Migration Decision Making: Review and Evidences

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ABSTRACT

The reasons why people migrate are often multiple and changing, and the categories of 'economic migrant' and 'asylum-seeker' are too rigid to reflect reality. There are many shared motivations for regular and irregular migration. Having the capability and economic means to migrate is particularly important; in conflict situations people may be very keen to migrate, but may not have sufficient resources to do so. Lack of economic opportunities in the country of origin and the hope of greater opportunities in another country are important drivers of irregular migration, though expectations vary according to the nature and reliability of the sources of information individual migrants have. Irregular migration is usually a collective effort in which families and social and religious networks play a crucial role. Irregular migrants are commonly supported financially by friends or family; as migration from a society becomes common, a 'culture of migration' may emerge in communities of origin which drives further migration. Many people who migrate irregularly use the services of smugglers or agents, who influence which destination is offered, promoted, or available, and the route taken. Smugglers' networks have become increasingly professionalised, in particular as a result of the ability of Syrian migrants to pay for more sophisticated services. While tightening border security may change migration patterns and routes, migration policies are unlikely to influence the volume of people migrating. A person's need to leave their home is likely to be far more important to them than different countries' welfare and asylum support systems. Trade and investment in a source country is likely to increase, not reduce, migration. It is not individuals from the poorest households who migrate to Europe, but rather those who have access to sufficient resources to pay for their journey

Keywords: migration, diaspora, kinship, social network, household, transnationalism

INTRODUCTION

The literature on drivers of migration in general is substantial, but few studies examine the factors driving irregular migration specifically (Mbaye 2014; Mannan & Wei 2007). There are many common motivations for regular and irregular migration, such as conflict and insecurity or a lack of economic opportunities (Kuschminder et al. 2015). This evidence review therefore discusses the factors influencing decisions to migrate via irregular means, but also draws on wider evidence of factors driving migration to Europe from the regions of interest.

With respect to the current migration crisis, it is difficult to distinguish between the numerous factors influencing migration for asylum or migration for work. The reasons for migration are often multiple and changing, and the categories of 'economic migrant' as opposed to 'asylum seeker' are too rigid to reflect reality. The focus of this evidence review is therefore on the drivers of migration without legal means, rather than the category into which a person who is migrating could be placed.

This section begins by describing the definitional difficulties of examining the factors which determine a person's decision to migrate via irregular means. The impact of political and economic insecurity on the decision to migrate is then discussed, followed by a review of further factors, such as personal characteristics, the influence of family, the role of smugglers and the emergence of a culture of migration. Finally, this section summarises the findings on the influence of broader, longterm forces shaping flows of irregular migration to Europe.

DEFINITIONAL DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING REASONS FOR MIGRATION

A concept which is critical to this evidence review is the categorisation of refugees as 'involuntary' migrants (Bakewell & Jolivet 2015) and to consider those who fall outside of this category as 'voluntary'. However, there are strong criticisms of this binary categorisation. Theorists have argued that, ultimately, there is always some degree of choice for all migrants even in the most constraining of situations, and understanding the specific reasons why an individual has left their country of origin is important for all groups of migrants (Mannan & Wei 2009; Mannan & Kozlov 2003). Equally important is the assertion that individuals can move between the categories of refugee and economic migrant, and indeed be present in both categories at the same time (Zimmerman 2009; 2011; Mannan & Wei 2008).

Timmerman et al. (2014b) provide a general framework for factors which influence migration, whether regular or irregular, and categorise these factors as macro, meso, or micro. At the macro-level, factors which influence all migrants, albeit not necessarily in the same way, include immigration policies, the strength of a country's economy, and a country's political situation. At the meso-level are factors linking an individual migrant to wider society, such as social networks and whether a person lives in a region where migration is common. Factors at the micro-level concern personal characteristics, such as education, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Timmerman et al., 2014b; Mannan & Kozlov 2005: Mannan & Krueger 2004). This framework emphasises that regular and

irregular migration are not driven by one factor alone, but by numerous social, economic, political, and environmental issues (Loschmann et al. 2014). Given the constantly changing international context in which migration occurs, statistical analysis or scenario modelling cannot accurately explain how interactions between drivers at different levels result in decisions to migrate (de Haas 2011b).

The transient nature of migration is especially important in understanding the drivers of irregular migration. Irregular migration does not always follow 'wellconsidered plans' (Schapendonk 2012), and a migrant may come across different information while in a transit country, forming new contacts and finding new opportunities which change their intended destination (Kuschminder et al. 2015). It is thus highly problematic to consider the aspirations and capabilities which enable irregular migration as fixed and unchanging (De Clerk 2015; Reitano 2015) and it must also be recognised that the migration drivers, flows, and smuggling networks described in this review are also in a constant state of change.

POLITICAL INSECURITY AND CONFLICT

There is broad agreement in the literature that conflict often forces people to consider fleeing their home. However, it is unclear what specific triggers result in someone taking the decision to leave (Adikhari 2013). For example, looking at why Ethiopian and Somali refugees had left their home countries, it was found that people often undergo a waiting period, attempting to make-do until the political situation improves (Zimmerman 2011). Often, changes in personal circumstances, such as access to income, property, or health, within the broader context of insecurity, lead to a person eventually deciding to flee (Zimmermann, 2011). Adhikari (2013) describes the decision of whether or not to flee conflict in terms of opportunity cost: 'people tend to stay in their homes and villages when the opportunity cost of fleeing, measured in terms of forgone economic opportunity at the place of origin as well as one's attachment to home, outweighs a physical threat to life'. While political insecurity and conflict may increase a person's desire to migrate, a repressive state may prevent people from leaving, as in Eritrea, or, if economic opportunities are still present, political repression may not automatically provoke mass migration, as shown by the Gulf countries (de Haas, 2011b). This underlines the importance of economic as well as personal security in the decision to migrate.

Having the capability to migrate is a particularly important factor in understanding migration flows. In a situation of conflict, people may not have sufficient resources to migrate even if their intention to migrate is high (IMI and RMMS 2012). For example, a large decrease in the number of Somali migrants arriving in Yemen in early 2010 is thought to be due to a deterioration in the situation in Somalia, which meant fewer resources to fund the journey. Disruption to transport systems due to conflict may also constrain people's ability to migrate (IMI and RMMS 2012).

With respect to current irregular migration to Europe, several situations of political instability in countries of origin are thought to be contributing to this in-flow of people, including the conflict in Syria and instability in Libya and Tunisia. Natter (2015) reports

that 'Libya's political and economic instability, civil war, and growing Islamist threat have prompted thousands of Libyans and foreigners to leave', many of whom have entered Tunisia or been repatriated to countries such as Egypt, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria and Gambia. Likewise, political instability in Tunisia during the Arab Spring resulted in an increase in irregular migration to Europe as border security was disrupted (Natter 2015).

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Political insecurity and conflict cannot be considered in isolation from the wider impact political instability can have on economic opportunities and the labour market. As de Haas (2011b) explains, 'Taken together, such factors will determine the extent to which people can fulfil their life aspirations locally and, hence, their aspirations and intentions to migrate as a perceived way to achieve their life'. Zimmerman (2009) finds that Somali refugees chose to continue their journey beyond the closest areas of safety to countries where they believed they could attain a greater quality of life, not just immediate safety. The study argues that 'safety was not all that they [refugees] sought because it was not all that they had lost'. Thus, rigid distinctions between migration to seek asylum and migration to seek economic opportunity are unhelpful in understanding migration flows (Zimmerman, 2009).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that a lack of economic opportunities in the country of origin and the hope of greater opportunities for work in a European country are important drivers of irregular migration (Czaika & Hobolth 2014; Wissink et al. 2013). A UNHCR study (2010) found that many young Afghan migrants to Europe had previously been working in Iran, where work opportunities were better than in their home country. However, economic opportunities in Iran have been decreasing and hostility towards Afghan migrants has been rising, prompting them to make the more difficult and dangerous journey to seek work in Europe instead. Similarly, a study of irregular migration from Senegal to Europe found that the prospect of greater economic opportunity in Europe – in particular, the presence of large informal economies in Spain and Italy – was an important factor motivating attempts to migrate there (Schapendonk & van Moppes 2007).

The importance of economic opportunity in driving irregular migration is reflected in the risks which migrants take in travelling via irregular means to Europe. While a migrant's understanding of the risks they are taking is dependent on their own experience and that of other migrants (Wissink et al. 2013; Mannan & Wei 2006), studies show that irregular migrants generally have a very high tolerance of risk. For example, a study by Mbaye (2014) found that 'half [of potential illegal migrants from Senegal] think there is a risk of death higher or equal to 25%' and that 'the vast majority of the sample of potential illegal migrants (77%) reported that they are willing to risk their life in order to emigrate', thus underlining the strength of their intention to migrate despite the current absence of conflict in Senegal

Numerous factors may shape a migrant's expectations of the possible standard of living available in a European country, including information available via the Internet and social media, information from contacts who have already migrated, and advertisements by companies invested in

international migration, such as Western Union (Schapendonk & van Moppes 2007). Migrants already established in Europe may feel a social pressure to report positively on their new life to their relatives, which in turn encourages others to migrate. Private sector actors, such as banks and internet sites, should also be considered agents in facilitating and motivating international migration (Schapendonk & van Moppes, 2007). The role of the Internet, technology and communication tools in facilitating and influencing the nature of migration networks is discussed.

Evidence suggests that the importance of different countries' welfare and asylum support systems as a pull factor for migration is weak. One study reports that the need to leave their home country is of far more importance to migrants than their destination, and that few asylumseekers arriving in the UK had specific knowledge of the benefits they may be eligible for (Robinson & Segrott 2002). However, differences in particular countries' systems for receiving migrants may influence the decision to continue on to another destination, including within the EU (Kuschminder et al. 2015): 'onward movements are also caused by a lack of social, economic and legal opportunities in the first country of arrival. This could include unfair asylum procedures and/or lack of local integration prospects for refugees, unviable economic conditions, generally hostile environments, e.g. discrimination, racism, racial violence and police harassment' (Triandafyllidou 2009). Conditions for migrants arriving in countries such as Greece and Italy are very difficult and the wait for refugee status is long, so migrants choose to move on (Kuschminder et al. 2015). Hostility towards Africans in Istanbul has also been a factor prompting them to move on (Kuschminder et al. 2015). Likewise, refugees arriving in Ukraine were motivated to continue to Western Europe because they saw the limited humanitarian support there as a sign that establishing themselves in Ukraine would be difficult (Rechitsky 2014).

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Factors driving irregular migration inevitably vary between individuals, and numerous personal characteristics influence whether or not a person chooses to migrate. Studies commonly report that the majority of irregular migrants are male, unmarried, in their early 20s, and have low levels of education (Heering et al. 2007; Loschmann et al. 2014; Mbaye 2014). While it is not uncommon for irregular migrants to have secondary-level education, those with a higher level of education generally have more opportunities to migrate legally (Mbaye 2014). With respect to gender, a study by Heering et al. (2007) identified three reasons for a woman to migrate: '(1) the traditional motivation as trailing spouse; (2) to work in the city or abroad to earn money for the family; and (3) a way out from a life with a traditional dependent status, and away from obedience to male kin.' The first of these motivations is likely to be by far the most common, but women who may have a low level of education but who are still able to secure domestic work may have a strong motivation to migrate (Heering et al. 2007). The relationship between gender and migration is discussed.

MIGRATION AS A FAMILY AFFAIR

Irregular migration is usually a collective effort: irregular migrants are commonly supported financially by friends or family, and are more likely to travel with acquaintances than with their family

(Loschmann et al. 2014). This suggests that irregular migration may at times be part of a household strategy to increase income (Loschmann et al. 2014; Loschmann & Siegel 2014). Kibreab's (2013) study of Eritrean migration underlines the importance of financial support at the outset of a migrant's journey to cover smugglers' fees and bribes for government officials. At the other end of the journey, the prospect of being able to send remittances back is identified as a key driver for young Eritreans to migrate, as is the potential for family reunification in the destination country (Kibreab 2013). It may also inform a migrant's decision to migrate to a particular European country (Robinson & Segrott 2002).

A CULTURE OF MIGRATION

A culture of migration is discussed in numerous studies as a factor driving regular and irregular migration. According to de Haas (2011c), 'migration processes tend to become partly self-perpetuating, leading to the formation of migrant networks and migration systems'. As networks and systems get stronger, it becomes easier for migrants to overcome obstacles to migration, and thus migration is likely to become self-reinforcing (de Haas, 2011c). As migration from a community or society becomes common, this behaviour is normalised and expected. Heering et al. (2007) report that 'over time foreign labour migration becomes integrated into the structure of values and expectations of families and communities. As a result, young people contemplating entry into the labour force do not consider other options'. Similarly, Schapendonk and van Moppes (2007) find that 'the investments of migrants in their families or local communities are a strong encouraging factor for other families and communities, who do not yet have members abroad, to start their own migration project'. Certainly, community members seem to notice the benefits other families receive from relatives who have migrated, and feel poor in comparison, which strengthens others' intentions to migrate (Mbaye 2014). A culture of migration is very significant in driving male migration, but not statistically significant for women, for whom the presence of a family network in a foreign country is a stronger driver (Heering et al., 2007). Social pressure to migrate also comes from religious communities. In their study of Senegalese migration, Schapendonk and van Moppes (2007) found that religious leaders often urge individuals to migrate in order to support their religious community through remittances. The varying importance of a culture of migration on the decision to migrate is discussed.

THE INFLUENCE OF MIGRANT SMUGGLERS

As noted earlier, an important difference in regular and irregular migration is the influence of migrant smugglers on the ability of a person to migrate by irregular means. A review by Kuschminder et al. (2015) found that smugglers influence irregular migration in three key ways: '1) the routes and destination choices that they offer (or exclude) to the migrant, 2) in making the destination decision for the migrant, and 3) in deviating from an agreement with a migrant and delivering/leaving them in a different destination than agreed'. The extent to which a smuggler determines a migrant's destination depends upon the nature of their relationship, which could simply be a financial transaction or could be more exploitative (Wissink et al. 2013).

Smuggling networks are becoming increasingly important, and increasingly professionalised. One study notes that 'the number of Eritrean migrant facilitators arrested by the EU in 2014 grew by four-fold [and that] cases of document fraud committed by Eritrean nationals has grown by threefold since the previous year' (Reitano 2015). One important driver in the professionalisation of smuggling is thought to be the relative wealth of Syrian migrants, which enables them to pay for more sophisticated services (Reitano 2015). The importance of contact with smugglers is discussed in further detail with respect to social networks.

ASYLUM POLICY AND BORDER CONTROL

The influence of a country's system for processing asylum applications and the strength of its border controls is important to the flow of irregular migration to Europe (Kuschminder et al. 2015). Changes to immigration policies can influence the routes irregular migrants take; for example, when visa regimes were made more open in Turkey and in the Western Balkans, there was an increase in migrants using these countries as transit routes (Kuschminder et al. 2015). A number of studies have concluded that efforts to intensify border controls have resulted in migrants seeking other, sometimes more dangerous, routes into Europe (Czaika & Hobolth 2014; Duvell 2009; Reitano 2015). Tightening border security in Southern Europe has resulted in a proliferation of new migration routes across the Mediterranean (de Haas 2011b). As border controls between Libya and Italy increased in 2009, irregular migration into Europe moved to Greece, via Turkey. More recently, as security at the Turkish border with Greece has been increased, more migrants have been using sea routes or entering via Bulgaria (Kuschminder et al. 2015).

While tightening border security may change migration patterns, migration policies are unlikely to influence the volume of people migrating (de Haas 2011c). Czaika and Hobolth (2014) report that, while increasing the restrictiveness of asylum policy appears to reduce the number of asylum applications, it also appears to increase the number of people migrating irregularly to the extent that 'the deflection effect may balance out or even exceed the deterrence effect'. According to Mbaye (2014), 'restrictive immigration policies may be less effective in staving off illegal migration and can incite potential migrants to turn to illegal methods'. Similarly, the Clandestino Project (Duvell 2009) argues that inefficient or complicated regulations and policies for managing migration contribute to migrants choosing to ignore formal systems and entering via irregular means instead.

BROADER DEVELOPMENT PROGRESS

Socio-economic development in source countries will continue to enable migration to Europe. The relationship between development and migration has been described as a 'migration hump', explaining that it is not individuals from the poorest households who migrate to Europe, but rather those who have access to sufficient resources to pay for their journey (de Haas 2011b; Loschmann & Siegel, 2014). De Haas (2011b) states that 'the combination of modest levels of economic development and education and relative poverty on the one hand, and the persistence of significant opportunity gaps with geographically

proximate countries on the other' drives people to migrate. Patterns showing that 'middle income countries have the highest average levels of emigration' reflect this theory, and support the understanding that trade and investment in a source country reinforces, rather than reduces, emigration.

The growing youth population in the Horn of Africa may also drive further migration from the region. Increasing employment and education opportunities in these countries would be unlikely to counteract this since people migrate not only to seek better education opportunities, but also to earn higher wages for their labour (IMI and RMMS, 2012). As de Haas (2007) concludes: 'as long as aspirations increase faster than the livelihood opportunities in sending regions and countries, social and economic development will tend to coincide with sustained or increased outmigration'. The significant differences in opportunities in European countries and Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East will not disappear quickly; if immigration into Europe from these regions continues to be restricted, it is likely that high levels of irregular migration will also persist (IMI and RMMS, 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from the evidence that the factors influencing an individual's decision to migrate via irregular means operate at a number of levels. International and national policies, economic conditions, and political situations are important in determining why a person of a particular nationality may migrate. However, there are many other factors related to a person's own circumstances, the culture of their community, and their local and wider social network which can encourage or prevent them from migrating. Several factors seem to be particularly important: personal security from conflict, economic opportunity and security to rebuild and improve their and their family's life, and having the financial resources to be able to migrate. The literature is clear that, in the current crisis, the factors influencing a person's decision to migrate irregularly differ for different nationalities and for individuals, and that these factors may change en route and over time. For those who chose to migrate despite lacking the legal means, their access to smuggling networks and their experiences in the different countries they cross are also important factors which shape where and how they decide to migrate. Finally, the influence of varying types of social network is particularly important in informing migrants' decisions and capacity to migrate.

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