

Borders and undocumented migration in the EU

The seminar was held by the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies. Prominent scholars and experts gathered to discuss human smuggling, human trafficking and undocumented migration in the EU which has undoubtedly become a pressing matter in Sweden as well as other countries of the EU.

First to speak was Ilse van Liempt, an Assistant Professor in Urban Geography. Van Liempt reviewed the history of human smuggling practices and how the legal context has changed since the mid-1990s with the criminalisation of the act. She emphasized the fact that smugglers have become an essential part of the journey for irregular migrants. They provide a service that migrants are dependent on since they have no legal means of mobility. Van Liempt argued that this situation created a vicious circle where increasing number of migrant deaths during smuggling has resulted in calls to fight against human smuggling which then forces the migrants to use more dangerous routes, resulting in more migrant deaths and injuries, leading to calls to combat the smuggling with stricter border controls. Van Liempt emphasized the fact that for some people, migrant smuggling is the only means to escape conflicts and grave human rights violations. Therefore, policies that aim at reducing human smuggling must recognize and address the root causes to avoid doing more harm than good.

Next up in the panel were Madeline Zavodny, Professor of Economics, and Pia M. Orrenius, Vice President and Senior Economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. They presented their policy brief of the economic aspects of unauthorized immigration in the EU, drawing lessons from the US experience. They demonstrated how the economic benefits for both the receiving states and the unauthorized migrants themselves require an access for the migrants to the labor market and flexible prices and wages. They concluded that coordination, consistency and cost sharing among EU member states is essential to successfully address irregular migration. Finally, they pointed out that creating more ways for people to enter legally into the EU, especially less-educated workers, may help reduce the number of unauthorized immigrants.

Monika Hjeds Löfmark, Senior Researcher in Economics at SIEPS, presented her empirical study on human trafficking in the EU, focusing on the receiving countries of the victims. In her presentation, Löfmark pointed out that while the right to move freely across the EU territory is a cornerstone of the EU it may also facilitate cross-border criminality such as human trafficking. Löfmark concluded that the EU needed to use its ability to signal the importance and severity of human trafficking and put more emphasis on the buyer. For this to happen, the EU should also put its ability to coordinate national efforts of Member States to greater use to battle this problem.

Patrik Engström, head of National Border Policing Section in Sweden, presented his the matter of unauthorized immigration from his experience as the head of the border police. Engström emphasized the importance of managing and channeling migration by realistic means while addressing the fact that migration will never be stopped, no matter the numbers of walls built or fences raised. He called for a unified solution within the EU.

Gunilla Hallonsten, acting international director of the Church of Sweden, was the last speaker in the panel. She presented the role of the church in helping and assisting migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The main point of her discourse was the importance of respect for human rights and how that needed to be the prerequisite for all treatment of unauthorized migrants.

The main conclusion of all of the speakers was the need for unified and realistic solution from the EU which deals with the root causes of the problem. The speakers emphasized the fact that building walls and raising fences on borders is no solution, it does not stop or deter migrants from making their way into the EU but only changes the routes to more dangerous ones, resulting in more migrant deaths. The speakers also addressed the need for reliable data in the matters of unauthorized immigration which is essential to be able to analyze and address the situation.