in Belgium. When border control took place on the way home, the migrants have been asked about the length of stay in Belgium and the reason for visiting the country. In our research, only four respondents have been identified as "overstayers" by the border control checks and

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had to pay a small fee. In none of the cases, however the migrant was included in a black list, which will prohibit future access to an EU member state.

Since the visa regime for Polish and Bulgarian citizens has been abolished, the migrants entering Belgium do not reveal the real reason for traveling and they do comply with the requirements for entering the Schengen countries, such as having a valid passport, enough cash to prove means of sustenance while in Belgium and, in some cases, even an invitation from a person legally residing in Belgium. The incidents we are describing took place in the period 2002 – 2004, a time during which, the respondents claim that the border control for people leaving the country was less strict in comparison with the years before 2002.

The question that remains open is how entering Belgium via flying to Brussels can be possible for people with a history of deportation or non executed order for leaving the country. Since this last question falls out of the scope of the current work, we will just elucidate what is the impact of events from this type on the undocumented migrant population in Brussels. On the first place, the migrants who have been a subject of police control and have never experienced negative consequences, believe that the local authorities are not very strict in dealing with undocumented immigrants especially of the latter have no criminal dossier. The people who have returned after deportation are even more suspicious about the abilities of the Belgium to do something against the undocumented immigrants. The information about cases like this starts circulating among the undocumented migrants and their feeling of certainty that they are "irremovable" is reinforced by similar accounts of other undocumented migrants from Eastern Europe. Over time, the undocumented Bulgarians conclude that with Bulgaria awaiting accession to the European Union, no strict measures would be taken against people whose only misdemeanor is working without documents in Belgium. In the course of our research we have also discovered that around half of the undocumented Bulgarians are aware that the EU enlargement will not have an immediate impact on their legal status in the country and will not give then an unlimited access to work if any. Even though the respondents do believe that, they will be the next tolerated group after the Polish migrants and that the same attitude will be displayed towards the Romanian undocumented migrants. A largely shared opinion is that that waiting some more years to obtain full settlement and working

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rights in the EU after Bulgaria's accession, is not such a long time especially when the perception of the future economic development in Bulgaria is rater negative and the living and employment conditions back at home are not envisioned as being better than before migration. Moreover, the undocumented migrants perceive themselves as achievers in Belgium: they have found jobs, they earn "good" money, they are able to help financially parents and relatives in Bulgaria, they are able to save money, and they are planning to regularize their status or to wait until full rights will be granted to the Bulgarian nationals. Therefore, the overall firm opinion is that the police controls are the last factor that can remove someone from the country. What is considered as a dangerous or distressing event is losing one's jobs or having and invalidating accident, which will reduce the possibilities for surviving in Belgium but not the prospective for being discovered and deported.

The present occupational status, the future migration plans, and envisaged possibilities for return migration have been employed as the last factors for assessing the stability of the sampled population of Polish and Bulgarian undocumented migrants.

The present occupational status and income from working illegally in Brussels are identified as one of the strongest factors for non-return to the countries of origin and respectively maintaining the sampled population relatively stable in size and structure. Since our goal is not to enter into a detailed presentation of the migrants' professional activities, we will focus only on these elements from the professional activities, which demotivate the undocumented migrants to leave Belgium. The first and most important factor keeping the undocumented population stable is the possibility to work and respectively to have an income, which is usually not the case in the countries of origin. In our sample all of the respondents do have a job at the time of the interview, have never been "unemployed" in Brussels for a period of more than ten days and have a monthly income between 1000€ and 2500€ This income is incomparable to what the undocumented migrants can earn at home and in most of the cases, such amount of money was not possible to accumulated even in one year or more. The possibilities to work and to earn well, taken in the context of the stimuli for migration including high unemployment rates in the regions of origin and poverty are sufficient to explain why the

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undocumented migrants do not plan to leave Belgium unless of course remaining without possibilities for work.

Looking to the Bulgarian and the Polish migrants reveals however some difference in the plans for continuing the practices of undocumented work in Belgium. The Bulgarian migrants, who are more recent phenomenon in Brussels in comparison with the Polish migrants indicate that eventual return to Bulgaria is either not envisioned at all, or is planned after a sufficient amount of money is saved and after the living and working possibilities in Bulgaria improve to reach those in Belgium. In other words the voluntary return to Bulgaria can be viewed as highly unlikely to happen in the near future. However, in the group of the undocumented Polish migrants two tendencies can be outlined. On the one hand, the "older" migrants, or those who have arrived to Belgium for the first time mote than five years ago, and who have accumulated the desired amount of savings[vii] or have achieved a personal goal set before migration (e.g. purchasing or renovating a house, purchasing a vehicle, saving enough money to finance one's own business in Poland etc.) tend to return to Poland but sell their job in Brussels to a new migrant with a similar profile, or a migrant coming from the same region of origin, usually with the same educational status, with lower (if any) income, and in a dire need for finding a gainful employment. In other words, the structure of the identified population is not changed by the return migration of some Poles. On the other hand, the more recently arrived Polish migrants do not tend to leave Belgium until a desired amount of earnings and savings is achieved or, similarly to the Bulgarian migrants, the living and working conditions in the migrants' native regions develop improve significantly.

A factor related to the possibility to work and to have an income in Brussels, which could explain why the population of undocumented migrants remains stable, is the foreseen improvement of the economic and living conditions in the countries of origin and the subjectively perceived chances for having a good quality of life upon return. As mentioned above, it is only the "older" migrants with achieved outcomes of working illegally who are considering a return (26 persons in total). From all remaining migrants only 8% admit to foresee some improvement in the country and such an improvement that will have a positive personal impact (e.g. better working possibilities, higher income,

possibility to support elderly family members etc.) and describe themselves as potential return-migrants. Nevertheless, this foreseen improvement has no power to trigger return at the moment of the interview.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration all above-mentioned arguments, in the current contribution we assert that a population of undocumented migrants is possible to be identified and sampled in a representative way and moreover generalizations based on such a sample could be made. The arguments we have advanced to support such a claim are twofold. Firstly, we have elaborated on the techniques, which could increase the representativity of a population sampled via snowball sampling. These techniques include the following of the principle of maximum diversity of the first respondent of a referral chain and respectively guaranteeing maximum coverage of the population under study; reducing sampling bias by carefully screening each respondent for assessing his or her eligibility as a sample member, raising the responsibility of the respondents as participants in the research and their function of de facto research assistants; and controlling the speed and the quantity of referral chains developing simultaneously.

Secondly, as control factors for assessing to what degree a population identified by a non-random sampling procedure is stable over time, we have proposed 1) the possibility to reach the initially identified population for a second or a third time in intervals of three and six months after the first contact with a respondent has been made; 2) the lack of impact of deportations and police detentions on the size and the structure of the undocumented population; 3) the possibility to find employment and to have an income in Belgium and also the overall negative migrants' perceptions of the living and working conditions in the countries of origin.

Both the implementation of the snowball sampling procedure as well as the analysis of the additional factors for evaluating the stability of the sampled population have been advanced as evidence that the identified Polish and the Bulgarian populations of undocumented migrants are stable over time and respectively offer initial grounds for making generalizations about the larger population of undocumented migrants from the two respective origins.

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Map 1. Map of Brussels and the 19 municipalities. (The municipalities where the undocumented migrants are concentrated are presented in green color.)

Table 1. Complying with the criterion of maximum diversity when initiating a referral chain considering the gender, family status, number of children, district of residence and legal status of the primary informant of a referral chain. Bulgarian sample.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	13	14	15	16	17
Gender	♂	♂	♂	♂	♀	♂	♀	♀	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♂	♀
FamSt	S	M	D	S	M	M	D	M	M	M	S	M	M	S	S	M
Child	0	2	1	0	2	3	1	2	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Munip	SG	SJ	Et	K	K	K	Uc	Mol	K	Uc	Mol	SJ	Jet	Xl	B	Sch
LegalSt	U	U	D/N	FSt	U/TBg	D/TB	D	U	U	D	FSt	U	D	D	U	U

Abbreviations and symbols: 1-17 = Number of the first respondent of each identified referral chain; FamSt = Family status of the respondent; Child = Number of children; Munip = Minicipality of residence in Brussels; LegalSt = Legal status in Belgium; ♂ = Man; ♀ = Female; S = Single; M = Married; D = Divorced; SG = Saint Gillis; SJ = Saint Joost Ten Noode; Et = Etterbeek; K = Koekelberg; Uc = Uccle; Mol = Molenbeek; Jet = Jette; Xl = Ixelles; B = Brussels; Sch = Schaarbeek; U = Undocumented; D = Documented; N = acquired Belgian nationality; TBg = Ethnic Turk from Bulgaria; TB = Belgian Turk; FSt = False student.

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Notes:

[i] This paper is elaborated as a part of a research project 'Legal and undocumented Eastern European immigrants in Brussels' financed in the framework of *Prospective Research for Brussels* program.

[ii] In the literature, it is rarely specified which courtiers are considered as Western Europe. Usually the term is used to refer to the countries in the West of the former Communist Block or the so-called countries lying behind the Iron Curtain. The self-definition of Europe was and is still grounded upon the dichotomy East-West, Western Europe - Central and Eastern Europe. In the current research, the term Western Europe denotes the countries to the West of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, The Russian Federation,

Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, former Yugoslavia, and Albania. Western Europe should not be understood as The European Union, as far as the geopolitical structure of the EU changes over time, and for example, data on migration rates for Western Europe in the past clearly do not refer to Greece, which is now a EU member state. Similarly, data on Western Europe include Switzerland, which is not a EU member state.

[iii] For a detailed discussion of why other non-random sampling techniques such as systematic sampling, quota sampling, accidental sampling, judgmental or purposive sampling, are considered inappropriate for sampling undocumented migrants, Paspalanova (2004) can be consulted.

[iv] Brussels is administratively divided in 19 municipalities (See Map 1). The populations of undocumented migrants (as well as legally residing migrants) are not equally represented in each municipality, with the central and districts traditionally hosting the largest numbers of foreign populations. Starting and developing a referral chain in each of the 19 municipalities is expected to reflect these geographic distributions of migrants and respectively lead to identifying more undocumented migrants in municipalities traditionally perceived as migrants' districts of residence.

[v] The foreign students are as a rule excluded from all types of migration research but it could be argued that exploiting the channels for education remains one of the few ways for legal migration especially for those of younger age, good education, and some language skills. The practice of re-inscribing in different academic or language courses once abroad is widespread among the non-EU students for whom this is the only strategy for remaining abroad and attempting to settle by securing a legal employment, establishing a family, or migrating to another country if the possibilities for remaining in Belgium turn to be limited. Nevertheless, the distinction between false and genuine students is sometimes blurred. In some cases, a person comes as a genuine student, then over time, the motivation for non-return increases, and respectively the academic system is viewed as a way for working towards settlement aboard. Once the academic career for which the student has arrived is completed and no options for settlement are present, the genuine student might become a false student just to remain legally in the country.

[vi] An inquiry initiated by the Italian Government in five European Countries brings the conclusion that international airports are the most easily accessible portal for undocumented immigrants (UN, 2002b).

[vii] The "desired" amount of savings can vary in each particular case. For some migrants this amount could be 10.000€ while for others it reaches 50.000€ In many cases however the amount of desired total income from working in Brussels cannot be translated to an exact values, since one part of the earnings is used to finance the education of children, the medical care for elderly family member, the building/purchasing/renovating of property, the investment in a small enterprise and so on.

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