Introduction: The politics of evidence-based policy in Europe's 'migration crisis'

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On 18 April 2015, more than 800 people drowned in just one incident off the coast of Lampedusa as they tried to cross the Mediterranean to Europe from the North African coast. It was one of the deadliest shipwrecks on record. Just a few days earlier, 400 people died when their overcrowded boat capsized just off the Italian coast, bringing the death toll to more than 1,200 in a single week. Their deaths occurred during a period of increasing irregular boat migrations across the southern Mediterranean from Libya to Italy and a subsequent, and largely new, flow of refugees and other migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece.[1] By the end of 2015, an estimated 3,771 people had lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean trying to reach Europe.[2]

Although people have been crossing the Mediterranean by boat since at least the late 1980s (Baldwin-Edwards 2006), the events of 2015 prompted a series of political initiatives by European Union institutions under the guise of a new European Agenda on Migration in response to the 'migration crisis'. As the number of people arriving on Europe's shores continued to rise during the course of 2015, reaching an estimated 1,008,616 by the end of the year, there was a simultaneous increase in the scale and intensity of political, policy and public concern. This was reflected not only in images of human misery and suffering that dominated newspapers, TV screens and social media feeds but also in increased public fears about the perceived economic, security and cultural threats of increased migration to Europe.

Alongside the public outcry, various research bodies, the European Commission and international organizations including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) all invested heavily in improving

data and evidence production with a view to advancing a better understanding of the complexity of migration processes and, it was hoped, improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of policies themselves. The IOM established a Global Migration Data Analysis Centre in Berlin and gathered data on deaths in transit, including previously neglected reporting on deaths at sea. The UNHCR, which had an under-developed statistical division that had frequently been surpassed by the work of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also began to capture better data on flows and the distribution of refugees across Europe. The UK, Swedish, German and other governments also publicised their interest in gathering data and new empirical information that could guide policy approaches to migration in Europe. These developments signalled a step change in the reporting of migration flows to Europe and emphasised the importance of research-based evidence for managing humanitarian situations.

The commitment to evidence-based policy

The focus on evidence-based policy (EBP) is, of course, nothing new. The term gained political currency in the UK under the Blair administration, starting in 1997, and was intended to signify the entry of a government with a modernising mandate, committed to replacing ideologically-driven politics with rational decision making (Sutcliffe and Court 2005; Wells 2007). For example, the Modernising Government White Paper (1999) states that:

> '... policy decisions should be based on sound evidence. The raw ingredient of evidence is information. Good quality policymaking depends on high quality information, derived from a variety of sources – expert knowledge; existing domestic and international research; existing statistics; stakeholder consultation; evaluation of previous policies ...' (Cabinet Office 1999, 31 cited in Wells 2007, 24).

The pursuit of EBP is, therefore, based on the premise that policy decisions should be better informed by available evidence and should include rational analysis. This is because policies that are based on systematic evidence are seen to produce better outcomes. Such views are now commonplace among policymakers in the most developed states: as a result, we find that across the Global North, academic researchers are now increasingly tasked with demonstrating the relevance and significance of their research, with the quality of work measured in terms of the extent to which it has an 'impact' on policy (Gunn and Mintrom 2016).

EBP has featured prominently in discourses on migration policy and as an instrumental – and at times controversial – tool for connecting academia and government. While policy-makers may value the evidence produced by academics for its insights and potential recommendations, the applied nature of the enterprise also gives researchers access to government institutions and additional sources of funding. We note, for example, that the European Commission has directed much funding through the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation towards ground-breaking research projects, including a number of cross-regional studies of migration. Since 1994, approximately 80 projects on migration have been funded within the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Framework Programme alone. This research has studied different aspects of the migration phenomenon, including immigrant integration, temporary/circular migration, trans-nationalism, migration and gender relations, migration and development, migration flows, migration data and statistical modelling, diversity, economic impact of immigration, and transnational families.[3]

Additional funding has been made available more recently under *The Societal Challenge of the Horizon 2020 Programme: Europe in a Changing World*[4] and a raft of other initiatives (Green European Foundation 2016). As a result there is now a great deal of migration-related research channelled through the Research Framework Programmes which

aim to give a strategic input into European policy-making (CEC 2009). In addition to occasional externally tendered projects through DG Home, the Commission draws on the resources of FRONTEX (since 2015, the European Border and Coast Guard) and the European Migration Network (EMN) to inform migration policy. However, there are important differences between these investments and those listed above. FRONTEX produces risk analyses that seek to inform and predict irregular migration flows, including refugee movements, and to this end has established a new FRONTEX Situation Centre (Carrera and Hertog 2016). The EMN (essentially, a network of EEA government agencies) also has an applied focus and produces studies on specific policy areas, commissioned by DG Migration and Home Affairs, 'to meet both the long-term and short-term needs of policymakers' (EMN 2017). Both of these are lacking in scientific independence and critical appraisal.

In the UK, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) responded to news of Lampedusa shipwrecks by issuing a call under its Urgent Research Grants scheme for projects related to what was described as 'the unfolding migration crisis in the Mediterranean'.[5] The stated purpose of the call was to 'test and demonstrate the capability of the UK social science community to respond to urgent social crises'. The research was to focus primarily on the experiences of those who had made the journey to Europe with fieldwork to be undertaken quickly in order to 'provide a robust evidence base to inform the development of policy and responses by governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental actors'. At the time of the call it was intended that 'one, or possibly two' project would be funded under the scheme. However, between the call for proposals and decision about which projects would be funded, the ESRC was able to draw upon significant additional resources. The source of the funding was the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), a 5-year £1.5 billion fund which is drawn from the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA)[6], described by DFID as a prominent component of the UK's Aid Strategy.[7]

This signalled both a commitment to EBP and the increasing use of development aid and financial assistance to manage migration, a theme to which we will return.

In September 2015, the ESRC announced that eight projects would be funded to undertake research on 'the Mediterranean migration crisis' with a total budget of £1 million.[8] The projects were directed by leading social scientists at the universities of Coventry, Durham, Queen Mary University of London, Loughborough, Middlesex, Warwick and York and involved significant collaboration with local researchers, NGOs, and humanitarian agencies in Greece, Italy, Turkey and Malta. Some projects also reached beyond areas of reception into both settlements in Calais and along the migration corridor in Serbia, and also eventual destination states such as Germany. These projects were brought together to form the ESRC's Mediterranean Migration Research Programme (MMRP). More than 100 researchers were involved across the MMRP which produced over 1,000 interviews with refugees and migrants, NGOs, humanitarian experts, and government officials from EU member states, as well as systematic analysis of migration policy developments within and across the countries of the EU.

The articles in this Special Issue draw on evidence from this programme of research and explore the relevance of recent empirical data in formulating the EU's policy responses to the so-called 'migration crisis'. Three themes cut across the articles, and link, in this volume:

1. To what extent can we describe migration flows to Europe in 2015 as representing a 'crisis'?

2. If the scale and nature of migration represents a 'crisis', to what extent did national and European policies respond in ways that alleviated the crisis and its underlying causes?

3. What was the basis upon which new migration management policies were formed in response to the 'crisis'?

Drawing upon fieldwork in the Mediterranean and selected sites across the European Union, the contributors to this volume seek to provide answers to these questions and in so doing unpack some of the dominant assumptions that have guided migration policymaking and media reporting on the events that took place in Europe over the period 2015-2017.

Migration trends and EU policy responses

As noted above, irregular migration to Europe is not new: for more than 30 years, people have been crossing the Mediterranean by boat. Similarly, informal settlements from Sangatte to the 'Jungle' of Calais have appeared at critical crossing points for decades (see de Vries and Guild, this volume). Not only is this information known to students of contemporary European history, but also to the European Union institutions which for almost 20 years have been grappling with these migration challenges, as evidenced in the design of European migration policies.

Since the 1999 European Council meeting in Tampere, the European Union has expressed its ambition to develop a 'comprehensive approach to migration' including common policies on asylum and immigration. A central plank of this agenda has been to find effective ways to secure the external border of the European Union and to prevent onward movements of third country nationals[9] through partnerships with countries of origin. The attempt to link internal and external policies reflected a greater interest in security which has been a constant over the past fifteen years. Since the 2002 Seville meeting, every European Council discussion on migration has emphasised the struggle to combat 'illegal immigration' and address 'root causes'. To this end, the European Union has made cooperation with third countries predicated on other commitments, including a

series of readmission agreements that require third countries to readmit their own nationals without the right to remain on EU territory.

Throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the European Council expanded partnerships with countries of origin and in so doing broadened the geographical reach of its campaign against irregular migration. European Union states also cooperated with each other on intra-state transfers as a result of the 1990 Dublin Convention, which entered into force in 1997, and later through further iterations of the Dublin legislation by Regulation, including Dublin II [EC 343/2003 of 18 February 2003], Dublin III [EU 604/2013] and now a proposed Dublin IV (2016). Ten years after Tampere, the European Union succeeded in establishing an asylum 'acquis' which includes legislation that seeks to align procedures and also promises the fair treatment of third country nationals.[10]

The architecture of the European Union's external policies on migration was named the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) in 2005, and included a number of programmes that sought to build partnerships with countries of origin where development aid and other forms of financial assistance were offered in return for cooperation in the struggle against irregular flows, trafficking and organised crime. Yet the claim that European Union policy was developed to protect human rights was little more than a fig leaf (see Crawley and Blitz, this volume). Essentially, the core elements of European external migration policy became the 'externalisation' of migration controls to transit and origin countries and 'preventative measures' designed to discourage the mobility of all but the most highly skilled.

Throughout the period 2000-2011, the EU strategy of controlling sea borders with the cooperation of neighbouring countries appeared to be working. Irregular arrivals by sea hovered around 40,000 a year (Canary Islands, Straits of Gibraltar, Italian islands, Malta and Greece). By 2010, the western Mediterranean route had been more or less blocked, by means

of the Spanish SIVE naval detection system and coastguard enforcement by Morocco and Tunisia. The central Mediterranean route had also been blocked with the 2008 Italy-Libya Friendship Agreement – essentially, paying Libya's dictator Q'addafi (Gadafi) significant funds to prevent the exit of refugees and other migrants from Libya, despite the lack of any protection (see Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck, this volume). The only apparent vulnerable point in 'Fortress Europe' was the Greek-Turkish land border, which recorded around 60,000 entries for 2011. To address this gap, FRONTEX in July 2012 launched Operation Aspida on the Greek-Turkish land border. The result was that refugees and other migrants were diverted to the Aegean sea border, with similar numbers then arriving there.

By late 2012, however, these policies of containment started to show some cracks. The displacement of millions from Syria which had begun in 2011 started to impact Greece, a country with no functioning asylum system and which was effectively excluded from the Dublin scheme after the 2011 European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruling in M.S.S. v Belgium and Greece. The ECtHR and subsequently the Court of Justice of the European Union found that the repeated failure of the Greek asylum system to afford adequate protection was incompatible with European human rights law. Returns to Greece were therefore suspended: in effect, this meant that those arriving irregularly in Greece had a *carte blanche* to transit Greece and seek asylum elsewhere in the EU. The response of the EU and the Greek authorities was to police the Greek-Italian maritime border, in the hope that they would prevent further large-scale secondary flows that were already occurring through that route.

Things were also beginning to go wrong elsewhere. In March 2011, a multi-state NATO-led coalition began a military intervention in Libya which led to the fall of the government and eventual capture and death of Q'addafi later the same year. In the wake of the government's collapse, Italy was obliged to suspend operation of its bilateral agreement

with Libya and as a result Libya rapidly became the main departure point for irregular migration across the central Mediterranean. With multiple incidents of boats sinking and migrants drowning, Italy launched in 2013 its own search and rescue operation, *Mare Nostrum*, which saved more than 1,700 lives: the scheme was abandoned in November 2014 when the EU refused to finance or support it. By that point, irregular arrivals into Italy were rising sharply, having reached more than 160,000 since the beginning of the year.

The increase in boat traffic corresponded with an upturn in fatalities, including the Lampedusa tragedies of April 2015 mentioned above. In response to the disaster, the European Council inaugurated the European Agenda on Migration, which explicitly pledged to take steps 'to prevent further loss of life at sea, fight the people smugglers and prevent illegal [sic] migration flows'. Further to the meeting of the European Council on 27 May 2015, the European Union initiated a number of actions which reflected its longstanding ambitions to promote border management, cooperation with third countries, and promise of refugee protection. It quickly provided €60 million in emergency funding to Italy and Greece and also published guidelines on the implementation of EU rules on the obligation to take fingerprints further to Articles 4(1) and 8(1) of the EURODAC Regulation.

Yet, rather than restart the search and rescue effort, the European Council set its sights on curbing migrant smuggling primarily through a new twin agenda of criminalisation on the one hand and containment on the other. Hence, the EU committed resources to tripling the capacity of FRONTEX's joint operations Triton and Poseidon, which aimed to secure the maritime borders along the central and eastern Mediterranean routes. One month later, the European Council passed Decision CFSP 2015/778 – legislating for a military operation, originally called EUNAVFOR-MED and later renamed *Operation Sophia*, in the central Mediterranean – which aimed to disrupt the business model of smuggling and trafficking networks. The EU's focus on externalisation was evidenced by further aid and development

packages. Most notably, it provided €30 million in regional development programmes for North Africa and the Horn of Africa and committed itself to establishing a multi-purpose centre in Niger, with the intention of curbing flows across the Sahara Desert.

In truth, the only elements of the European Agenda that reflected the stated interest in protecting human rights were the schemes for refugee relocation and resettlement. These initiatives aimed to relocate 40,000 people from Italy and Greece and resettle an additional 20,000 people from outside the EU. Although the number of beneficiaries was just a tiny fraction of those in need of international protection, the idea of a pan-European resettlement scheme was heralded as a major political achievement.

Alongside the relocation and resettlement schemes, the EU also instituted 'hot-spots' in Italy and Greece to process more efficiently the claims of asylum-seekers who arrived by boat or were intercepted by military and civilian patrols. The hot-spot approach was characterised as an innovative way of managing the increasing volume of arrivals in Greece and Italy, even though their operation was never defined in EU law and as a result the systems in the two countries operated very differently (d'Angelo et al. 2017). Centres on the Greek islands of Lesvos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos rapidly deteriorated into overcrowded closed facilities in contrast to more open processing centres in Sicily (Lampedusa, Trapani and Pozzallo) (see d'Angelo, this volume; Vradis and Papousi, this volume).

Although the precise content of the European Agenda became more defined over late 2015 and 2016 with further meetings of the European Council, there was little change in the design of the main policy pillars – which emphasised the need to police and curb flows using FRONTEX and national agencies, and the management of arrivals through hot-spots, assisted by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). At the same time, the EU produced lists and action plans to inform potential returns to designated 'safe countries of origin' and, as before, the carrot of development assistance was offered to more countries of origin in return

for cooperation on controlling irregular migration. The EU also committed significant funds to support the UNHCR and World Food Programme as well as set up Trust Funds for Africa and Syria. The relocation scheme was expanded to provide for up to 120,000 people to be relocated, although in practice the numbers that could benefit were severely limited by restricting eligibility to those nationalities with an EU asylum recognition rate of more than 75 per cent (see Kofman, this volume).

While the EU was testing out its new migration policies, more than 850,000 asylum seekers – predominantly Syrians, along with Afghans and Iraqis – rapidly transited through Greece to gain entry to the EU via non-EU Balkan countries. The destination of the majority of these migrants was Germany, a country where the Chancellor Angela Merkel had publicly announced that Syrian refugees would be welcome.. Yet, the creation of the 'Balkan route' generated new political crises as states responded one after the other by closing their borders. As a result, the operation of the Common European Asylum System, the Dublin Regulation and the functioning of the Schengen Agreement (permitting passport-free movement of nationals of contracting states) were all called into question. Moreover, the decision by Hungary in September 2015 to build a fence along its borders with Serbia and Croatia, tore at the EU's claims of solidarity. Not only did the Hungarian border fence divert refugees and other migrants into countries that had previously received few arrivals, and were therefore ill-equipped to respond, but more importantly this action set the scene for further coercive attempts at border management across the EU and among its neighbours.

By October 2015, around 10,000 people were arriving on the Greek islands every day – with no sign that the flow would decrease any time soon. It was against this background that the European Council initiated a joint action plan with Turkey which paved the way for further significant transfers of financial assistance and the framework for what would become the EU-Turkey agreement, implemented in March 2016 with the specific – and explicitly

stated – objective of reducing the number of refugees and other migrants arriving in EU territory. At the same time, one by one, Greece's western neighbours followed Hungary's example and closed their borders. By 8 March 2016, all the Balkan borders were closed for asylum-seekers wishing to exit Greece. Tens of thousands of people became blocked at different borders in Europe, or in temporary makeshift camps established whilst they – and panic-stricken governments across Europe – decided what to do next.

In March 2016, the eastern border with Turkey was formally closed subsequent to an agreement of 18 March. The so-called *EU-Turkey Statement* determined *inter alia* that all irregular migrants and rejected asylum-seekers arriving in Greece after the cut-off date of 20 March would be returned to Turkey; that for every Syrian returned from Greece another would be resettled directly from Turkey to the EU (with a complex proviso that initially 18,000 would be resettled, followed by potentially another 54,000); that Turkey would take measures to prevent all irregular migration from Turkey to the EU; and that an allocated funding of €3bn from the Facility for Refugees in Turkey would be available, with another potential €3bn up to the end of 2018.

While the agreement between the EU and Turkey contained the eastern border of Europe, it also generated new protection challenges for the thousands of stranded refugees and other migrants caught between inhospitable national borders or in informal and precarious settlements. Over 4,000 asylum-seekers languished, some for over a year, in closed detention centres in Moria on Lesvos. Others were stuck in Serbia while those who had reached Calais, and possibly had hoped to cross to the UK, experienced repeated abuse by the French police and saw their settlements destroyed.

The central Mediterranean route via Libya had remained open during 2016, utilised by refugees and migrants primarily from countries of West, Central and East Africa. Following the success of the EU-Turkey agreement in stemming the flow of refugees and

other migrants from Turkey to Greece, Europe's politicians were keen to replicate the deal with Libya – to stop the arrival of people into Italy. Since Libya does not possess a coherent government and is also a dangerous place for refuges and other migrants, the arrangement with Libya could not simply replicate the arrangement with Turkey. In early 2017, Italy concluded a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding with Libya's UN-backed government headed by al-Sarraj, which at the February 2017 EU summit in Malta was endorsed by the EU as a whole (see Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck, this volume). This bilateral deal was followed up by unspecified deals made between Italy and local governments in Libya, allegedly paying off militia groups engaged in the trafficking and smuggling of migrants to Italy. By July 2017, the flow of refugees and other migrants started to diminish, and the deal was enthusiastically hailed as another success in blocking a major migration route into the EU.

Thus, by 2017 the EU's external migration policy was focused primarily on sealing Turkey and Libya as the two main transit routes into Europe, the continuation of promoting capacity-building of non-EU countries in the Mediterranean region to host refugees and other migrants alongside blocking migration flows, and addressing the 'root causes' of migration in countries of origin. Irregular flows into Italy and Greece continued, albeit at low levels, with weak capacity of these two countries to host and manage the mixed flows, while the actual protection afforded those in Libya, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and other countries of the region remained unknown. In the case of Libya, the main transit country of the central Mediterranean route, the experiences of refugees and other migrants have been increasingly well documented with widely reported incidents of kidnapping, forced labour, torture and death (Crawley et al. 2018).

The gap between evidence and policy

Why then, given the history of migration to Europe and the plethora of evidence that has been produced across the EU and made available to policymakers, has the EU response to the 'migration crisis' been so problematic? There are several possible explanations for this, not least the many problems and paradoxes inherent in the concept of EBP. For the purpose of this introduction, it is worth highlighting three particular issues that explain, in large part, the ongoing and substantial 'gap' between a significant body of evidence examining migration processes including the drivers of migration to Europe, and the policy response.

First, it is important to note that the gap between evidence on the drivers of migration to Europe and the policy response is not limited or specific to the issue of migration. Rather, it reflects a deeper problem with the concept of EBP which parallels the long-standing 'paradigm war' in social research between positivist, interpretivist and critical approaches. In particular, the definition of 'evidence' for the purpose of migration policymaking is often reliant upon quantitative data and statistical analysis (e.g., that provided by FRONTEX) that can provide a straightforward numerical description of the issue(s) and steer the policy response in a specific direction, the success or otherwise of which can be easily measured. In truth, the world is more complex than this, and data in the area of migration and asylum policy continue to be subject to definitional and spatial limitations that are exacerbated by rapid changes and incorrect usage and interpretation (Singleton 2016). In other words, the nature of what counts as 'evidence' is itself contested and challenged.

Secondly, it is clear – regardless of how 'evidence' is defined and characterised – that research is only one component of the evidence that shapes and informs EBP. At each stage of the policy process, a number of different factors will also affect policy. This occurs both at an individual level – for example, a policymaker's own experience,

expertise and judgement – and at an institutional level, for example in terms of institutional capacity (Sutcliffe and Court 2005). It also occurs at the broader level of policy narratives – in other words, the story that is constructed about the role of a particular policy or set of policies and the purpose that 'evidence' plays in this process of narrative construction (Boswell et al. 2011). Boswell et al. argue that many aspects of migration policy can be characterised as areas of risk, with policymakers invoking different knowledge claims, sometimes based on evidence from research, other times drawing on management data or other forms of evidence to construct and/or support particular policy narratives.

This takes us to the third, and perhaps most important, aspect of EBP – namely, the political context within which policymaking takes place. This aspect is how evidence is incorporated into policymaking, the stage at which it is taken into account and the use(s) to which it is put. The positivist, empiricist worldview that underpins the theory and practice of EBP has largely failed to address the key elements of the policymaking process and the complex social and political realities within which policymaking takes place (Greenhalgh and Russell 2009). In particular, a narrow 'evidence-based' framing of policymaking is inherently unable to explore the complex, context-dependent and value-laden way in which competing options are negotiated by individuals and interest groups. Policymaking is, as Sutcliffe and Court suggest, 'neither objective nor neutral; it is an inherently political process' (2005, iii). Although this has implications for EBP across all policy domains, the politics of policymaking is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the area of migration and asylum – issues that have become deeply politicised at the national and regional levels. We note, for example, that in the case of the EMN studies, the emphasis on evaluation is often at the expense of critical insight. The studies tend to address the question 'How well does EU policy work in achieving its stated goals?' There is little or no critical reflection, no attempt to challenge the stated goals or analyse why migrations are occurring and what the

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constitutive elements of 'mixed flows' of persons may imply for alternative policy responses.

Following from the ontological biases listed above, it is helpful to consider the following additional explanations.

Assumption led policymaking

Throughout the 'crisis', EU member states – and in particular the UK – suggested that refugees and other migrants were drawn to Europe by a variety of 'pull factors', including better employment opportunities, social security, access to healthcare and other benefits. This emphasis on pull versus push factors is regularly asserted, with politicians making assumptions about the factors shaping migrants' decision making – speaking for them, but not listening to their own accounts and reasons for deciding to leave or move on (Crawley et al. 2017, 2018). In addition, it is clear from the outline of EU policy developments above that European migration policy has been preoccupied with curbing irregular flows and addressing the criminal aspects of smuggling and trafficking. Yet, in spite of much evidence presented by academics and by refugees and migrants themselves, there has been an unwillingness to accept the complex and mixed nature of migration flows. We note that there is often an overlapping relationship between 'forced' and 'economic' drivers of migration and that many of those who left their home countries primarily for economic reasons may effectively have been recast as refugees – for example, as a result of abusive and exploitative practices in Libya and elsewhere (Crawley and Skleparis 2017). As a result, many people have been excluded from international protection. While Syrians have overwhelmingly benefited from both the granting of asylum status and participation in the EU relocation scheme, other nationalities have been denied such opportunities even though they may have equally pressing claims for protection. A recent survey of 700 boat

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migrants who reached Sicily and Greece found that only 18 per cent described themselves as 'economic migrants', the vast majority having come from refugee-producing states and who had escaped conflict and political turmoil (see EVI-MED 2017). This evidence is in line with that of IOM (2016), which found that economic or work reasons were the main reasons for migration among only 24 per cent of the 1,031 refugees and migrants they interviewed.

Interest led policy-making – a convenient 'crisis'

Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins (2016) argue that the 2015 'migration crisis' cannot be treated solely as a crisis, since the solutions have built on pre-existing practices and actually helped to consolidate them. This is a view shared by van Reekum (2016) who notes the phenomenon of 'routinized emergency' acting to 'naturalize' migration politics. In the case of the European Union, such practices are well-documented. As we argue above, there is a line of continuity between the Tampere and Seville European Council decisions and the 2015 European Agenda on Migration. The EU's commitment to 'manage' migration flows is further evidenced in external policies that build on top of a raft of migration partnerships and schemes. The most obvious legacy of this approach is in the design of the EU-Turkey agreement.

Further, the events described above relate to an emergency situation which enabled the EU to expand its competences. Again, the focus on smuggling, irregular flows and the criminalisation of migration dominated the agenda. Blockmans (2016) sees the 2015 crisis as an ideal opportunity for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) to acquire a bigger role in EU policies – something borne out by the recent reconfiguration of FRONTEX as a semi-militarised European Border and Coast Guard. We might also argue that casting migration as a security issue, and addressing it through the CDSP, was a less

problematic way forward for EU policymakers when confronted by highly divergent national positions on the management of external immigration flows.

Nationalising migration policy

With the creation of a 'Balkan route', EU member states took action to close their borders, and saw the pillars of EU policy – the operation of the CEAS, the Dublin Regulation and the Schengen Agreement – abrogated in favour of restrictive and nationalised policies that appealed to domestic audiences. In particular, Central European states – above all, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland – presented their actions as natural responses to the inflows of migrants. These actions were defended in the name of border management, national sovereignty, social cohesion – the lexicon of populism. Thus, while the European Union expanded its competences in protecting the EU's external border, its internal borders hardened – to the benefit of chauvinistic national governments.

Rewriting the rules of the game

The framing of migration management as a crisis has been used to justify extraordinary and exceptional measures, characterised as rapid, informal and flexible policy instruments at odds with the rule of law and the fundamental rights of migrants. The expansion and multiplication of borders – physical, technological and mental – is seen as the cause of long and fragmented journeys, denying access through legal routes and particularly problematic for persons seeking international protection. As Ansems de Vries et al. (2016) argue, the fractured and complex journeys of migrants, and the dramatic effect of increasingly coercive policies where migrants are pushed back from one country to another, and borders become extended zones of hold-up, pushback and/or violence, fundamentally undermine the potential for settlement. The system works against the institution of asylum.

The stories unheard

The articles in this Special Issue engage directly with the complex relationship between evidence on migration processes and the policymaking process. What becomes clear from the stories they tell us about different aspects of EU migration policy and practice is that the aspiration – as expressed in the ESRC's Urgent Grant Call – for robust evidence to inform the development of policy and responses by governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental actors is not, in itself, sufficient to produce meaningful impact. The failings of the EU's response to increased migration were not through a lack of robust evidence on 'what works': rather, because this evidence was viewed as insufficiently convincing relative to the other forms of evidence available to policymakers. Such evidence was also over-ruled by the perceived political imperative of controlling and limiting migration.

This volume examines the internal contradictions in the design of European policy. One unifying theme is the problematic lens of 'crisis'. Leonie Ansems de Vries and Elspeth Guild explore this concept through the perspective of transit points, which they describe as the kind of spaces that people seeking refuge pass through – including informal sites such as railways stations, parks and ad hoc camps as well as institutionalised spaces such as reception centres, detention centres and hotspots. The authors describe how the 'Jungle' in Calais turned into a (semi-)permanent place of passage and residence owing to the closed border with the UK and how other spaces have become sites of significant human rights abuses where people are often detained unlawfully. Ansems de Vries and Guild also highlight the ineffective way in which transit points are used to manage migration flows, arguing that 'eviction and destruction has not stopped people from moving through and staying in informal places'. One particularly telling contribution this article makes is in its description of the ways in which policy frameworks structure the experience of migration and as a result

of multiple and overlapping forms of coercive measures undermine opportunities for settlement.

Vicki Squire and Nina Perkowski take issue with the European Agenda on Migration and the Union's emphasis on tackling the issue of smuggling and trafficking. Drawing upon 257 interviews carried out with 271 people who travelled across the Mediterranean Sea by boat using smuggling networks, the authors look at the complex co-relationship between smuggling and anti-smuggling initiatives – arguing that the European Union has been distracted by a focus on the criminal actors and actions that enable people to reach places of safety, rather than focusing on the criminal regimes from which people are fleeing in their search for international protection.

Squire and Perkowski note that, from the individual perspective, the absence of choice undermines a moral argument against smuggling and they unpick the logic of 'good versus bad smuggling'. Drawing on concepts of 'anti-politics', they demonstrate how policies have emerged in response to the problem of managing 'bad things'. Whereas 'good smugglers' provide a service, 'bad smugglers' are considered to be 'interested only in financial gain, and potentially cheating, threatening, abusing, or risking the lives of their 'customers' to maximise their profits'. In this way, Squire and Perkowski's article highlights a plurality of approaches to smuggling, some of which may involve cooperation with smugglers and reduce rather than increase harm. These counter-narratives expose the limitations of the European Union's approach to the issue of smuggling. Squire and Perkowski further explain that rather than functioning as a consistent and logical set of operations that seek to curb the exploitative practice of human smuggling, the European Union's approach has in fact given way to a series of contested practices that seek to transform migrant smuggling networks from 'low risk, high return' operations into 'high risk, low return' ones' – with devastating consequences for refugees and other migrants caught in the middle. They argue that the EU's

legitimacy may be called into question by the rising number of deaths at sea, in spite of increasingly sophisticated intelligence networks.

Eleonore Kofman similarly seeks to deconstruct EU policy and expose its underlying biases – in this instance, the designation of vulnerability and the gendered implications for the EU's relocation scheme. Exploring the nature of 'gendered mobilities', Kofman argues that the absence of socially disaggregated data for differentiating between the needs of adults and children masks a wider challenge in the conceptualisation of categories of vulnerability. It is not just women and children as a whole who are classified as vulnerable, but sub-categories such as pregnant women, single parents or unaccompanied minors who are deemed to be the most dependent and in need of additional support and who should be given priority in terms of reception support and relocation.

The application of 'vulnerability' to the reception of asylum seekers and the privileging of certain nationalities for those eligible for relocation have created a series of hierarchies and stratifications. Drawing upon empirical data from UNHCR and national sources in Greece and Italy as well as original data generated by the EVI-MED project, Kofman argues that in practice the way in which people are deemed to be vulnerable privileges certain categories over others. Those omitted tend to be those who experienced emotional trauma. Kofman also describes how vulnerability is conceptualised in gendered terms. For example, single women travelling alone who encounter dangerous and threatening situations and gender-based violence. She identifies two very different sub-systems such that the increasing feminisation of the refugee flow occurred only in the eastern Mediterranean – dominated by Syrian, Iraqi and Afghan populations – in contrast to the central Mediterranean where the major flows emanate from East and West Africa, and the female population actually decreased from the end of 2015. On this basis, Kofman argues that these shifts have been used to exclude men from the category of vulnerable persons, highlighting how gender

has featured in discourses on migration and fuelled anti-immigrant platforms. The supposed absence or small number of women travelling to Europe has been used by anti-immigrant social media sites to argue that men fleeing conflict zones are cowards, and unwilling to safeguard vulnerable women and children – and therefore are not vulnerable.

The article by Anna Papoutsi and Antonis Vradis focuses on the operation of the reception system, and in particular the use of hotspots in Greece and Italy, highlighting multiple abuses that undermine the European Union's claim to protect the rights of migrants. The authors argue that international protection systems for asylum seekers effectively cease to apply on large swathes of Greek territory. 'Hotspots' allow the state and the EU to further separate citizens and non-citizens into categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations and through the use of pre-registration systems manage their mobility by creating further ambiguous categories. In this way, Papoutsi and Vradis argue, the hotspots are liminal spaces that institutionalise mobility yet also facilitate the immobility of transit populations. The use of these sites results in a forced detachment between territory and population such that migrants encamped in hotspots are no longer citizens, dwellers or bearers of any other residence-derived rights. They are simply populations passing through.

Alessio d'Angelo, writing on the management of reception systems in Italy, similarly notes how the 'hotspot' approach in Italy has turned the idea of refugee protection and migration management on its head: d'Angelo argues that the institutionalisation of hotspots in Agrigento, Lampedusa, Taranto, Trapani and Pozzallo has effectively created an 'illegality factory'. The Italian system of reception for refugees and migrants involves a galaxy of state and non-governmental actors and a multi-tier classification of services and centres operating in an overcomplicated system created from confused and contradictory legislation. Yet, just as in Greece, where officials are assisted by FRONTEX and EASO, the hotspots act as a sorting office. The process of illegality management begins at this point, because in spite of

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the notice of rejection given to many, individuals are not removed but 'virtually expelled' or assisted to leave, with gates to centres deliberately left open or – as with the smugglers in Squire and Perkowski's account – the police facilitating their exit by taking migrants to rural areas so they can 'disappear'.

The agreement with Turkey in March 2016 which has significantly reduced the flow of refugees and migrants to Greece, presents operational challenges on both sides of the Aegean. Yet, as Frank Düvell argues, in Turkey as in Europe, the police and border enforcement agencies play an ambiguous role. Drawing upon interviews undertaken in Greece and Turkey he describes the competing motivations of individuals, state actors and social networks in the outflow of migrants from Turkey to Greece. He identifies an assemblage of macro, meso and micro-level drivers which includes geographical borders, official policies, hostile and migrant discourses, social processes, routes and movements; he considers smuggling to be symptomatic of the extraordinarily restrictive conditions that permit entry to the European Union. Although Turkey is often criticised for a plethora of support for smugglers and, in turn, for refugees and migrants seeking to cross the Aegean, Duvell also records how informal structures have provided support – including mosques and NGOs – which help to determine onward journeys and cater to those left stranded.

The problem of stranded migrants is further explored by Martin Baldwin-Edwards and Derek Lutterbeck who examine the importance of Libya as a transit state and the situation for those crossing to Europe via the central Mediterranean route. The authors describe how the EU has accommodated abuse in Libya by tolerating a contradictory relationship between the security of the state versus the security of the migrant. Although the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration is the 'official' agency responsible for overseeing the management of detention centres, Baldwin-Edwards and Lutterbeck argue that these are controlled by militia beyond the reach of the Ministry of the Interior. The 2017

arrangement between Italy and various Libyan authorities has resulted in a large stock of migrants being stranded in Libya and in need of international protection – in a country where the UNHCR and the EU have almost no access or influence, and which is controlled by three competing governments with extensive militia activities and a recent history of extreme abuse and violence towards migrants.

The final article by Heaven Crawley and Brad Blitz revisits the relationship between the EU's policies of migration management and the use of financial aid and development assistance to control flows to Europe, focusing on the ways in which ODA and other forms of development assistance have been used to externalise the borders of the EU and limit potential flows from the Horn of Africa. Drawing on data from two of the projects funded as part of the MMRP – MEDMIG and EVI-MED – the article charts the development of EU cooperation with countries of origin, from the Tampere Council to the multiplication of development programmes and readmission agreements with third countries over the past 15 years. Although these initiatives are purported to advance a 'common agenda', it is clear that they are increasingly being orientated towards the political aspirations and needs of the EU.

Drawing upon data from interviews and surveys with 128 people originating from Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan, the authors argue that the development of regional cooperation initiatives, further to the agreement between the EU and Turkey reflect a series of assumptions about the factors driving migration from the region – including the belief that poverty, not political oppression or human rights abuse, is a principal cause for outflows. Rather, the empirical data record that persecution, insecurity and the absence of access to rights – in countries of origin and neighbouring countries in the region – shape individual decisions to move onwards towards Europe and hence fundamentally challenge some of the premises underlying both the European Agenda on Migration and the idea that robust and timely evidence alone can shape the policy agenda. The authors conclude that the

lack of coherence between the EU's ambitions to control irregular migration and the prevailing rights-violating contexts in which the EU seeks to engage, threatens to create further political destabilisation which may ultimately increase, rather than decrease, outward migration from the region.

While Europe has grappled with the reception and integration of more than one million refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean in 2015, and a further 364,000 that arrived during the course of 2016, these articles unpack the relationship between what we know of the reasons why people risk their lives, and those of their families, to make the crossing and the EU's policy response to the 'crisis' – which has failed to deliver protection, curb the need for smugglers to access Europe or prevent deaths at sea. In September 2017 the European Commission released a statement claiming that 'good progress' had been made in managing migration flows and encouraging all parties 'to sustain and further accelerate the good progress made in managing irregular migration flows, protecting the EU external borders and supporting the frontline Member States under pressure'.[11] This volume challenges the idea that the European Agenda on Migration is internally consistent and an effective means of managing the arrival and integration of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean. It also raises important questions about how the future of migration policy in Europe, with the EU reliant upon Turkey and diverse actors in Libya to manage its external borders – both countries with significant refugee and migrant populations and with serious human rights concerns. There is increasing evidence that the logic of containment and 'sorting', which runs through many of the policy initiatives discussed in the articles, is being applied in neighbouring states. This raises additional questions about the European Union's position as a protector and advocate of human rights. For both the European Union and the UK government (which has funded the research that underpins the articles in this volume), these findings are of great importance. Whether, and how, these findings will be used to

inform the future development of migration policy in Europe represents a further test of our politicians' commitment to evidence-based policy.

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[1] We refer to refugees and other migrants throughout, reflecting the nature of 'mixed flows'.

[2] See 'IOM Counts 3,771 Migrant Fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015', 1 May 2016. available at:
https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015

[3] See European Commission Policy Areas – Migration Research Platform; available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm?pg=policies&policyname=migration-mobility

[4] See European Commission Funding and Opportunities; available at: https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/index.cfm?pg=funding

[5] The Urgency Grants Mechanism is intended to respond to 'rare and unforeseen events' where there is considered to be a strong case for immediate social science research. Following a review of the scheme, it was decided that that Urgent Research Grants would instead be allocated on a strategic basis, with ESRC inviting calls for projects in areas deemed to require rapid action rather than waiting for these issues to be identified by academics[5]. Europe's 'migration crisis' was the first topic determined to be worthy of such a response. See See: Economic and Social Research Council – Shaping Society - Urgency Grants
http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/urgency-grants/

[6] See Research Councils UK, Global Challenges Research Fund; available at
http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/gcrf/ and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Policy paper: Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): how the fund works, 30 June 2017; available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-how-the-fund-works

[7] See Research Councils UK, Global Challenges Research Fund; available at:
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[8] See Economic and Social Research Council Shaping Society - £1 million Urgency Grant to fund social science research into migration crisis, 18 September 2015; available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/news-events-and-publications/news/news-items/1-million-urgency-grant-to-fund-social-science-research-into-migration-crisis/

[9] The term 'third country nationals' refers to individuals who are living in countries which are not their country of origin and who are not citizens of other EU Member States

[10] The asylum acquis includes but is not limited to the Asylum Procedures Directive, the Qualification Directive, the Reception Directive and the Dublin Regulation.

[11] See European Commission - Press release - European Agenda on Migration: Good progress in managing migration flows needs to be sustained, Brussels, 6 September 2017; available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-3081_en.htm