Choice of destination country: evidence from refugees in Australia and potential asylum seekers in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka

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Research questions

Did potential asylum seekers from origin countries and refugees in Australia have a destination country of preference?

If yes, why was a destination country preferred?

What are the key sources of information?

Does destination country policy influence country choice?
Literature

Context & methodology
Findings
Implications
Literature

Theoretical: Little weight given to destination country choice among refugees (Kunz 1973; Richmond 1993).

Empirical: Case-studies are mixed with respect to whether refugees select a destination country; large macro models suggest that refugees do choose destination countries.

Limitations of approaches;

- Case-studies (small n) focus on agency in the absence of scale.
- Macro level studies (large N) focus on scale in the absence of agency.
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Number of irregular maritime arrivals to Australia (1976–2014)
Refugees surveyed in Australia

- Sample frame were irregular maritime arrivals who had been issued a protection visa between 6 July 2011 and 31 December 2012.

- Survey undertaken in 2013.
Areas surveyed in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (2014)

Afghanistan (4,400 HH)

Bangladesh (4,700 HH)

Pakistan (4,400 HH)

Sri Lanka (20,632 HH)
Main ethnic groups by country sample

- **Afghanistan**
  - Pashtun: 49%
  - Tajek: 10%
  - Hazara: 38%
  - Other: 3%

- **Bangladesh**
  - Bengali: 77%
  - Rohingya: 21%
  - Marma: 2%
  - Rakhain: 2%

- **Pakistan**
  - Pashtun: 47%
  - Sindhi: 27%
  - Seraiki: 12%
  - Muhajir: 5%
  - Baloch: 2%
  - Hazara: 1%
  - Other: 2%

- **Sri Lanka**
  - Burgher: 39%
  - Moors: 19%
  - Sinhales: 42%
  - Other: 2%
Methodological similarities across all 5 surveys

• Questionnaire design based on literature review, input from migration experts and in-country experts.

• Back-translation with specialist review.

• Cognitive testing.

• Pilot surveys.

• Tablet devices used to collect data.
  – Confidentiality
  – Ongoing data review (surveys outside Australia)
  – Answers to sensitive questions

• Probability proportionate to size sampling (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka); Simple random sampling (Pakistan and Afghanistan).
Proportion of households approached by people smugglers (origin countries)

- Hazara (AFG): 17% (2% approached in Australia)
- Rohingya (BAG): 27% (2% approached in Australia)
- Hazara (PAK): 8% (7% approached in Australia)
- Tamil (SL): 1% (0% approached in Australia)
- Muslim (SL): 0% (0% approached in Australia)
Aspirations for asylum seeking (potential asylum seekers)

Country wide analysis; if analysis was in post-conflict areas, the proportions would be higher.
Key sources of information varied among refugees, potential asylum seekers and between ethnic groups

- Refugees in Australia
  - Family in origin country (25%).
  - People smugglers (15%).

- Potential asylum seekers in Afghanistan (Hazara)
  - TV (25%).
  - Friends in other countries (19%).

- Potential asylum seekers in Pakistan (Hazara)
  - Friends in other countries (20%).
  - Internet (19%).

- Potential asylum seekers in Bangladesh (Rohingya)
  - Family in Bangladesh (59%).
  - Family in other countries (9%).
Did refugees and potential asylum seekers have a destination country of preference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People smuggling</th>
<th>Current intentions</th>
<th>Sources of information</th>
<th>Preferred destination country</th>
<th>Reasons for destination country choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refugees (Australia)</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazara (Afghanistan)</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazara (Pakistan)</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rohingya (Bangladesh)</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td></td>
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<td>84%</td>
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Australia was the preferred destination country among surveyed potential asylum seekers

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- **Australia**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)
  - Hazara (PAK)
  - Tamil (SL)

- **Belgium**: 
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **Canada**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **Denmark**: 
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **Finland**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **Germany**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)

- **Greece**: 
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **Netherlands**: 
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **New Zealand**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)

- **Norway**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)

- **Spain**: 

- **Sweden**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)

- **Switzerland**: 

- **United Kingdom**: 
  - Hazara (AFG)

- **United States**: 
  - Hazara (PAK)

- **United States**: 
  - Tamil (SL)
In 2011 and 2012, refugees who selected Australia as a destination country did so primarily because Australia was accepting refugees.

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<td>Australia does not return refugees</td>
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<td>Because my family would be able to follow me to Australia</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because it is easier to travel to Australia than other countries</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is work in Australia</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be with my family</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be with [ethnicity] people</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not have family in other countries</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>To be with friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia is safe</td>
<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>[Ethnicity] people are not in other countries</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to life</td>
<td>0%</td>
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In 2013 survey, refugees who selected Australia as a destination country did so primarily because Australia was accepting refugees.

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An ‘accepting’ asylum seeker policy was not an important reason why Australia was preferred among potential asylum seekers in 2014.
Australia was preferred over other countries for varying reasons

- **Afghanistan (Hazara)**
  - Due to the country’s job opportunities (57%).
  - Previous asylum seekers in those countries send money back (39%).

- **Pakistan (Hazara)**
  - Because the country is safe (87%).
  - Due to the country’s job opportunities (38%).

- **Bangladesh (Rohingya)**
  - They can earn more money in Australia relative to other countries (88%).
  - Because the country is safe (79%).
Australia may be preferred due to perceptions relative to other countries.
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- Evidence that proactive potential asylum seekers (as opposed to acute potential asylum seekers) do have destination country preference.

- Potential asylum seekers appear aware of aspects of immigration policy in destination countries.

- Information sources for potential asylum seekers vary considerably.

- Broader perceptions of destination countries varied substantially.
Future potential

- Data collection using tablet devices facilitates timely feedback to policy makers.
- Further surveys of potential migrants can build on existing data.
- Model can be replicated in different geographic locations.
- Further empirical evidence to inform policy and operational deliberations.
- Highlight extremely vulnerable communities, aspects of smuggling networks as well as potential migrants’ views.
- Qualitative approaches to further explore smuggling dynamics and decision making processes.
Questions?