Journeys to Europe

The role of policy in migrant decision-making

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Foreword

I very much welcome this report, which is essential reading for all those seeking not only to mitigate the current crisis of politics and policy in Europe, but also to improve the governance of human mobility in future years. The report expertly challenges popular myths about migration and exposes the reality of why people make the often dangerous journey to Europe—a combination of aspiration, fear, and hope. The evidence and testimony detailed herein should serve as a wake-up call to policy makers that they need to change course and recognise both the moral imperative and economic opportunity of a well-managed approach to migration. And most of all, we should all be humbled by the dignity of those people who, having suffered so profoundly, are turning to Europe with hopes of improving the lot of their families. To reject them so harshly undermines our common humanity and harkens back to far darker times in Europe that we thought had long ago passed.

Peter Sutherland, United Nations Special Representative on Migration

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Abstract

This research aims to increase understanding of the role destination country policies play in journeys made by migrants. Based on in-depth interviews with more than 50 migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who have recently arrived in four European cities (Berlin, London, Madrid and Manchester), it explores: the journeys migrants take; the factors that drive them; and the capacity of national migration policies to influence people's decisions, both before their journey begins and along the way. Based on these findings, we make three key policy recommendations that could lead to the better management of, and a more effective and positive response to, the current migration crisis in Europe.

1. Make journeys safer. Act now to minimise the appalling humanitarian and economic consequences of policies that aim to deter migration by: expanding legal migration channels; implementing a system of humanitarian visas; and expanding search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean.

2. Create a faster, fairer European Union (EU) asylum system. Build a much-needed effective regional response by: investing in a better functioning, EU-wide asylum processing system; strengthening the EU's arbitration role; and reforming the Dublin Regulation, which determines the EU Member State responsible for the review of an application for asylum.

3. Make the most of migration. Capitalise on the positive impacts of migration by: publicly communicating its social and economic benefits; encouraging circular migration; and investing in economic integration programmes for new arrivals.

Insights project introduction

ODI Insights is a new series of research papers, policy briefings and outreach activities that address urgent and unresolved development priorities and challenges. As well as reaching new audiences, the aim of Insights is to ensure that ODI's high-quality research and analysis influences policy debates, providing innovative practical solutions to existing and emerging problems. This Insights report on migration is the first in the series.

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1. Introduction

In October 2014, the UK government announced it would not be supporting any future operations to save drowning migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean Sea. ¹ Speaking in the House of Lords, Baroness Anelay used the following words to justify her government's decision: 'We do not support planned search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. We believe that they create an unintended 'pull factor', encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing and thereby leading to more tragic and unnecessary deaths' (House of Lords, 2014).

The assumption underlying this statement speaks to a political belief, shared by not only European Union (EU) member states but also governments around the world, that it is possible for states to control migration. Rooted solidly in the increasingly outdated yet still popular 'push-pull' model of migration, decisions such as those to withdraw support from search and rescue operations are expected to work because they make the prospect of migration less appealing. They minimise the 'pull' – and, in doing so, put people off the idea of coming.

Many will come to know 2015 as the year of Europe's migration crisis. The persistence and intensification of crises – some slow-burning (Eritrea), others more acute in nature (Syria) – helped produce the largest movement of migrants and refugees into Europe since World War II (Metcalfe-Hough, 2015).² With some exceptions, the European response has been guided by strategies of containment, restriction and deterrence. Rather than welcome, settle and integrate the new arrivals, EU member states have largely sought to drive them away from their borders through an escalation of restrictive migration policy designed to stop people coming in the first place.

This study was motivated by a desire to find out whether such an approach works. Is it possible for governments, through a process of discouraging human movement, to actually change someone's mind about migrating?

To answer this question there is only a smattering of available evidence. Of the few studies that exist, most suggest it is all but impossible to prevent crossborder movement through migration policy. Analysis of 20 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries for the period 1985-1999 finds that the effects of 'receiving' countries' migration policies are largely offset by 'historical, economic and reputational factors that lie largely beyond the reach of asylum policy makers' (Thielemann, 2004: 1). A recent briefing by Oxford University's Migration Observatory similarly suggests it is often other kinds of policies, such as labour market regulation, macroeconomic policy and trade, that affect immigration flows (Markaki, 2015). Two recent reviews of the effectiveness of migration policies conclude that, although they can sometimes shape the dynamics of migration (where people go, when they leave, how they do it), both immigration and emigration policies are basically incapable of doing anything about the 'big' aspects of migration: volume and trends (Czaika and de Haas, 2013; de Haas and Vezzoli, 2011).

Other work suggests that, while the actions of smugglers and agents (migration middlemen, as it were) can influence the destinations refugees end up in, official deterrence or prevention measures do not seem to have much of an effect (Zimmermann, 2010). More broadly, several authors have pointed out that the blunt instruments governments use to prevent human movement – walls, apprehension, detention (and so on) – are unlikely to work because they originate from an oversimplified understanding of the complex social process of migration (Boswell, 2011; Effeney and Mansouri, 2014).

With some exceptions (e.g. Zimmermann, 2010), there have been relatively few qualitative efforts to directly investigate whether and how migration policies shape migration flows. The majority of work on this question has instead relied on statistical analyses of large-N datasets to identify significant correlations and effects. Although clearly important, this work has been unable to shed much light on the highly personalised and intimate process of human decision-making underlying migration flows. In an attempt to help address this imbalance (and the evidence void more generally), this study uses qualitative research methods and analysis.

We draw on data generated through 52 in-depth, semistructured interviews carried out with (mostly irregular) Eritrean, Senegalese and Syrian respondents in four sites – London, Manchester, Berlin and Madrid – between July and October 2015. In order to make sense of these data, we adopt an established theoretical framework known as the 'threshold approach', which has been empirically shown to help explain the 'whether', the 'why' and the 'how' of migration decision-making (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2015; see Section 2).

¹ Throughout this paper, the term 'migrants' includes so-called 'economic' migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. While we recognise the distinctions between different categories of migration, they do overlap and the economic and political motivations are often intertwined. We broadly agree with Carling (2015), who argues that 'migrant' continues to offer a useful umbrella term that legitimately captures multiple forms of human movement.

² It must be noted that this 'crisis' is neither new nor exceptional, especially when viewed through an historical lens. People from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Syria (and elsewhere) have been migrating into Europe for many years now, if at somewhat lower levels. Arguably, this crisis has been produced at least partly by the visibility afforded to 2015's migrations by the Western media.

We pay particular attention to the dynamics of people's journeys. Generally speaking, migration scholars have been far less interested in migrants' journeys than in the causes and consequences of international migration. The literature's 'receiving country bias' partly accounts for this (Castles et al., 2014), but so too does the way migrations have often been thought about. Migration has long been seen as a 'movement between two fixed points' (Triulzi and McKenzie, 2013), an abstract transition from A to B. Yet what happens in between is important to understand the impacts of cross-border movements. In an increasingly saturated field of migration studies, such research is shedding new light on how migration works.

The paper unfolds as follows. In the next section, we continue the above discussion by providing more detail on the study's theoretical and empirical design. Section 3 then looks at the issue of migration journeys in depth: we describe what 'typical' journeys look like and consider migrants' decision-making throughout their journey. In Section 4, we answer the question set out in the title of this report: does policy matter to the decision-making processes (and hence the behaviours of) migrants? Finally, we conclude in Section 5 by drawing out the key factors that influence migrants' choices and offering three sets of concrete recommendations for policy-makers to reflect on.



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2. Options, thresholds and choices: conceptual and empirical design

The question of why people migrate has been studied for decades and is not the focus of this research. We are interested here in the less documented processes of where people decide to move to and how they do it. These aspects of international migration are far less well understood. With the exception of the literature on social networks, the migration literature to date has largely overlooked the 'how' in particular – that is, the means through which individuals move across space (BenEzer and Zetter, 2015; Schapendonk, 2012). This in itself is quite curious. The journeys people make, or are planning to make, not only determine the risk and cost involved in an individual's migration but also can affect decisions about whether to leave and where to go.

For the purposes of this study – to better understand the decision-making process behind migration trajectories and destinations – we need to know about the journeys people make. What is it that drives, diverts or deters them? In particular, we are interested in the influence of migration policies on these decisions. To what extent do the actions of transit and receiving states affect the choices migrants make?

To address these questions, we draw on a theoretical framework called 'migration thresholds', developed by van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011, 2015). Its analytical power lies in its holistic focus on the entire migration process and the decisions continually made throughout. This includes even before a physical migration has occurred. As Koikkalainen and Kyle (2015: 12) point out in their compelling paper on 'cognitive migration', there is always a 'process by which our minds migrate before our bodies do'.

Various theoretical advances made over recent decades inform the threshold approach. Echoing Castles et al. (2014), it sees migration as not only the product of macroeconomic differences between places but also a fundamentally personal and social process, driven and shaped by feelings, perceptions, relationships and networks. Following Massey et al. (2008), it recognises that migration is not always the outcome of individual rationalism; exposure to only certain pieces of information and selected rejection of others means bounded rationality defines most migrations. And in line with BenEzer and Zetter (2015), it grasps the importance of looking at the way people move and the spaces through which they do so. All of these things are relevant to this study.

The approach works as follows. It starts from the premise that international *immobility*, rather than mobility, is the norm. That is, the majority of people around the world – as much as 97% in fact – do not migrate across borders. The approach's architects suggest this is because there are

a number of thresholds that prevent people from going. These thresholds essentially represent barriers to human movement, consolidating immobility. But the main point is they are as much psychological as physical: crossing them is contingent on the complex dynamics of multiple decision-making processes.

In order for someone to cross a border, the *idea* of migration as a viable option must first take root in the mind of an individual. In many cases, this simply does not occur. When someone's notions of identity, social belonging and attachment are so concretely and resiliently anchored to the geographic space in which they grew up, the concept of migrating internationally might never even enter the design of their livelihood trajectory. As one example, when asked why so many more men than women from his community migrate overseas, one of our Senegalese respondents replied, 'It's a society that believes the man should go out to work and the woman should look after the home and the children [...] *She doesn't even think about [migrating].*'

For migration to become an option, a person must: (1) first stop feeling indifferent towards the idea – violent conflict can do this, as can limited livelihood options in place of origin – and then; (2) accept it as something that might potentially bring a positive change in wellbeing (in whatever dimension – see MacGregor and Sumner, 2009). Van der Velde and van Naerssen (2011) refer to this process as getting over the *indifference threshold*. It is the first 'stage' of (cognitive) migration.

However, there are still two further thresholds to pass before migration occurs. These are known as the locational threshold and the trajectory threshold. While the former refers to a decision-making process regarding where to go (destination), the latter is more concerned with how to do it (journey). Again, each represents a mental barrier that must be overcome before cross-border migration occurs. Once a possible destination has been identified, the differences between that and the current place of residence are weighed up; should the 'keep' and 'repel' factors prove more influential than other concerns, it is then completely possible for an individual to come down on the side of staying. Likewise, if a certain route is perceived to be too risky - a judgement conditional on the particular risk disposition of the individual (which is in turn influenced by a range of factors, including the context in which decisions are made) - then immobility may be favoured over mobility. Thus, physical barriers along the way, from violent intermediaries to border fences, have the power to establish, consolidate and reinforce mental barriers in the mind of a (would-be) migrant, ultimately deterring them from crossing a border in the first place. It is not until all three thresholds have been reached that migration actually occurs.

As van der Velde and van Naerssen point out, there can be considerable nonlinearity in the decision-making process. As circumstances change, each threshold may be (re)visited on a continual yet irregular basis. Individuals who at one point in time feel compelled to reach a particular destination may, at another point in time, reorient their strategy to suit a shifting set of livelihood objectives. While many migrations of course do display aspects of linearity – when, for example, a flight is taken from one place to the next – the point here is particularly relevant to protracted migrations.

Neither is the relationship between the locational and the trajectory thresholds necessarily sequential. Although it may seem logical for people to first decide on a destination before deliberating on how to reach it, this is not always how things work. As an expanding body of migration journeys research shows, the complex, evershifting process of transit can itself be the most formative element of migration. People's perceptions and ideas about destinations – that is, their positioning in relation to the locational threshold – are often shaped by how their trajectories play out.

Our own interpretation of the threshold approach is that it is not just 'about migration'. Rather, given its focus on options, choices and decisions, it seems to us to have much in common with the conceptual basis of (certain) livelihoods frameworks. In particular, the threshold approach draws attention to the role of both perceptions and non-material motivations in explaining why and how people behave the way they do. As Carr (2014) and Levine (2014) would argue, these dimensions are central to any investigation of livelihoods, as is an understanding of the forces that govern them. The more general point to make is that migrations are not isolated phenomena, but rather components of people's broader livelihood projects (as is also argued in the New Economics of Labour Migration literature (see Stark, 1991)). As such, they should be studied within the context of how individuals think about, construct and pursue their own goals and priorities in life.

In this study, we use the threshold approach to explain the choices people make as they move across borders. Specifically, we try to locate the role migration policies (may or may not) play in shaping decisions and movements. Broadly defined, migration policies refer to those 'established in order to affect behaviour of a target population (i.e., potential migrants) in an intended direction' (Czaika and de Haas, 2013: 489). Following Boswell (2011), they are typically built on 'narratives of steering', attempting to push people a certain way through direct engagement in the migration process. Relating this back to the framework, such policies can theoretically impact decision-making processes at various thresholds.



Syrian migrant family at the Berliner Stadtmission, an emergency migrant shelter, where we conducted interviews. Photo: Majdi Laktinah

For example, states can either make journeys more difficult and expensive (trajectory threshold) or make their own country appear less appealing or welcoming (locational threshold). It is less clear, however, whether they potentially have any influence over the indifference threshold.

Of the wide range of migration policies in action, which include legal entry, legal exit, border control and integration, we are particularly interested in those designed to limit, block and ultimately prevent migration. According to Carling and Hernandez-Carretero (2011), preventive or restrictive migration policies work in three main ways. There are:

- 1. those that aim to restrict movement through direct control
- 2. those that aim to restrict movement through deterrence and
- 3. those that aim to restrict movement through dissuasion

Of course, a single policy can theoretically operate through more than just one of these mechanisms. Take border fences. On the one hand, these represent the blunt force of *direct control*, placing physical barriers in the pathways of migrants wanting to enter a particular territory (whether they want to settle in that territory or pass straight through it). On the other, the fence also serves as a *deterrent*. When Hungary built one along its border with Serbia over the summer of 2015, its construction – and even the decision preceding its construction – was accompanied by a great deal of fanfare. The point was clear. Viktor Orban and the rest of his government were sending a message to migrants: *Don't bother coming this way, we've blocked it off.*

Although we do consider direct control policies in this study, we are particularly concerned with deterrence and dissuasion strategies - those that most clearly attempt to affect the mindsets of migrants. European governments like to believe they are capable of changing people's minds about crossing borders. In order to explore how deterrent/dissuasion policies may or may not control migration flows by changing people's minds - and therefore alter the course of development and change across multiple locations - we look at how they 'travel'. For any (migration) policy to achieve its intended effect, whether this be a new border fence designed to deter entrance or an integration programme designed to ease arrival - a complex chain of events needs to be followed. Formulation and implementation alone do not equal 'success'. By focusing on the migrant's journey, and the

specific decision-making processes underlying it, we are provided with a viable means of exploring policy travel – and potential policy success.

Methods

We carried out qualitative data collection in three countries (Germany, Spain and the UK) covering migrants from three countries of origin: Eritrea, Senegal and Syria. These migrant groups were selected in order to (1) capture some of the major flows currently reaching Europe (Eritreans, Syrians) and (2) include a migrant group that can be considered to have mostly economic motivations for migration (Senegalese). While many of those we interviewed were either undocumented or in the process of applying for asylum, this sampling strategy allowed us to analyse themes across a mixture of different trajectories and types of flow.

Our focus was on migrants who had made it to Europe, mostly with people who had recently arrived (i.e. within the past two years – although it was not always possible to identify respondents as recently arrived as this). It is important to acknowledge at this early stage in the paper that this aspect of the research design has implications for our findings. That is, people still on the move or yet to leave might have answered our interview questions quite differently. We do not know this to be the case for sure, but it is worth pointing out.

All our research sites were major cities. These were selected on the basis that they are all major destinations for migrants, but for different migration groups that potentially have different migration trajectories. London has one of the biggest migrant populations in Europe, in both absolute and relative terms; some migrants will have travelled via Calais, a particularly risky trajectory.³ Migrants amount to a third of Madrid's population; many of these are visa over-stayers, which illustrates a different migration trajectory. Berlin has seen growing migration inflows in recent years, and Germany more generally has proven a popular destination for asylum seekers of late.

Interviews were arranged through trusted intermediaries, for example charities or refugee shelters, and were conducted in safe locations either in English or with interpreters. Respondents were guaranteed full anonymity, if so desired, and, as such, some pseudonyms are used in this report. We conducted a total of 52 interviews: 15 with Eritreans, 10 with Senegalese and 27 with Syrians. We also conducted two focus group discussions with Syrian migrants in Berlin to further explore some of the issues that emerged from individual

³ Because of practical difficulties identifying suitable respondents in London, we were forced to expand our search to other major UK cities. Through contacts, we were able to locate and interview several respondents in Manchester.

interviews. Annex 1 provides a full list of interviews. As seen in the table there, each respondent has been assigned a unique code, which identifies the site in which they were interviewed (i.e. for those in Berlin, B01, B02, etc.; for those in Madrid, M01, M02, etc.; and for those in the UK, UK01, UK02, etc.). Throughout this paper, whenever we refer to evidence provided by or use quotes from a particular respondent, we footnote the relevant code.

Finally, while our research was purely qualitative, we tried to capture as many 'hard facts' and numbers as possible. We used these data to include some quantitative statistics and figures in the study. These are purely illustrative, of course, and should be interpreted with care; not being based on a representative or big sample, they cannot be used to draw conclusions about these migrant populations at large. Yet we feel they still add a useful dimension to our analysis.

3. Understanding migration journeys

Migration is often seen in terms of a direct movement from A to B. For decades, the economic literature on migration has talked about push factors in origin countries and pull factors in destinations, with much less regard for what happens in between. As migrants are portrayed as rational actors weighing up the pros and cons of different countries, the journey itself is reduced to a meaningless intermediate phase (Cresswell, 2010). What happens in transit – itself a term that evokes ideas of fleeting moments – is deemed marginal to the migration experience as a whole.

This could not be further from the truth. As Schapendonk (2012) argues, 'It is not so much beginnings (the A) and endings (the B) that matter, but rather the in-between, the trajectory itself ... The spatial evolution of a trajectory influences the continuation of the same trajectory.'

Picture a road movie. So rarely are these about what happens once the protagonists reach their destination. They tell stories of transformation along the way – of people met, friendships made, chance moments encountered. All of these shape how the narrative plays out.

So too with real-life migration journeys. The detail of crossing borders doesn't just make for a captivating story, the likes of which we saw last year in *The Guardian* and *The New Yorker* (Kingsley, 2015; Schmidle, 2015). They also tell us important things about what happens to people before they even reach Europe, and about the ways in which experiences along the way may determine where migrants end up. As such, migration scholars are increasingly realising that the journey is an important part of the picture in understanding the impacts of crossborder movement (Collyer, 2007; BenEzer and Zetter, 2015; Schapendonk, 2012).

There are three reasons in particular why migration journeys merit further critical study.

First, not all people make it to their destination. People die on route and are doing so at increasing rates. According to the Missing Migrants Project, a total of 3,760 people died crossing the Mediterranean in 2015 alone (Missing Migrants Project, 2015). The majority died in the Central Mediterranean travelling from Libya to Italy or Malta, both in absolute terms (2,892 people) and in relative terms (2% of all attempted crossings on that route, including successful ones)⁴ (ibid.). Different routes and different modes of travel have different risks and fatality rates attached, so we should be trying to understand how people travel, why they take those routes and how we can make their journeys safer.

Second, the dynamics of transit can have a direct effect on the potential development impacts of migration. The academic evidence shows migration typically benefits migrants and their families staying behind. Michael Clemens (2011) has described migration as the most effective form of poverty reduction we know of. Numerous studies show the positive impacts remittances have on family members staying behind (see, e.g., Adams, 2006, for a study covering 115 countries). But what happens if someone pays a lot of money to reach their destination and spends the first few years paying off their loan? For example, research in Nepal has shown that the average migration loan accounts for 97% of annual household expenditure, and most migrants take years to repay such loans (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2014). Or what if a migrant becomes injured on the way, or traumatised, and then finds it difficult to keep down a job in the destination? In short, what happens on the way can limit the potential benefits of migration.

Third, as BenEzer and Zetter (2015) argue, the study of journeys promises a better understanding of the 'profoundly formative experience of the journey'. Journeys can be life-changing events that change migrants and their motivations and shape where migrants end up. Many people leave without a clear destination in their mind and their experiences on the road, the people they met and the information gathered inform where they go next. A lot of it is down to good or bad luck and chance encounters (Gladkova and Mazzucato, 2015).

While the majority of irregular migrants in Europe enter legally - mostly on a plane - and overstay their visa (Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011), we mainly interviewed people who had travelled to Europe on irregular trajectories crossing multiple sea and land borders. Among this population, migration journeys are often non-linear and rarely straightforward. People do not necessarily travel along the easiest or quickest route, being constrained as they are by border controls, limits on financial and social capital, the actions of smugglers and the extent and reliability of available information. Journeys tend to involve multiple stages, as people cross from one place to the next, sometimes at different speeds. Some even end up having to cross the same border multiple times. Plans change and decisions evolve as the journey unfolds, as a response to external circumstances, information gathered and people met along the way.

Of the 52 Eritreans, Senegalese and Syrians we interviewed, just 24% travelled directly from their departure point to their destination, without having to cross or spend considerable time in another country.

⁴ This is the number of documented deaths as a share of documented arrivals. The Missing Migrants Project uses the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a data source, but actual deaths and arrivals may be higher owing to underreporting.



Saliou Age: 29 Born: Diourbel, Senegal Migration cost: £600 Migration duration: 10 days

Madrid, Spain (2006-2015)

Saliou has done all kinds of work in Madrid: selling sunglasses, working in construction and as a delivery guy and working in a bar. Most of these paid little, as they were paid informally. Despite this Saliou sends money to his family every month.

Tenerife, Spain (2006)

People were divided into two groups: Saliou was in the first boat that had a GPS. The sea was rough and after four days the second boat sank with 75 people on board. After six further days at sea, they were rescued by the Spanish Coast Guard and taken to a reception centre in Tenerife.

Kayar, Senegal (2006)

Saliou kept hearing from his friends about "the boats" that would take people to Spain and decided to go to Europe to earn some money. He borrowed £600 from his landlord, found a smuggler through a friend and set off from a beach near Dakar.

Dakar, Senegal (2004)

Saliou worked as a carpenter in Dakar, making £60/month. This was not enough to support his elderly parents and seven younger siblings.

The Gambia (2000) •

Saliou moved to the Gambia when he was 14 to train as a carpenter. When he was 18 he moved back to Senegal to look for a job.

Dakar



Most of these were Senegalese who entered Europe with a legal visa. The other 76% experienced what we might consider more difficult journeys, crossing a number of countries and often spending months or even years in transit. On average, respondents crossed about four countries, with two respondents having crossed 10; however, this varied considerably by nationality (see Figure 1). The Syrians who had reached Germany via the Eastern Mediterranean route had crossed six countries on average. Eritreans also had often faced lengthy journeys, crossing five countries on average. Senegalese had had the shortest journeys in our sample, crossing just two countries on average (with 90% of Senegalese respondents travelling directly to the destination).





Note: Averages based on 51 interviews

In this section, we explore five particular aspects of migration journeys. Each of these emerged from our data as being central to understanding how journeys work, or at least those under study here. These five aspects include the difficulty in pinpointing the exact starting point of a migration journey, the mutation of migration plans once on the road, the velocity of journeys, the costs of journeys and the risks and threats experienced in transit.

3.1 The starting point of migration is hard to define

Even something as seemingly simple as a journey's 'starting point' often proved difficult to define. The first reason for this is that migration begins as a mental process and the decision to leave often takes years of deliberation, frequently involving a contradictory mix of motivations. The second reason is that mobility, particularly movements within the country or region of origin, featured in many people's lives prior to this particular migration.

The previous section introduced the threshold approach, which argued that the first threshold a potential migrant has to overcome is the 'indifference threshold' (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2011). This means leaving a space of *belonging*, where people feel connected to others, where they have an identity, in other words where they feel at home (ibid.). Mental barriers may be more important than physical barriers in determining this initial decision. Overcoming these mental barriers often involves years of deliberation and back-and-forth. This is the 'cognitive migration' stage, where potential migrants play with the idea of migration in their head (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2015). As such, the decision to migrate is rarely spontaneous.

Box 1: Abdu's experience in the national service

Abdu is from Asmara. He tried to stay in school for as long as possible to avoid entering Sa'wa – the education and military camp all Eritrean youngsters are forced to join. To no avail – by the time he was 20, in 2007, Abdu had to join. The camp was located in a volcanic area called Wia, with high temperatures (48-50°C) and no grass, no trees. Young people died because of the heat; others lost their mind. There were two basic meals a day (bread and tea in the afternoon and bread and lentils for tea).

After six months he was moved to a different camp and asked to work as a cameraman for the state channel. He had no say in the matter, yet he was relatively lucky. Others had to work in construction, moving stones and building dams for 16 hours a day for the equivalent of £7 a month. He saw no future there, even though he was doing better than others.

His first attempt at escaping was in 2008. He was caught at the border and jailed for two years and seven months, until 2010. In jail, he was made to dig holes every day; he doesn't know why. Abdu was released five months earlier than his original sentence dictated, and was told by officials, 'We give you mercy.' Abdu disagrees: 'But it's not mercy. They took two years.'

After he was released, Abdu was sent back to his previous work place. Finally, he could contact his family again. He now knew that if he tried and failed a second time to escape, he would be killed, not jailed. So he stopped thinking and continued working.

In February 2014, he got permission to visit family in Asmara. During that time, the Ministry of Defence discovered there were some missing tapes in the archives Abdu was handling. Abdu's colleague was asked where the tapes were, but he didn't know so was taken to prison. One of Abdu's friends called him and warned him. After calling around and talking to an uncle, Abdu decided to escape and moved towards the Sudan border.

Source: UK06

So what does push people over this threshold at last? 'Getting over' the indifference threshold often involves an accumulation of multiple causes and conditions being in place, although the exact combination is of course subjective and different for everyone. There is rarely a *single* cause of migration. The factors that push people over the edge can include a wide range of things. Political and economic insecurity, conflict, violence, human rights abuses and repressive governments affected many of our respondents, forcing them to leave (or rather making them feel forced to leave). This is the case for both the Eritreans and the Syrians we interviewed. The Human Rights Council's recent report (2015) on Eritrea found that 'Systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations have been and are being committed in Eritrea,' where 'Individuals are routinely arbitrarily arrested and detained, tortured, disappeared or extrajudicially executed.' It also describes the system of 'national service and forced labour that effectively abuse, exploit and enslave them [Eritrean citizens] for indefinite periods of time'. These conditions were confirmed in countless interviews. Eritrean respondents talked about the constant threat of arrests and imprisonment, for reasons such as practising their religion, and many had spent decades in national service. Likewise, many Syrians cited war and violence as a motivation for leaving. Basma, from Damascus, is just one of many who were exposed to conflict in Syria:

'The war was really bad. There were dead people in the streets, snipers, car accidents, bombs. I couldn't leave the house for four months.' ⁵

Political insecurity also has wider impacts on economic opportunities and the labour market and hence the extent to which people can fulfil their aspirations locally, which also affect people's decision to move (de Haas, 2011). In other words, the political and economic motivations for migration are intertwined. Right now, Syrians are distancing themselves not just from an ever-present threat of violence and physical harm but also from an economic environment in which it is increasingly difficult to make a living. Our own interview material suggests that, within Syria, people are being taxed multiple times at road checkpoints and struggling to find decent work. For example, Mohammed from Damascus explained that, in the months before his departure, his neighbourhood was under siege, meaning there was no electricity, water or work.⁶ In Eritrea, too, young people are growing up into a life of national service, to which there are very few alternatives (Kibreab, 2013). Jobs assigned by the Eritrean government tend to be badly paid (Amnesty International, 2015b). For example, one respondent, Samuel, was assigned to work as a chemistry teacher in a rural area; his monthly salary of 150 Nakfa $(\pounds 10)$ was meant to cover rent, food and all other expenses. This was not enough, so he had to seek support from his parents, his relatives and the parents of his students.7

The literature has long identified lack of economic opportunities in countries of origin acting as a push factor (see Hagen-Zanker, 2015 for a review), but at the same time the definition of 'economic migrant' is not clear-cut as it seems. As argued by the House of Commons International Development Committee (2003), so-called economic migrants are often escaping the depths of poverty and insecurity, which give little room for choice. Even 'safe' countries often have multiple problems (e.g. lack of economic opportunities and poor governance). So, even in places that are not a warzone, like Senegal, people often felt they had no choice but to migrate. Some respondents cited lack of livelihood options at home and the pressure to support the family as reasons for leaving. For example, Serigne worked as a fisherman, as did everyone else in his community.⁸ With a growing number of industrial fishing trawlers increasing competition,⁹ it became harder to earn enough to support his family. So Serigne felt he had to leave to earn money elsewhere and began looking for opportunities to go.

Others we interviewed had a decent standard of living prior to migration but still felt like they had no choice, owing to a 'culture of migration' that is particularly pronounced among young men. Talking about Moroccan migration, Heering et al. (2007) find 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.' In such a context, migration becomes almost a rite of passage or a 'social expectation', as also documented in other migration contexts (e.g. Castle and Diarra, 2003, for Mali). Our respondents described similar norms emerging in some places in Eritrea, Syria and Senegal. Abdoulaye, who comes from a big coastal town in Senegal, explained that it's a 'common idea to think about coming to Europe'.¹⁰ We explore this culture of migration in greater detail in Section 4.

Box 2: Fatima's moves in Syria

Fatima's was born in Syria, to Palestinian refugee parents. She married young and lived in Yarmuk, with her husband and four kids. Some of the first big battles of the Syrian conflict took place in Yarmuk in 2012 and, after constant bombings, they decided to move to Khan El Sheik, where her parents lived. They lived there for seven months, but then Khan El Sheik was attacked by the Free Syrian Army. The whole family left, including her parents, and they moved to Damascus, where they stayed for four years. In Damascus, Fatima was constantly exposed to death. She developed psychological problems and was even temporarily paralysed on one side. She had to spend three months in a mental health hospital, but the situation was not getting any better, nor was Fatima's mental state improving. Her parents and husband decided Fatima had to get out Syria and they scraped together enough money for her to leave with her two youngest children. They couldn't afford for the rest of the family to travel.

Source: B09

⁶ B07

⁷ UK07

⁸ M03

⁹ Lafraniere (2008) also describes this in The New York Times.

¹⁰ M7

The second reason why it is hard to pinpoint the exact point migration starts is that mobility featured in many people's lives prior to the current journey. Many people we talked to had a history of mobility; their most recent migration journeys were frequently preceded by internal and international migration. While some had travelled or moved for work, most often previous moves were linked to conflict, political insecurity and human rights abuses. Unsurprisingly, this was especially common for Syrians; many we interviewed had previously moved across the country to escape the violence, terror, random killings and bombings of the civil war. Yet a period of high internal mobility was also common among respondents from Eritrea, where people are frequently moved around the country as part of open-ended national service. As Hadinet told us:

'The government changes people's postings frequently, so that they don't get too comfortable, don't get acquainted with people and start thinking about things.' ¹¹

3.2 Migration plans mutate, destinations change

In this section, we aim to understand the decision-making process around destination. Once an aspiring migrant has overcome the indifference threshold, they face the locational and trajectory thresholds (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2011). Destinations often start off fuzzy, forming into something more solid as journeys are 'moved through'. In particular, people who travel over long distances and long periods of time may not initially have a clear destination in mind (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2012). Among our respondents, only half had a clear idea of their final destination at the point of departure. For many, the journey can begin with the overriding need to get out. In some cases, the destination is the broad idea of 'Europe'. Many grow up with stories and TV shows about Europe and see it as a place with opportunities, a better life and human rights. For example, Dehab's mother sent her to Europe so she could 'study and be free'.¹² Abdoulaye pictured Europe 'as a place of prosperity, paradise' from other people's stories and European TV shows.13

A number of recent studies highlight that, owing to the length and complexity of migration trajectories, migrants' destination can change frequently en route (de Clerk, 2015; Kuschminder et al., 2015; Schapendonk, 2012). We also found destinations mutate over space and time. We found that, to begin with, people often plan only one country ahead. At this stage, the destination will just be a neighbouring country and there may not be a clear plan beyond this. For instance, in the case of Eritrean migrants, many will initially not plan further than reaching Sudan. One respondent, Tirhas, crossed the border into Sudan after police raided her secret prayer group.¹⁴ At this point, she did not have a plan, money or a specific idea of where to go next. But, as migrants move through their journeys, as they gather information, meet new people, learn of new opportunities, their destination may change and slowly start to solidify.¹⁵

Plans and destinations are shaped by where people see a viable future. So what are the factors that affect destination choice? Despite the diversity in our sample in terms of country of origin, education, occupation and social class, 'locational objectives' were overwhelmingly universal: people wanted a place that offers safety and security, employment, schooling and education and decent living conditions. As such, 'final' destinations are those places where people have a decent chance of achieving at least some of these objectives – more on this in Section 4.

Perceptions of risk, viability and opportunity change, so people may move on after a while, some even years later. This means people may move to one place initially with the intention to settle, but then move on when things don't work out or reality does not meet expectations. It was guite common for the Syrians we interviewed to have moved to a neighbouring country initially and looked for work there, only to move on a few months later when they felt the environment proved too difficult to make a living. Nabil initially crossed into Turkey from Syria and planned to find work there, but after three months still had not found a job, so continued on towards places perceived to offer greater opportunity. Other respondents tried finding work in Egypt, Israel or Lebanon, with similar difficulties. Others faced the same kinds of experiences in Europe. Adama, for example, decided to move on from Italy after he saw that other Senegalese migrants in Milan were either unemployed or selling drugs. He explained to us that this wasn't an option for him personally: Adama wanted a 'clean migration'.¹⁶

¹¹ UK11

¹² UK10

¹³ M07

¹⁴ UK05

¹⁵ For others, keep factors hold them in place, unable to proceed further - this group of migrants is not, however, the focus of this study.

Adama: 'High costs of living, combined with an inability to earn an income, proved another reason for people to move on. For example, Khalil fled with his family to Lebanon, as he had worked there previously, but explained why they moved on after just over a year:

'Life in Beirut was very expensive. Renting a flat cost at least \$700-1,000 a month; electricity and food were very expensive. We were not supported by the Lebanese government and because of the policy our three kids were not allowed to attend school.' ¹⁷

Khalil's experience also shows that access to essential services - itself a function of a country's public policy environment - is another major factor that affects destination choice. For example, a number of interviewees cited low living standards, especially those experienced in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Somalia, as a reason to move on. Respondents shared their experiences about crowded, unsanitary living conditions and lack of access to food and clean water. Rosina stayed in Shagarab refugee camp and explained that, 'Conditions were very bad. It was hot and dusty. I shared a small hut with 11 girls and we didn't always get food. Those with money bought their own food.'18 Shagarab has been described as having the worst conditions of all refugee camps in Sudan (IRIN, 2009). Respondents also said they feared for their safety in refugee camps in Sudan, citing abductions by the Rashaida tribe (for ransom) and the Eritrean secret service. Their stories are corroborated by others: the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reported 552 kidnappings for 2012 (UNHCR, 2013).

Furthermore, negative experiences with authorities or locals may prompt people to move on. Teweda could not stand life in Sudan because of constant abuse and extortion by locals. As he explained, '*If you don't give them* [local people] money, they will take you to the police where you will be prosecuted for not having papers.'¹⁹ It happens in Europe too. For instance, Dehab decided to leave Greece after five years of residing there, having been arrested and imprisoned for nine months without being brought to court. She was subsequently released without a clear reason why.²⁰ Some express shock at the treatment experienced in Europe, and shift their

22 UK12

23 B14

Box 3: A chance encounter enables Fatima to get to Berlin

Fatima and her two kids ended up travelling with a group of four Iraqi men from Greece to Germany. She met them on the boat from Turkey to Greece and they took pity on her. They stood up for Fatima, paid her share of expenses when her money ran out soon after reaching Greece and carried the kids when they walked for days. When the group of travelling colleagues arrived in Munich, everyone moved to different towns where they had friends. Fatima and her two kids were stuck at Munich train station, with no money, unable even to call her parents or husband. Again, Fatima was lucky. She met a German who told her there was a supermarket close by run by an Iraqi, who might be able to help. She went there and the Iraqi man was very helpful. He bought her train tickets, gave her kids biscuits and gave Fatima £40 for the kids. Later that day they got on a train to Berlin. Source: B09

trajectories further in order to reach more 'welcoming' countries. For instance, Abdu came to Italy from Senegal and met a friend who had reached Italy seven years earlier and was still living on the streets. He had been fingerprinted and could not move on. Abdu thought:

'How can they put a person without anything on the street? I was shocked!' ²¹

Both financial and social capital determine the ability to move on, as well as the route that is taken. Yassine explained that poorer Senegalese people go through the Sahara and Libya, whereas those with wealthier backgrounds pay for fake visas that cost around £6,000.22 From Eritrea, Senait wanted to go to Sweden, but she had only €200 left by the time she reached Italy. She instead decided to go to Germany, as the train ticket was within her budget (it also helped that she had heard of the country before).²³ So we see that the trajectory itself can determine destination. Senait never had the intention to go to Germany when she left Eritrea, but was 'moved' along the journey by friends and smugglers. Hearing stories from other Eritreans she met at the train station and in parks in Rome, she decided to move on to improve her chances of making a good life for herself. Germany was the destination that was both recommended by others and within her budget.

¹⁷ B03

¹⁸ UK04

¹⁹ UK08

²⁰ UK10

²¹ UK06

Social networks can also play an important role in shaping migration decisions and subsequent movements - if migrants can draw on the right contacts at the right time (Schapendonk, 2015). Gladkova and Mazzucato (2015) highlight the role of chance encounters in shaping trajectories, as we saw in Fatima's story above. The most influential ones are often between people of similar ethnic and socio-demographic characteristics (ibid.), again highlighted in Fatima's story. We also found that migrants often approach migrants who look similar to obtain information or even food or money. Social networks help by proving information and financial resources. Even without funds, people are able to move on if they can draw friends or 'travelling companions' who are able and willing to pay for them. Travelling companions are people met en route, who then become companions for onward travel. Cases of solidarity among friends or travelling companions were not uncommon among our respondents, although solidarity was mostly restricted to fellow country(wo)men. For instance, Dehab's Eritrean friend had managed to save up quite a bit of money in Greece, and paid for both of them to travel to Italy, and then for Dehab's onward travel to France.²⁴

Then there are also those migrants who feel they don't have much of a say in deciding their destinations. The decision is taken for them by others, often without consultation. The decision-makers are frequently those who pay for the trip. These can be family members, as was the case for Fallou, whose mother paid for a fake visa and told him a week before departure that she wanted him to go to the UK.²⁵ Friends or travelling companions – often a trusted and influential source of information – also shape decisions on destination (as discussed above; see also Section 4).

Finally, people smugglers can play a role in shaping migration trajectories. As we see below, use of smugglers is the norm. The process of negotiation between a migrant and a smuggler can determine which destination is offered, promoted or available (Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Smugglers are in a powerful position, allowing them to determine routes, prices and destination, given the huge demand for these services and the limited bargaining power of those wanting to use them. For example, Mohammed and Amal, a couple in their 60s suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, were approached by smugglers at the Syrian-Lebanese border.²⁶ The 'pushy and aggressive' smuggler they employed suggested they travel to the UK via Spain, Denmark and Sweden. Being unaware of the Dublin Regulation,²⁷ they agreed to this route and were shocked when they were

sent back to Spain – their first point of entry in Europe. Whether a smuggler determines a migrant's destination depends on the nature of their relationship, which could simply be a financial transaction or could be more exploitative, where the migrant is more dependent on the smuggler's information and service (Wissink et al., 2013). Particularly vulnerable migrants may feel they have no say in the matter.

3.3 Journeys can be fast or slow

In moving through migrations, people experience periods of mobility and immobility – moving and waiting. What does this mean for the time spent getting to the 'final' destination? Of interest here is the so-called 'velocity of travel' – a term coined by Schapendonk (2012) – which is essentially the speed at which one travels through different stages of the journey. As Schapendonk explains, migration trajectories are not only about mobility, but also about periods of rest, reorientation and (un)expected and (un)intended temporary or long-term settlements. These periods of (in)voluntary immobility can be hugely important; this is when migrants meet new people, gather more information and have new experiences that may shape their future onward travel.

There is much variation in terms of velocity in our sample. Table 1 shows the fastest and slowest journey time among our respondents, by nationality. Some Senegalese migrants that we talked to got on the plane and arrived the same day – in England, Italy or France. Others had spent weeks at sea before they reached Spain. Some Syrians had travelled to Germany via Turkey, Greece and the Balkans in around two weeks. Others had spent months taking the same routes. Eritreans had the longest journeys among our respondents, facing the greatest financial and other barriers in moving onwards.

So what determines velocity? Velocity while actually travelling depends on resources, mode of transports and travel companions. One respondent described travelling from Greece to Germany by train in two days,²⁸ a trip that could almost be described as a super-deluxe journey. Others did much of the same journey through the Balkans on foot or bike and with public transport and private cars, often taking weeks. Weather conditions can slow people down, as can kids (see Box 4).

²⁴ UK10

²⁵ UK01

²⁶ M08

²⁷ This is the 1990 Convention that dictates that asylum seekers have to apply for asylum in the European country where their fingerprints were first taken.

Box 4: Haifa's velocity along the journey

Haifa is a teacher from Hamah. She left Syria in May 2015, travelling along the standard route that many Syrians take, en route to Germany. She left with family – husband, five kids and some cousins – but they often travelled with others who were using the same smuggler. Once in Greece, they made their way to Thessaloniki by bus. From there they had to walk to the infamous Hotel Hara in Evzoni, at the Greece-Macedonia border, a 70 km walk. At the hotel, they secured a smuggler to help them navigate across the border, avoiding border police and gangs. Like many others, they ended up in a big group of migrants - they were around 300. They continued walking, but after five days one of Haifa's children got sick. Her son had an insect bite that got infected and he developed a fever and needed a doctor. The rest of the group was not willing to wait for them and moved on. Haifa and her family were stranded somewhere in Macedonia. They managed to flag down a car and persuaded the owner to drive them to a hospital for £150, but were caught by the police and put in jail for 23 days. Others in a few days to cross Macedonia; it took Haifa almost a month. Source: B02

Less obvious is that overall velocity is also determined by what happens in between travelling segments. We already saw above that people may decide to settle in a place with the intention of staying but then move on when things don't work out. At other times, a stay is intended to be a temporary stopover to prepare for the next leg of the journey. Journeys are often financed in different stages, for example Sudan-Libya, Libya-Italy and so on. Many people do not have the funds or social connections to pay for the whole journey upfront. This means a break when money has run out. Some migrants are able to draw on family networks to finance the next leg, but others look for work. For example, Mohammed found a job in a sewing factory in Turkey in order to save up \$4,000 for the next leg of the journey.²⁹ An Eritrean couple we interviewed worked in Libya for just over a year, with Nur working on construction sites and Halima as a maid, before moving on to Europe.³⁰

Some parts of the trajectory are beyond migrants' control. Long periods of immobility may occur as a result of the actions of others. People often spend weeks or months waiting for a smuggler to get the journey started. Why smugglers make people wait is often unclear to them. Explanations given range from bad weather conditions to government patrols or waiting for further migrants to join the travelling group. For example, Abdu travelled from Khartoum to Tripoli, which took one week in actual travel time.³¹ But in between he actually spent three months in the Sahara, staying in a small camp. He was told the route was blocked and they had to wait.

Finally, forces beyond the control of the individual also shape the velocity of journeys (as well as the overall nature of the journey). Some people get caught by border police, are sent back and end up having to cross the same border multiple times. Others are arrested or imprisoned, often for weeks or months (e.g. in Libya, Macedonia and Serbia). Yet the determination to reach a specific destination is often so strong that deterrent policies such as 'push-backs' have virtually no effect on people's behaviour. Most of the people in Calais' 'jungle', for example, have already travelled thousands of miles and spent thousands of pounds getting to that point. Under these circumstances, they are highly unlikely to drastically rethink their 'migration project', regardless of how strict the UK's border controls become.

Then there are the chance encounters that can shape trajectories (Gladkova and Mazzucato, 2015). We interviewed a few lucky migrants who came across kind people who let them continue their journey undisturbed (e.g. train conductors who don't ask migrants for tickets) or even actively helped them move on, by giving information, money or food, and hence made their journey quicker.

Table 1: The velocity of journeys varies hugely (time spent travelling between origin and destination)

	Shortest journey	Longest journey
Eritreans	2.5 months	7 years
Senegalese	1 day	1 month
Syrians	1 day	2.5 years

²⁸ B16

²⁹ B07

³⁰ B13

³¹ UK06

Summing up, the lived experience of migration journeys contradicts the view that migrations are simple movements from A to B. Many people experience long periods of immobility, some of which are of their own choosing, some of which are out of their control. These aspects of velocity should not be ignored, because – as the previous section shows – the dynamics of the journey often influence decisions about future movements and destinations.

3.4 Everyone gets rich from migrants

On average, a migrant in our sample spent $\pounds 2,680$ on their migration journey. This is a lot of money! ³² This average should be interpreted with care, as the costs of migration vary hugely. There were clear differences by route and means of transport. For example, as Figure 2 shows, a journey with a fake visa – a much quicker and safer way to get to Europe- is more expensive: the majority of our sample were in no position to afford this. Trips through the Central Mediterranean, mostly undertaken by Eritreans, are more expensive (average cost £3,280) than those through the Western Mediterranean, which tend to involve more walking and public transport (average cost $\pounds 2,620$). While a greater geographical distance between sending and destination country makes a difference to costs, Senegalese journeys on cayucos – migrant boats – are considerably lower in price; sometimes these are organised by groups of migrants themselves without involving a smuggler or middlemen. Those Senegalese opting for the more comfortable and safer option of a (fake) visa had paid more than four times as much. While Syrian migrants had often paid for the

costs of migration with their own savings, Eritreans were more likely to draw on extended family networks abroad.

While migration costs varied owing to differences in route and economic means, once again luck also played a part. Why luck? Migration journeys tend not to be contractually enforceable (although we see below that there are some security mechanisms) and the migrants we interviewed had an irregular legal status for most of the journey. This means they were vulnerable to exploitation and extortion by those they relied on to continue with their journey. A fairly high share of our respondents were cheated in some way. We heard that 9% of respondents lost money because, for example, their smuggler ran off with their payment before the trip (this mainly happened to Syrians). A total of 36% of respondents were extorted in some way. This involved anything from a bus driver charging double fares, to Eritreans being held hostage by smuggling networks in Sudan or Libya until the family had paid a ransom payment. Particularly, kidnapping, hostage-taking and extortion of Eritrean migrants seem to be increasing (Aziz et al., 2015; indeed, this had happened to almost half of the Eritrean we interviewed. Aziz et al. argue that there is an increasingly blurred line between smuggling and trafficking practices. In Libya and the Sinai, armed militias or violent groups associated with some tribes have 'capitalised their capacity of using violence in order to exploit migrants in transit'. Consequently, those hiring a smuggler to make a journey may then for example be kept a prisoner at a smuggler camp until additional payments are made (ibid.), something a handful of our respondents also experienced.

Figure 2: Journeys to Europe are expensive (average cost of journey by nationality)



Note: Averages based on 45 interviews where information on costs was recorded

³² It also suggests that migration probably isn't an option for the poorest, who are unable to afford these considerable sums, often paid upfront, to finance the costs of the journey. In fact, the migration literature suggests an inverted U-shaped pattern of migration flows, resulting in low emigration rates among the poorest and richest (see de Haas, 2010).

Box 5: Senait's first experience of kidnapping

Senait hired a smuggler to take her across the Ethiopia-Sudan border for £350. After six exhausting days, involving days of walking in the sun and crossing a crocodile-infested river, they arrived in Sudan. In Sudan, the Ethiopian smuggler handed them over to a Sudanese smuggler, who brought them to his camp somewhere near Al Hajer. Since the Sudanese smugglers knew the Ethiopian smugglers, Senait agreed to come. In the camp, a shock awaited her: Senait and the others were told that they now had to pay £1,000 (instead of the agreed-on fee of £350) to continue the journey. Panicking, she called her parents in. They called her sister in the US and her sister's husband contacted the smugglers. The smugglers told her brother-in-law they would sell Senait if the family didn't pay up. The brother-in-law was told to wire the money to Khartoum, where she would also be sent once the money arrived. She stayed in Al Hajer for one week, in a mud house guarded by Sudanese men, armed with knives. She was given dirty water that not even animals wanted to drink, and some flour once a day, with which she made some dry flatbreads on the fire. When her family paid up, she was taken to Khartoum as per the agreement. Source: B14

For the majority of respondents, migration expenses went primarily towards the payment of people smugglers. We use the term smugglers in the broad sense here to represent any agent or broker arranging (part of) a journey for a fee. Few authors have focused on the smuggled migrants' experiences, as we do (for exceptions see Amnesty International, 2015a; Kuschminder et al., 2014; van Liempt and Sersli, 2013). Recent studies on migration to Europe have shown smugglers tend to operate in fluid and wide-ranging networks, often involving many links in the chain (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). Smuggling networks are dynamic and adapt their routes and methods in response to EU border controls (Aziz et al., 2015; Townsend and Oomen, 2015).

Roughly two thirds of irregular migrants coming to Europe use smugglers (Koser and Kuschminder, 2015) and, given that the majority of our respondents had irregular journeys, we also found that the use of smuggler(s) – for all or part of the journey – was the norm. In fact, only 13% of migrants in the sample did not use a smuggler (and none of these was Eritrean). In a focus group discussion with Syrian men in Berlin, participants told us smugglers were necessary to make the journey: 'You do not have a choice.' ³³ Smugglers provide a useful service for which there is a strong demand. They offer transportation, logistical support and information on the best route to take. Services range from 'deluxe' (the provision of fake documents and accompanying the migrant all the way to the destination country) to 'basic' (walking across a land border together), with much variation in prices and services provided. Smugglers are often not dealt with directly, but work through intermediaries, with yet another person actually conducting the trip. Fellow countrymen frequently act as the intermediary for smugglers, for example Syrians in Turkey or Eritreans in Sudan.

Relationships between migrants and smugglers are complicated. Smugglers aren't necessarily the 'cut-throat villains' they are often portrayed to be. Some migrants describe smugglers as 'helpers' and may speak of their smugglers in a positive way (van Liempt and Sersli, 2013). We saw this too in a few cases where smugglers provided free services or helped migrants negotiate with kidnappers or officials. For example, Samer told us he was in a WhatsApp group with smugglers, where he would send them his GPS location.³⁴ The smugglers would send back a map showing the route he should be taking. This service was provided free of charge. Another migrant, Syrack, was kidnapped and tortured by people from the Rashaida tribe shortly after he had crossed the Eritrea border, who then demanded a payment of \$1,600 per person.³⁵ The brother of one of his travelling companions found a smuggler in Khartoum, who negotiated with the tribesmen (for a fee of \$400) and then brought Syrack and his travelling companions back to his apartment in Khartoum, where they stayed for three weeks.

Yet satisfaction with the services smugglers provided was mostly low. Few respondents had neutral or even positive experiences with their smugglers, as described above; on the whole our respondents were unsatisfied. Complaints covered lying, extortion and violence. Exemplifying the opinion of migrants comes the comment from one respondent that smugglers are '*shitty people, criminals*, *big liars*'.³⁶ Receiving inaccurate information from smugglers was common. Syrian women, participating in a focus group discussion, elaborated on this. They explained that smugglers '*lie so much about the numbers*', i.e. when they will travel, how long it will take, how many people will join the trip.³⁷

Smugglers' treatment of migrants was frequently inhumane, exploitative and violent, and conditions during travel tended to be poor and dangerous. Common experiences included lack of provision of life jackets or

36 B01

37 B18

³³ B17

³⁴ B08

³⁵ B22

no or little food and water, as well as uncomfortable and unsafe transportation, with a high number of people squeezed onto a boat or truck. Some respondents had extremely traumatic experiences with unscrupulous smugglers. As mentioned above, in Sudan and Libya, some smugglers demanded additional payments before moving on, blurring the line between smuggling and trafficking. This happened to Teweda, who had already made payments of almost \$4,000 for a trip to Italy, and was taken to the beach by his smugglers to get on the boat when he was captured and imprisoned by an armed group.³⁸ There he was asked for an additional payment of \$1,200. After his family abroad had paid, Teweda was released and handed back to his previous smugglers, who then put him on the next available boat to Italy. Smugglers and other groups frequently collaborate to extract as much from migrants as possible, as Aziz et al. (2015) also observe. Other smugglers were described as violent; for example, Senait told us the Libyan smugglers who took her across the Sahara beat the men with rubber cables and raped some of the women.³⁹

Yet migrants are far from being passive victims. They speak up and defend themselves. For example, Senait told us that, during the second night in the Libyan desert, all women stuck closely together, shouting loudly and successfully fighting off the smugglers' attacks.⁴⁰ People also attempt to safeguard themselves against being ripped off. Great care goes into the selection of smugglers. What matters more than price - there aren't many savings to be made, it seems, by shopping around - is the reputation of the smuggler; preference is given to those who are vouched for by migrants who have successfully completed their journey. Migrants also complain when they are not treated well, frequently attempting to negotiate over price and conditions, in some cases successfully. On some routes, systems are put in place to protect migrants against loss of money to smugglers. It is fairly common to pay only after arrival, and a new system of 'insurance offices', started in Turkey after Syrians began migrating en masse, formalises this. Nabil explained how it works: 'You give your money to an office in Izmir (called Secure Your Money), along with a password. When you reach the other side you phone the office and give your password. Only then is the money transferred to the smuggler'.41

Lastly, migrants are a source of income for multiple agents, not just smugglers. The vulnerability that underscores many migrants' journeys – stemming in turn from their undocumented status, desperation, fear

41 B01

42 B01

43 B02

- 44 B08; B10
- 45 B08

and unfamiliarity with new places and rules - provides opportunities for many people along the way to make money, from 'ordinary' citizens and bus drivers to border police and armed groups. Amnesty International (2015a), on migration through the Balkans, notes that people's irregular status makes them vulnerable to robbery by armed groups as well as extortion by law enforcement officers, who misuse their authority to demand bribes. Our interviews revealed numerous examples of people outside formal smuggling networks capitalising on migration journeys. There is the bus driver who charges migrants more than the fare and refuses to move on unless they make the payment.⁴² There is the Macedonian that offers to drive the Syrian family to the hospital with their sick child for €200.⁴² There is the Syrian prison doctor in Macedonia's notorious Gazi Baba detention centre who sells mobile phones for €500.44 Yet, once again, we see migrants negotiating, joining forces and fighting back. For instance, inmates in Gazi Baba prison started engaging in demonstrations and food strikes to attract media attention. They gathered and chanted 'Freedom' or 'Asylum'. As a result, local people around the prison started contacting the press. Samer said the detainees all felt united:

[•]We were all together, Muslims and Christians. We're all in this together.^{*45}

It is clear the cost of migration depends on many factors, including journey route, mode of transport and financial means, but is also heavily influenced by the people met along the way. These include not only smugglers but also bus drivers and others.

Box 6: Amira's negotiation with a smuggler

Amira is a 23-year-old nurse from Qamshli. As she was pregnant, she wanted to find an easier and more comfortable way to travel to Europe. In Istanbul, she found a smuggler who promised to drive her to Berlin, for £4,500, with half paid upfront. As promised, after three days, Amira and ten others were picked up in a truck and the Turkish driver took them to a hotel just over the Bulgarian border. Two days later they were driven towards the Serbian border with even more people and to Amira's great surprise they were asked to leave the truck in a forest somewhere in a Serbian forest. They walked all through the night, crossing a river around 1am. The smugglers told them to find a taxi in Hungary and go to Budapest. They got some money for this, but the taxi ended up costing more. Likewise, the hotel Amira was told to go to in Budapest was fully booked and she and her travelling colleagues had to find another one. Amira eventually made it to Germany, with some delays, and then refused to pay the second instalment as the conditions during the journey were worse than promised. Source: B15

³⁸ UK08

³⁹ B14

⁴⁰ B14



Mousa Age: 33 Born: Damascus, Syria Migration cost: £6,910 Migration duration: 2 months

Berlin, Germany (June 2015)

Having paid a taxi £500 to drive from Budapest across Austria, Mousa finally made it to Germany – 'a country where you can find work'. He went to stay with his sister in Berlin, before applying for asylum.

Budapest, Hungary

Soon after crossing into Hungary, he was caught by the police and taken to a centre. There, he saw other Syrians being beaten with sticks and tasers. Upon release, Mousa's fingerprints were taken.

Skopje, Macedonia

As Mousa made his way towards Serbia on foot, his travelling group was caught by the police and returned to Greece. After a second attempt, he made it through Macedonia and into Serbia.

Chios, Greece

In the end he took a boat from Izmir to the Greek island of Chios, where he was held in a 'bad' and 'dirty' camp by the authorities.

Mersin, Turkey

The plan had been to get to Italy by boat. However, after being scammed out of more than $\pounds 5,000$ by a smuggler who suddenly disappeared, Mousa spent the next month and a half in Turkey.

Sahnaya, Syria (April 2015)

Mousa had been waiting a long time for things to get better in Syria. But as the bombings and armed forces got closer, he made a decision with his family to go.



We cannot understand the relationships between migrants and these different groups of actors as simply exploitative – although in many cases they do display extortionary aspects. Rather, these relationships are quite complex, and certainly more ambiguous than politicians often make them out to be. Besides the people who profit from migrants, there are also individuals and charities helping migrants. A number of respondents experienced acts of kindness that facilitated their journey. For example, Khalil and Hind were stopped by three men in a black Audi in Macedonia and immediately worried about being robbed. Instead, the men gave them food and shelter and helped them get the right documents to transit through Macedonia.⁴⁶

3.5 Harassment, violence and deaths: the new normal

Consider these stories. Akbaret had to hide her teenage daughter under her skirt when on her journey through the Libyan desert, while around them other young women were raped.⁴⁷ Dehab's dinghy started sinking on the way to Greece, as it was overloaded, and she reported that fellow migrants started to push other passengers off to reduce the weight, including a pregnant woman.⁴⁸ On Dauda's boat journey to the Canaries, three people fell off the boat because it had no barriers; they drowned.⁴⁹ Fatima's travelling companion was beaten by Hungarian prison guards when he asked them to return the asthma inhaler of Fatima's five-year-old son.⁵⁰ Teweda jumped on the back of trucks in Calais more than 100 times before he finally made it ⁵¹ and Tirhas almost suffocated in the truck she travelled on, when it was parked somewhere for three days after it had reached the UK.⁵²

In this sub-section we ask: Why did people subject themselves and their families to such horrific experiences? Is it because of information asymmetries and limited awareness of risks? This is what the EU's Mediterranean Task Force (EC, 2013) implies, recommending the communication of 'information on the grave risks and dangers attached to irregular migration'. Yet most of those interviewed did not seem surprised about the dangers faced along the journey. Many had spoken to family and friends who had travelled the same route previously; others had heard 'stories' from travelling companions. For example, Dehab told us how she was 'always thinking about things' and worrying about the stories she had heard. She expected the journey to be bad.53 One way to gather detailed information before and during travel is through social media. Some respondents had used this heavily, for example Facebook groups for migrants that provide detailed information on routes, weather conditions, costs and possible dangers (see Figure 3). Social media has been described as 'a rich source of unofficial insider knowledge on migration' (Dekker and Engberson, 2012). This is affirmed by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2014), which shows social media is playing an increasing role in the migration trajectories of migrants coming from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe.

Figure 3: Informing other migrants about weather conditions – screenshot from Facebook group



- 46 B03
- 47 B05
- 48 UK10
- 49 M06
- 50 B09
- 51 UK08
- 52 UK05
- 53 UK10

It is clear most people know their journey will be difficult. Migrants seem to tolerate high levels of dangers on the road (see also Mbaye, 2014; Townsend and Oomen, 2015; Wissink et al., 2013). For example, Mbaye found that 77% of Senegalese interviewed were willing to risk their life in order to emigrate. Harassment, violence and deaths are all considered part of the migration process and become the norm in migrants' experiences. As Mohammed from Damascus explained:

'Nothing can stop you. [...] Those who are leaving haven't calculated the risks; they are not afraid of the journey. They just want to leave even if they know they will be robbed.' ⁵⁴

But what makes people tolerates these risks? Why do they push on, even when their life is in danger?

For one, the risk of death or injury seems worth taking compared with the more *immediate* threats to personal safety faced back home (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). What's more, the risks already experienced at home (often for years) may seem more concrete and real, compared with the abstract risks posed on the journey. Hence, migrants often feel they don't have any other options and that they are weighing up certain imprisonment or death against possible injury or death. For example, Abdu, who escaped national service in Eritrea after six years, was aware of the danger crossing the Sahara, but it didn't stop him. He declared, 'I know it's risky. That it's illegal. But it's better than Eritrea and the spies [in Sudan].'5 Serigne, from Senegal, told us, 'The people who do it have no other option, many die anyway. If they try to leave their countries at least they are doing something to move on, the point is to overcome a difficult situation.' ⁵⁶ In addition, there is a sense of not being able to return; once people are on the way, even when they realise the full extent of danger, they don't feel they can go back.

Second, we should keep in mind that many migrants have already experienced years of violence or conflict at home and this may increase their willingness to take

risks in the future. The continuous thud of bombing in a neighbouring part of town, or the knowledge that at any moment the authorities might take away someone close to you, is capable of routinising an intense sense of fear into people's daily lives. As a result, risk and vulnerability become part of how normal is perceived. For example, Teweda, told us that he was shocked the first time he saw people jump on moving lorries in Calais.57 The first few times of doing it himself were a struggle, but it soon became part of his new daily routine and he stopped thinking about the risks. Some literature within the psychology field has already demonstrated that large shocks, even if temporary, can affect people's outlook in life (e.g. Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, cited in Voors et al., 2012). Moreover, there is a growing literature that shows a correlation between long-term exposure to violence and lasting changes in risk preferences. A number of these studies (but by no means all) find that individuals exposed to conflict have increased risk tolerance (Callen et al., 2014; Voors et al., 2012). In other words, migrants may be so used to experiencing violence and near-death scenarios that they become part of their normal frame of mind.

Finally, migrants may be operating on a different timeframe. Through the very act of migration – involving high costs and hardship in order to achieve a better future outcome – migrants are prioritising long-term objectives over the short term. Once they have decided to migrate they may increase their timeframe to achieve those long-term objectives (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). This clearly comes out in people's motivations for migration, which often involve variations of 'wanting to have a better future'.

In this section, we have shown that migration trajectories are non-linear and dynamic, adjusting to new information, external circumstances and social networks. We have also seen that people are determined to push on, despite the hardships and risks faced on the road (see Cummings et al., 2015 for a relevant evidence review of irregular migration). But what is the role that migration policies play in decisions? Is it possible to change someone's mind about migration through policies? That is the focus of the next section.

⁵⁴ B10

⁵⁵ UK06

⁵⁶ M03

⁵⁷ UK08

4. Does policy matter?

Governments believe migration can be managed. Driven by their own economic interests, they believe they can attract (certain classes of) migrants to fill gaps in the domestic labour force or stimulate growth in particular sectors when needed. They also believe it is possible to shut migration down: to refuse people entry or even stop them coming in the first place.

For the most part, Europe's response to the migration crisis has centred on the latter. It has been guided by the logics of control, containment and deterrence. With some exceptions, European countries have sought largely to divert and push back the migration flows rather than allow people to (potentially) settle and work within their territory.

The EU has been extensively criticised for its failure to act collectively and coherently on this crisis. Deciding to send more development aid to the 'regions of origin' – the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa – is one of the few instances where member states have actually agreed on anything. This is perfectly illustrative of the dominant approach: deal with the problem by shifting it elsewhere.

This approach is not novel. For years, European governments have been trying to prevent entry of certain people, particularly those coming from outside the EU and through irregular channels (while simultaneously facilitating entry of the 'right' kind of migrant (de Haas, 2015a)). Their attempts are reflected in a range of migration policies, from visa restrictions to border controls (see Figure 4).

Restrictive migration policies theoretically work through a number of mechanisms (Carling and Hernandez-Carretero, 2011). The first is direct control, preventing human movement there and then: a person cannot easily cross a border if there is a 10-foot wall lining it, or legally board a plane without a visa. The second is by altering migrants' mindsets. In addition to physically blocking people's paths, deterrence and dissuasion strategies are designed to put people off coming in the first place. Governments want these policies to 'send a message'. They focus on amplifying that message as loudly as possible, so people thousands of miles away – people who might not have even started their migration journeys – are able to hear it. This is why so much fanfare accompanies the introduction of new border controls: *we are building a wall, and we want you to know it.*

Deterrent strategies operate on the assumption that, by transmitting negative signals and messages, it is possible to change someone's mind about migrating, at least to a particular place. They can be understood as a kind of cross-border behavioural change or nudge policy.

Last year, for example, the Danish government placed adverts in four Lebanese newspapers (see Figure 5), advising readers of its decision to tighten regulations in a bid to discourage any would-be asylum seekers from making the journey to Denmark (Al Jazeera, 2015). There is actually very little that is unusual about such an approach. Recall the Programme of Action - a major agreement adopted by 179 governments at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and often understood as 'the first attempt to elaborate an international and consensual discourse on migration' (Pecoud, 2010: 185). According to Paragraph 10.19 of the Programme: 'Governments [...] should deter undocumented migration by making potential migrants aware of the legal conditions for entry, stay and employment in host countries through information activities in the countries of origin' (in *ibid*.: 186).



Figure 4: Border control has been a popular focus of European migration policies over the past 20 years

Source: The shares used in this figure were calculated through a migration policy-mapping exercise, carried out as part of this project. For that exercise, we drew on the DEMIG project methodology as described in de Haas et al. (2014).

Figure 5: Danish government advert in Lebanese newspaper discouraging people from coming to Denmark

The Danish immigration authorities are informing about changes of conditions regarding residence in Denmark being implemented by the new Danish Government	
Denmark has decided to tighten the regulations concerning refugees in a number of areas.	
The Danish Parliament has just passed a regulation to:	
 Reduce the social benefits significantly. The social benefits for newcomer refugees will be reduced by up to 50 per cent. 	
The government will also maintain and ensure:	
 That foreign nationals granted a temporary residence permit will not have the right to have their family brought to Denmark during the first year. 	
 That foreign nationals can only be granted a permanent residence permit after 5 years at the earliest and prior to this they risk having their residence permit revoked. 	
 That there are language requirements in terms of the ability to speak and understand the Darish language in order to obtain a permanent residence pennit in Denmark. 	
 That in accordance with a particularly expedited procedure an application for asylum is refused when it is regarded manifestly unfounded. 	8
 That all rejected asylum seekers must be returned quickly from Dermark. 	
 That there is a special return centre for rejected asylam seekers to ensure that rejected asylum seekers leave Denmark as quickly as possible. 	

Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Proving

Ministry of levelspratic Integration and House The Danish Of course, this is not representative of the broad range of migration management policies on the table. As Figure 4 implies, there are many others geared towards alternative ends, such as legal entry and integration. Neither are all prevention policies about information campaigns: the transfer of EU aid to key 'entry points' into Europe, such as Turkey, is justified politically in the name of preventing onward movement.

That said, attempting to change people's minds about migrating through these kinds of strategies – strategies designed to transmit a negative, off-putting signal – is a common approach. As Alpes and Sorensen (2015: 1-2) describe, 'An important EU measure to prevent migration is awareness campaigns, designed to discourage potential migrants in migrants sending and transit countries from embarking on irregular migration projects.' And it's not just political actors picking up on this logic. In July 2015, for example, Jeremy Vine used his popular BBC Radio 2 talk show to suggest taking some loudspeakers over to Calais, before inviting listeners to phone in with ideas for messages that could be broadcast to people trying to enter the UK. Here are some of the suggestions submitted via the show's Facebook page (Box 7).

One of the questions at the heart of this study is whether this kind of approach works. Is it in fact possible to change someone's mind about migrating through policy – particularly policy designed with the logics of deterrence in mind – and to therefore guide processes of development and change across multiple locations?

Box 7: The question posed on BBC Radio 2's Facebook page on 29 July 2015

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How should we convince migrants in Calais that the UK is not all it's cracked up to be? What would make migrants understand that the UK is not a land of milk and honey with streets paved with gold? Maybe some loudspeakers could be taken over to Calais to try and get the message across of what it's really like here. If we did that, what should be broadcast from them?

Some written responses:

If they are told no benefits, free health and free housing they might think twice!

They all need to be gathered up and taken back to Calais. Do this over and over again and the message will soon get through.

Mr Cameron needs to release a statement saying something along the lines of, 'Sorry but Britain is now full! We're not accepting any more migrants for at least two years until we've sort out the problems we already have.'

Giving so much in foreign aid [...] just adds to the impression that this is the place to come to get something for nothing and where we just 'give it away'.

Source: BBC Radio 2 Facebook page, 29 July (https://m.m.lite.facebook.com/BBCR2/ photos/a.135213933157262.21859.129044383774217/1192167807461864/?type=1&p=380) To answer this question, we look at migrants' decisionmaking processes. This is partly in response to the lack of qualitative evidence on the subject of whether migration policies are effective at regulating human movement. But it is also because, in order to understand the role policy may (or may not) play in shaping the dynamics of international migration, it is first important to understand how individuals process information, think through their options and select courses of action. As such, we are not interested in migration policies in and of themselves, but rather in their relationships and interactions with all the other factors that affect people's decisions (as described in the previous section). What is it that offsets them, or renders them irrelevant? Under what circumstances might they influence an individual's trajectory?

The remainder of this section attempts to answer those questions. It is split into four parts. Broadly speaking, the first three explore the limits of deterrence policies, laying out a series of reasons why we should expect them to play at best a limited role and at worst no role whatsoever in restricting migration. Each of these three parts focuses on factors that essentially offset such policies. We first look at the quality of information being conveyed through deterrence, comparing its (lack of) credibility with that of more trusted sources of information shaping people's thought processes. We then consider the fact that these policies are challenging social norms, which a wide range of research suggests can be highly resistant to external influence. Third, we consider which aspects of (potential) destination countries seem to really matter in shaping people's decisions, showing how migration policies often come a distant second to 'non-migration policies'. In the fourth and final part of this section, we consider the conditions under which migration policies, deterrence strategies included, might actually affect the dynamics of migration. We name that section 'Reshaping, not preventing', because we find little evidence that such policies are actually capable of stopping cross-border movement in an absolute sense.

4.1 Trusted information is what counts

Part of the logic behind deterrent strategies, and many migration policies more generally, is that they convey new, important information to people either wanting to migrate or already doing so (Pecoud, 2010). In order for them to actually work, that information needs to influence behaviour. And, in order for that to happen, the information first needs to be heard, then listened to and then internalised. In other words, the information must become meaningful to an individual. What, then, does meaningful information look like? People fleeing persecution or simply looking for a better life operate, like the rest of us, in a world where information is plentiful. Of course, this is not to say migrants always possess what economists might call 'perfect information'. Most people reach decisions in accordance with the laws of bounded rationality (Simon, 1982), making the best choices possible in the face of incomplete information, rather than fitting the rational actor model put forward by neoclassical economists.

The real challenge confronting people on the move lies in knowing what information to take seriously, which pieces they (feel they) should be listening to and internalising. The social circles individuals move in closely govern their personal decisions. This is partly about the role of social institutions, which help determine the limits of what is considered 'acceptable' behaviour for particular groups of people. For example, in many countries, women are far less likely to migrate internationally for work because of their own society's gendered expectations around roles and responsibilities. Talking in Madrid, Serigne explained why, even though so many Senegalese are migrating into Europe, it is usually men making the journey: 'It's a society that believes the man should go out to work and the woman should look after the home and the children [...] She doesn't even think about [migrating].'58 Institutional norms define the options people feel are available to them, expanding the horizons for some while limiting them for others.

But social circles are also capable of legitimising – making *meaningful* – certain pieces of information. It is rare that people make decisions about migrating completely by themselves. Their choices are usually influenced by the feelings, words and actions of others. Almost everyone we interviewed for this study recalled moments in which key decisions were made on the basis of other people's advice. More often than not, these people were 'members' of our interviewees' closest social circles: parents, siblings, good friends. This applies both to individuals fleeing conflict and human rights abuses and those in search of better livelihood options.

Biniam, a young man from Eritrea, spent several months trying to decide whether to cross the border into Sudan. He had reached the limits of his tolerance for national service, but was deeply concerned about what might happen should he get caught mid-flight. It was only after confiding in and talking extensively to a friend with whom he was hiding in the north of the country that he finally took the plunge and made the trip (see accompanying case study).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ M03

⁵⁹ UK03



Biniam Age: 28 Born: Asmara, Eritrea Migration cost: £2,540 Migration duration: 1 year

olton

Calais

FRANCE

Bolton, UK (2015)

He was eventually allocated accommodation in Bolton, and in June 2015 granted asylum by the British government.

Calais, France (2015)

UK Unimpressed with Milan, Biniam continued onto the UK. After a three week wait in the Calais 'jungle', trying every night to creep into vehicles, Biniam finally made it across the Channel by hiding in a truck's cargo.

Sicily, Italy (2014)

From Zuwarah port, it took Biniam four attempts to cross the Mediterranean. He finally made it in October 2014 when a passing ship rescued them and took them to Sicily. Before he could be fingerprinted by authorities, Biniam made a dash for Milan.

Benghazi, Libya 🔍

Sudan wouldn't be a safe place for a defected Eritrean to stay. So using savings, Biniam paid smugglers to get him to Europe via Libya. The trip cost around £2,000 and time in prison.

Khartoum, Sudan

Unsure whether to move on, Biniam sought the advice of a friend on the farm. "We had built a trust. He told me to go for it". A few days later, Biniam was in Khartoum.

Teseney, Eritrea (2013)

By 2013, Biniam had reached his limit and decided to defect. Suspecting he would be caught by the authorities back in Asmara, Biniam moved to Teseney near the Sudanese border. Here he worked on a relative's farm.

Sawa camp, Eritrea 🔍

At 12 years old, Biniam was rounded up for national service. For 15 years, he was based at Sawa camp, only being allowed to visit his family in Asmara when his superiors let him. He³⁰ often went years without seeing them.

ITALY

LIBYA

Benghaz

Zuwarah



ERITREA

Talking in Berlin, Mohammed admitted that he never wanted to leave Syria; the thought hadn't even entered his mind (i.e. Mohammed was yet to cross the indifference threshold). But his parents, fearing for their son's future and convinced that 'the degree you're getting isn't worth anything here', encouraged him to travel to Europe.60 Serigne, the Senegalese man we mentioned above, had known about the Spain-bound boats leaving from West African shores for some time before his departure in 2006. He had long wanted to make the journey himself, but explained to us that he had been waiting on 'reliable information' about whether the method was actually viable. In the end, that reliable information came through a friend, who rang Serigne once he had made it to Spain to talk him through the process. That was the tipping point.61

It is not just in the initial stages of a journey, when people are still trying to weigh up whether to go or stay, that close social connections matter. As the previous section showed, migrants continuously draw on known contacts throughout their movements to interpret, make sense of and order the options in front of them. For example, Tekleab described the range of information sources he drew on when he decided to leave Sudan:

'As usual I found the smugglers in the cafes in Khartoum where Eritreans go for information. I have also consulted friends in Europe and they gave me information on how the trip was.'⁶²

Social networks are also paramount whenever smugglers are sought (which is often multiple times over the course of a single journey). As the last section showed, smugglers operate in a marketplace. However, they compete with others less on the basis of pricing than on the basis of reputation and trust ('*how guaranteed the smuggler is*').⁶³ Asking people how they knew they could trust a certain smuggler (inasmuch as it is possible to trust members of the smuggling industry), we heard the same answer time and time again: people they had a preexisting relationship with recommended them. This was particularly clear for Syrians moving through the Balkans route. Another reason frequently given for the selection of smugglers was the broker or intermediary being from the same hometown, which made them more familiar and trustworthy. For example, Samer explained that he opted for a smuggler who was from Daraa in Sryia, like him, because he felt '*comfortable*' with him.⁶⁴

In each of these cases, one characteristic appears universal: our interviewees trusted their informants. Migrations are risk-laden enterprises. As the previous section showed, they are often hugely expensive and intensely precarious, made all the more so by the gradual tightening of legal migration and asylum channels into EU countries (de Haas, 2015b). Deciding whether to put oneself through that process is a huge call, life-changing (and potentially life-taking). In these situations, trusted information is both precious and influential. People don't gamble on their lives, or on the lives of their sons and daughters, on the basis of information they don't believe or 'buy into'.

What does this mean for migration decision-making? For starters, it should make us think differently about the kinds of information, signals and messages that guide migrants' behaviour. The push–pull theory of migration suggests it is possible to change someone's mind about migrating simply by minimising the number of pull and push factors. And its accompanying rational actor logic implies this occurs when (would-be) migrants are exposed to new, previously unknown, information about route or destination.

62 UK02

63 B17

64 B08

⁶⁰ M03

⁶¹ UK03

Our evidence suggests this assumption is based on an oversimplified theory of change that misreads the way humans process information. While there is usually a lot of it around, not all information is equal. In order for it to count, it first needs to be trusted; only then will it actually mean anything to the individual. For instance, in a focus group discussion with Syrian women, we were told that 'The more the people they asked are trusted, the more they believe what they tell them.'65 On the basis of our own research, it seems information becomes trustworthy when it is transmitted by known social connections with whom the individual already shares a relationship of (at least some) trust. Evidence from the wider literature likewise suggests the development of trust relies on there already being a social relationship in place, making it possible for repeated interactions to occur over time (Rousseau et al., 1998). As such, where that initial bond is missing, or when an individual has no reason to invest trust in a particular relationship, any information coming via that source is unlikely to drastically alter their behaviour (see Box 9).

It emerges that the identity of the information's source matters as much (if not more) than the content of the information itself. In other words, when it comes to changing someone's mind about migrating, the messenger is as important as the message. Take the Danish newspaper adverts as an example. The information contained within those ads might be perfectly useful and usable. It clearly communicates the country's new asylum laws to people who, one might think, would find this highly relevant. But consider the source: a faceless state bureaucracy centred thousands of miles away from the realities of life in Lebanon. The same information coming through a close personal contact, particularly one who has already reached Denmark, would probably mean far more. Indeed, the fact that macro or institutionbased trust is often referred to as 'thin trust', whereas more micro, personalised forms of trust are termed 'thick trust', is particularly telling (Nooteboom, 2006), implying as it does an important spatial influence on trust creation (Nilsson and Mattes, 2015).

This is not just true for migration decision-making. Research into a wide span of issues supports the idea that, when it comes to shifting someone's beliefs and behaviours, the messenger matters. During the West African Ebola crisis, for example, efforts to encourage citizen compliance with public health measures were undermined by a lack of trust in the source of the advicenamely, national governments and international aid

Box 8: The limited effectiveness of information campaigns

In October 2014, UK immigration minister, James Brokenshire, suggested that 'emergency measures [such as search-and-rescue operations] should be stopped at the earliest opportunity', and that their discontinuation be given the widest publicity in north Africa.

Is this kind of information likely to prevent migration? Our interviews suggest not. In one focus group with Syrian women, we heard that they 'do not really care about those [kinds of] announcements'.

Source: B18

agencies (Denney and Mallett, 2015; DuBois and Wake, 2015; Tsai et al., 2015). In the US, greater scientific knowledge of climate change tends to be associated with higher levels of concern about the problem ... but only among people who trust scientists. Those of a more sceptical disposition are unaffected by knowing more about global warming (Malka et al., 2009).

Ultimately, it is wrong to assume it is possible to prevent migrations simply by exposing an individual to new information. For information to be acted on, it needs to come through particular channels and from particular sources (especially from those with whom a relationship of trust has already been established).

What's more, knowing about risks and regulations is in most cases unlikely to have much of an effect, particularly for people coming from war zones. As the previous section showed, information asymmetries are generally quite minor. Most of the Syrians we interviewed, for example, were quite aware of how dangerous and uncertain their journeys were going to be. This did not deter them. Other considerations proved more powerful. This is precisely why information campaigns have, according to a recent evidence review of their effectiveness, 'very limited effect on migrants' decisions to leave [...] Conditions of poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of economic opportunities at home, and reports from trusted social networks about conditions abroad, play a much stronger role in migrant decision-making' (Browne, 2015:2).

⁶⁵ B18

4.2 The power of normal

Migration is often difficult to prevent, because for many people it is considered so profoundly normal. And normal can be tough to break down.

As the previous section showed, in certain countries – Senegal is one good example – the idea of migration appears almost automatically on the agendas of young people, particularly young men. It is part of the culture in which people surrounded by limited domestic livelihood options grow up. To go is not seen as extraordinary by any measure, but rather is expected of certain people. As an option, it is taken for granted. Which is of course not to suggest it is considered easy or straightforward.

A parallel can be drawn with the high rates of emigration we now see in places like Eritrea and Syria (among others). Ten years ago, the idea of paying a (relatively) unknown smuggler thousands of dollars to snake them precariously through Europe would have probably seemed absurd to the average Syrian. This is now the norm, considered as much a viable option as staying and looking for work in an increasingly predatory environment.

This 'new normal' has become so through a series of social and psychological processes, years in the making. Today's migrants are not only following quite literally in the footsteps of thousands of their fellow citizens – guided by social media along well-worn, litter-strewn footpaths – but also responding socially to an idea, gradually cemented in over time, of flight as an acceptable thing to do. In sociological terms, the establishment and deepening of (border-crossing) habits and routines contribute, over time, to an *institutionalisation* of those social practices (Berger and Luckmann, 1991, in Ellingsen, 2014: 31). The following remark by Amin illustrates:

'For a Syrian, you don't have to decide [to migrate]. Everyone is going [...] Now, the Syrian is experienced with the border.'⁶⁶

Disbelief is often expressed at the decisions of Syrians and others to put themselves and their families through journeys known to result in fatality. But that misses the point. Extreme risk is part of what has become normal about the option of migration. As the previous section argued, years of exposure to violence and conflict may increase people's willingness to take future risks.

To relate this back to the threshold approach, the people making their way through the Balkans, across the Sahara or over the Mediterranean are so far across the trajectory threshold that the dangers these journeys represent are deemed largely irrelevant to the project as a whole. Known people within their own social circles – families, neighbourhoods, communities – have passed through these routes before. It has been done not just by a select few but by tens if not hundreds of thousands. Almost every Syrian we interviewed, for example, knew someone personally who had made the trip previously. They had received 'signals' from previous emigrants and observed their choices over several years, helping them gravitate towards migration decisions of their own making (see Epstein and Hillman, 1998 on 'herd effects').

On the whole, people used familiar, 'well-trodden' paths for large parts of the journey. Many of our respondents were familiar with general routes as well as specific places on the way from the stories of friends, family and social media. Throughout our interviews, the same places kept popping up over and over again: for Syrians, it was usually 'Hotel Hara' at the Greece–Macedonia border. Travel routes are also quite standardised, especially along the pathways towards Europe's major entry points. Abdu from Eritrea recalled the moment he spoke with a smuggler. When asked where he wanted to get to, Abdu replied '*Libya*'. The smuggler's counter-response says it all: '*Libya*? Everyone knows that if you are going to *Libya, then you are going to Italy*.'⁶⁷

The normalisation of particular routes as acceptable or particular countries as destinations ascribes to those pathways and territories a certain sense of familiarity. This may at first seem counterintuitive. How can a place thousands of miles away, a place someone might have never been, feel familiar? Again, the threshold approach helps us make sense of this. As van der Velde and van Naerssen point out, when families and friends have already made their way across the other side of the border, have come to reside in a certain place, a 'space of belonging' is created. Particular places can become a 'home far away from home'; a '"here" in the "there"" (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2011: 221). These new meanings of place can then serve to both initiate and facilitate cross-border movement.

The power of normal comes in its ability to turn certain ideas into viable options. Goals once thought out-of-reach, or perhaps not even considered, suddenly become not only believable but also attainable. It is this sense of possibility, created in the first instance by the establishment of a new norm, that encourages people to move. And it is the same sense of possibility, the same norm, that prevents people from turning back when confronted with barriers or threats (see Ryo, 2013, for similar findings from the US–Mexico border).

⁶⁶ M01

⁶⁷ UK06

The literature on governance and development has long grappled with the question of how social and institutional change happens. In answering this question, scholars have increasingly recognised that external actors – donors, international aid agencies, global civil society movements – are able to play, at best, only a very limited role. Most of us now accept that change is, by and large, an endogenous process; it comes from within. From time to time, international players may have some luck in tweaking domestic conditions or in bringing certain groups of key players together (Booth, 2012; Booth and Unsworth, 2014; Centre for the Future State, 2010), but there is very little evidence to suggest they are capable of transforming them.

The point here is: norms are not immutable, but they are often highly resistant to change, particularly when the attempted drivers of change emanate from external (and potentially untrustworthy) sources. In trying to change people's minds about crossing borders, this is essentially what European migration policies are up against. And it is partly why they have little capacity to stop people moving.

4.3 Essential services + economy > migration policy

Migration policies are one thing that can potentially shape someone's migration trajectory. But they are one thing among many (Czaika and de Haas, 2013). Just as some pieces of information matter more than others, so too do different kinds of policies exert different degrees of influence over a person's thinking.

Parts of our interviews with people in Germany, Spain and the UK focused on the (shifting) reasons underpinning their choice of destination. We saw in the previous section that destinations often start off as vague, fuzzy ideas of a 'kind of' place, only to solidify as people move through what are quite fragmented and protracted migrations. By the time most people have arrived, they have a much clearer understanding of what drew them there.

Some common themes emerge. For young people and those with young children – and even for those without, but who are thinking long term – education is central. People want places with a decent schooling system, where they can realistically get their kids a good education over the coming years. In one focus group with five Syrian women recently arrived in Berlin, this reason was placed front and centre; it was clearly the most influential factor driving their movement towards Germany.⁶⁸ In a separate interview in Berlin, Khalil again anchored his attraction to Germany to the future of his children.⁶⁹ Education came up again, as it did in so many discussions, but Khalil also talked about the broader social environment of the country. He had considered Holland, but at some point decided against it: that country is *'all about drugs and smoking'*, he said, before explaining how growing up in an environment like that is not good for children. It is clearly a stereotype – an inaccurate picture of how Dutch people live their lives – but that's not really the point. Khalil's perception of the Netherlands as a country obsessed with drugs was enough to put him off the idea of going there, and it was a consideration for his children that ultimately determined that. Speaking in Madrid, Amin summed it up:

'When you have children, you need good places.' ⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, economic reasons are important too. Many of those we interviewed expressed a desire to find work in the places they had ended up in, and talked about that as one of the things that drew them there originally. After showing us the scratches and cuts on his legs – a legacy of his time stumbling through the forests of Macedonia - Mousa explained that, to him, Germany was a country where you can find work.⁷¹ It is far preferable to a place like Sweden, he continued, where you 'sit down and get stuff given to you for doing nothing'. For this young father, Germany symbolised a place where he could 'give [my family] the life I could never give them in Syria'. The livelihood trajectory of Mousa and his family is not and never was just about migrating. Rather, Mousa's migration – irregular, precarious or however else we might refer to it – was simply a means to a far greater end for those closest to him. Mousa's story also illustrates a point we made in the previous section. The search for better (or at least wider) livelihood options is not a project restricted solely to those leaving politically stable countries, such as the Senegalese people we interviewed for this study. The economic, political and security motives for migration are often intertwined.

For most people, uprooting themselves to cross an international border is a big deal. If you're already going through that process, then one might expect it to be perfectly reasonable to get to a place where you can maximise your chances of getting by – and perhaps even getting better off. In the end, the reasons refugees end up in countries like Germany or the UK comprise a combination of factors. These relate on the one hand to the circumstances under which they left in the first place

71 B12

⁶⁸ B18

⁶⁹ B03

⁷⁰ M01

and on the other to the broader construction of their own long-term livelihood projects (Carr, 2014; Levine, 2014). And there is actually quite a blurred line between these.

The important point to make here is as follows: none of the reasons why asylum seekers and refugees want to get to European countries – good education systems, safety, human rights, employment opportunities – does anything to challenge, undermine or call into question the reasons they have fled warzones. If someone directly experiences conflict or persecution – the most important grounds for refugee status – that remains unchanged by the dynamics of their journey.

Aside from the presence of family and friends, our interviews suggest that education and employment are the two most important factors influencing people's thinking about where to go. In fact, nearly half of those we spoke to cited aspects of public policy at destination, such as education and labour markets, as motivations that shaped the migration decision-making process (figure 6).

Figure 6: Public policies at destination often influence decisions (share of respondents that cited public policy in destination country)



This finding contradicts the opinion that it is welfare systems that 'pull' migrants towards comparatively wealthy countries (see Giulietti and Wahba, 2012). In fact, researchers have already looked closely at the 'magnet hypothesis' underlying that belief, and found essentially zero evidence for it. In a recent literature review, Giulietti (2014: 1) reports in clear terms that, 'There is no strong support for the welfare magnet hypothesis.' In our interviews, most people did not even mention welfare systems; those that did told us that they would rather be working than receiving benefits, as Mousa did above.

So, when lined up against the broader public policy environment and economy of destination countries, it seems that neither welfare systems

Box 9: Does access to benefits act as a pull factor?

In a recent opinion poll, 64% of Londoners thought that the reason why migrants in Calais want to come to the UK rather than stay in France is because Britain has a more generous welfare system.

Abdu, 29, arrived in the UK in 2015 after a year-long journey from Eritrea. He came via Calais, where he stayed for a total of three months whilst trying to cross the Channel.

'We're not here for our whole life. No one wants to stay out of his country [...] I'm not waiting for benefits, I'm not here for that. I want to help myself'.

Now, Abdu is with the job centre. Every day he is searching, going into shops and warehouses and asking if there is anything going. As he explained, 'I don't want to stay in my home every day'. At the time of talking, he had so far only received rejections from potential employers, but was nonetheless grateful for his new situation.

'Thanks for everything UK. Here, I feel something new – a confidence [...] That route was dangerous, but I got lucky and it was better than returning to Eritrea'

Source: UK06

nor specific migration policies matter all that much. Another focus group in Berlin, this time with six Syrian men, illustrates this perfectly. In the resulting notes sent to us by our colleague Majdi, the following was written: 'When asked, "What determines destination?" no one mentioned migration policies, particularly not deterrents. Rather, they are searching for safety and possibilities to start a new decent life, and where there are good chances to work.'⁷²

Other evidence supports this. In a study of asylum applications in 20 OECD countries between 1985 and 1999, Thielemann (2004: 1) finds that policy measures to deter 'unwanted migration [...] have often been ineffective'. This, he explains, is because, 'The key determinants of an asylum seeker's choice of host country are historical, economic and reputational factors that largely lie beyond the reach of asylum policy makers' (ibid.). Other research reports similar conclusions (Czaika and de Haas, 2013: 489), implying that, 'The role of states in migration processes is much greater than a narrow focus on migration policies alone would suggest.'

Following this, it is theoretically possible for European governments to put people off coming – but only by sending their countries' education systems into decline and collapsing their economies.

4.4 (Re)shaping, not preventing

The Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) project has examined the effects of governments' migration policies on migration flows. Much of its work suggests that, while migration policies are secondary to the broader role of the state, as well as a whole range of 'non-migration policies' (as we saw above), they are not altogether inconsequential.

In one of the project's earlier papers, de Haas (2011) argues that migration policies are probably not very good at affecting the 'bigger' aspects of migration: volume and long-term trends. But they can (re)shape the dynamics of flows. In particular, migration policies – specifically restrictions on immigration – seem capable of producing a series of what he terms 'substitution effects'. These include the following:

- **spatial substitution:** the diversion of migration flows to countries with less restrictive regulations
- categorical substitution: when migrants are pushed into alternative migration channels, such as illegal or student categories
- inter-temporal substitution: when people either rush into or put off their journeys in response to the impending implementation of new migration policies. In the case of forthcoming restrictions, this is sometimes known as 'now or never migration'

Box 10: Do fences change people's minds?

The Hungarian government was the first to build fences last summer. In justifying that decision, prime minister, Viktor Orban, claimed Europe had 'sent out invitations to the migrants', and that these fences were key to protecting Hungarians against the 'brutal threat' of mass migration. In a media interview, a government spokesperson put it more directly: 'This is a necessary step [...] We need to stop the flood'.

Are these fences effective in changing people's minds? When we posed this question to a group of Syrian men in Berlin, they told us fences were unlikely to affect people's journeys: 'Syrians will find a way. It may be harder and more expensive, but they will find another route.' They told us that once people have begun their journeys they continue until they achieve their goal.

Source: B17

• reverse flow substitution: when newly introduced restrictive immigration policies discourage migrants' return owing to concerns that they won't be able to get back in again

Our own research lends broad support to these ideas. Based on our sample of people *who have already made it* to Europe, the factors that compel people to migrate do not appear to be offset by European countries' migration policies. This seems to be because the influence of those policies is marginal to the range of other forces governing migration decision-making.

As previously discussed, in order for the option of migration to be placed on the agenda, a person must stop feeling indifferent towards it. For people from certain countries - Syria, for example - this process can take many years: many Syrians we interviewed had never even considered migrating prior to the onset and escalation of civil war. In other countries, such as Senegal, the idea of international migration is far more embedded in social and economic life. For people who grow up surrounded by a 'culture of migration', the phase of indifference is almost non-existent. Of course, it is possible for people to 'fall back' across the indifference threshold - as circumstances change, opportunities emerge and collapse, perceptions shift - but we see little evidence from our own interviews that European migration policies have the potential to power that reversal.

However, while governments probably put too much faith in the capacity of their migration policies to serve as 'the last bastion of sovereignty' (Dauvergne, 2004: 588),

⁷² B17
we do observe some ways in which they appear to shape migrants' trajectories. Here, we discuss two of these – both of which most directly concern de Haas' spatial substitution effect.

Policies that incentivise matter more than policies that deter

First, we found evidence that people's trajectories – their routes and, perhaps more importantly, their choice of destination – sometimes shift in response to migration policies that make things a little easier. For example, if country X were to implement a new migration policy that either makes entry less difficult or increases the likelihood of asylum being granted, then it can become a more attractive option relative to country Y or country Z. As we have shown throughout this paper, when ideas about destination are unstable, migrants may, at some point along their trajectory, consider new places that might never have before entered their mind.

This is clearly what is happening to many Syrians moving towards and through Europe. In one of our focus groups in Berlin, two men explained how they originally started off with different destinations in mind. After being fingerprinted in Hungary and Italy, however, they (separately) redirected themselves towards Berlin, working off the perception that in Berlin they *cancel your fingerprints [taken] in other Dublin countries*.⁷³ Other interviewees cited a similar reason, suggesting again that the dynamics of a journey – in this case the taking of fingerprints – alter the overall trajectory.

At the same time, however, it is not simply the policy of fingerprinting that shifts someone's course. Neither is it the suspension of Dublin alone. Rather, it is the interaction of these policy decisions that matters. Had Germany never placed a temporary hold on Dublin implementation, the experience of being fingerprinted in the EU's borderlands might not have redirected thousands of Syrians towards the country. And vice versa: had Hungary (and others) failed to enforce those biosecurity measures, it is possible Germany's suspension of Dublin would not have had quite such a powerful magnet effect.

A second example of policies changing people's trajectories is the perception of the length of time it takes to process an asylum request. Among our respondents there was the perception – perhaps a factually inaccurate one – that asylum cases in the UK are processed more quickly than those in France or Scandinavian countries. In some cases, when migrants received this (trusted) information from within their social network, it compelled them to reassess their own position on the locational threshold. For those with an unstable, flexible idea about where to go, a change of plans then became a distinct possibility. For example, Abdu's original plan was to apply for asylum in France. Once there, however, he soon learned of others who had been through that process and were still waiting on a decision more than seven months later. When he then heard asylum claims were being processed more quickly in the UK, he decided to sneak into a lorry at Calais and try his luck across the Channel.⁷⁴

What can we take from this? Two things stand out. First, trajectories do appear to be influenced by migration policies (to an extent) – but much more so by those that incentivise movement and facilitate entry. People seem more responsive to positive messaging and actions than they are to negative ones. However, while preventive or restrictive policies in and of themselves probably don't work, the question is ultimately a relative one. What this means is that variations between different countries' migration policies likely do affect where people end up, with some (but not all) migrants (re)directing themselves towards places deemed more welcoming. This then raises questions about how to manage migration effectively, with a potential trade-off emerging between unilateral (member state) action and collective (EU-wide) action.

Second, the likelihood of individuals redirecting themselves based on perceived 'welcoming-ness' is probably linked to where they are on the locational threshold plane. There are many people who have decided they want to migrate but are still largely indifferent as to where they end up. Such indifference can be read either as the product of poor planning and preparedness or as the result of a counter-intuitively 'rational' approach. As Smith (2015: 39) writes in his study of prospective Ghanaian migrants: Many migrants purposely maintain a certain vagueness in the final destination they seek to reach in order to make this dream achievable. Making a list of all the issues they might come across along the way would make the idea daunting and result in them not setting off after all, even though this was they strong desire.

For indifferent migrants, if that is what we can call them, country-by-country variations in 'welcoming-ness' may be enough to push them a certain way (but rarely to deter them altogether). This is probably less likely for migrants with a much more defined view of their destination – and stronger reasons for selecting a particular place.

⁷³ B17 – this interview was conducted before the Germany-wide suspension of Dublin. At that time, there was a strong perception among respondents that the Berlin state informally cancels fingerprints.

⁷⁴ UK06

Feeling, not hearing

Perceptions govern action. Decisions are made and options selected on the basis of an individual's own interpretation of which option(s) make most sense given the time and place (an interpretation that is of course influenced by others). Subsequently, choices are the product of subjective knowledge; what is 'rational' or sensible is not necessarily the same for all (Koikkalainena and Kyle, 2015).

We established in the first part of this section that the potential of deterrent policies to influence migrants' behaviour is limited by the fact that they tend not to convey trusted information (from the perspective of a migrant). Part of the logic underpinning these policies is that knowledge transfer is, in itself, sufficient to prevent migration. That is, they imply an automatic causal relationship between knowledge transfer and a change in migrants' perceptions (towards a particular viewpoint). They also assume that, through this mechanism, (would-be) migrants can then be convinced to choose alternative livelihood options before crossing their own borders.

Many factors can theoretically prevent an individual from passing (or staying above) the locational and trajectory thresholds – which hence consolidate their immobility. Based on our research, the signals and messages of governments in either 'host' or 'transit' countries do not seem to be one of them. But direct exposure to and experience of those policies is another matter.

Many people we interviewed talked of certain countries they had transited through as places to which they would never return. For Syrians moving on the Balkans route, Hungary is the usual suspect. To give one example, after crossing the border, Mohammed walked for five hours before being caught by the Hungarian police.⁷⁵ He was held in prison for 13 hours with no food, and for half that time was refused access to water and bathroom facilities. Meanwhile, the officers referred to his country as 'Toilet Syria'. Mohammed described how he would do anything not to go back to Hungary, how we would rather burn himself than return: 'I swear they have no humanity [...] It is all about humiliation.' Fatima told us she was put in a crowded prison cell in Hungary, her children and herself soaking wet from crossing a river at the Serbia-Hungary border, with no means to dry their clothes and no access to toilet facilities for her two young children.76 Smartphone footage shown to the authors of detained Syrians being threatened and beaten by Hungarian police with sticks and Tasers is testament to the kinds of experiences many people endure as they pass through Europe.77

Eritrean and Senegalese interviewees passing along quite different routes similarly expressed fear, anger and regret at certain parts of their journeys, indicating that, in retrospect, they should not have taken them. This is not to say that these people were initially unaware of the risks associated with their routes. The point is rather that there is a difference between knowing about a risk and feeling that risk first-hand. As we argued in the previous section, the risks already experienced at home (often for years) may seem more concrete and real compared with the abstract risks posed on the journey. While knowledge and information can be subjectively discounted in accordance with the particular objectives of an individual's livelihood project (Smith, 2015), the effects of actual experience on one's perceptions can be much harder to shake off (Voors et al., 2012).

What this ultimately means is that policies and practices aiming to make life difficult for migrants are probably more likely to produce an ex-post effect rather than an ex-ante one. In other words, for these policies to really change someone's mind, that individual must first directly experience them. Signals and messages alone, received far away from the centres of policy implementation, are insufficient.



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5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study has explored recent migration flows to Europe and the dynamics underlying these. Drawing on 52 in-depth interviews with Eritreans, Senegalese and Syrians in Berlin, Madrid, London and Manchester – the majority of whom had arrived through irregular means – we set out to:

1. understand how migrants' journeys unfold and

2. identify the factors that influence the process of migration decision-making, with a particular focus on the role of European states' migration policies

While journeys have long been seen as marginal to the migration experience as a whole, we instead find they are often profoundly formative episodes. Just a quarter of those we interviewed – the majority of those Senegalese – travelled directly from country A to country B. Most experienced what could be described as more difficult journeys, with Eritreans having to cross an average of five international borders and Syrians (in our Germany sample) having to cross six.

These journeys are lengthy, $costly - \pounds 2,680$ on average within our sample – and exhausting. The length and complexity of migrant trajectories mean destinations and travel plans change frequently en route. Plans and destinations are shaped by where people see a viable future, and this perception – this feeling – can change over time. As such, a migrant's initially planned destination may not be their final destination.

These journeys are also precarious. Last year, more than 5,000 migrants died in transit around the world. Almost 4,000 of those were in the Mediterranean, making Europe the most dangerous destination for irregular migrants. The vulnerability that often accompanies irregular migration journeys also creates opportunities for other people along the way to exploit migrants and refugees, including smugglers, armed groups, officials and 'ordinary' citizens. And many do so: a total of 36% of the people within our sample were extorted in some way, and almost half of the Eritreans we spoke to were kidnapped for ransom.

Yet migrants are far from being passive victims. They speak up, defend themselves and, in some instances, try to capture media attention to highlight their situation. Nor are they necessarily making 'bad' decisions by travelling such dangerous routes. People are often aware of the risks, but are willing to accept them because of more immediate threats to their safety and livelihoods in their country of origin.

Migration journeys can be life-changing experiences that shape where migrants end up. Many people leave without a clear destination in their mind. Much like a 'road movie', experiences along the way, people met and information gathered all inform where they go next. Chance encounters matter, as does having good or bad luck. In other words, the journey itself influences the migration decision-making process.

But what else matters? **People make decisions on the basis of 'trusted' information.** In order for information to count – for it to prove influential – it first needs to be trusted. Only then will it actually mean anything to the individual.

We find that who transfers the message matters just as much as what the message is. It seems that information becomes trustworthy when it is transmitted by known social connections with whom the individual already shares a relationship of (at least some) trust. For those we interviewed, these included friends, family members, travelling companions or even a smuggler who came recommended. As such, where that initial bond is missing – as is usually the case for European governments seeking to change people's minds about migrating – any information coming via that source is unlikely to drastically alter migrants' behaviour.

On the other hand, trusted information can serve to normalise both the idea of migration as a viable livelihood option as well as particular migration pathways – the sheer number of Syrians taking the Balkans route throughout 2015 is a case in point. And with that normalisation comes a perceived sense of familiarity. When family, friends and other members of the same 'imagined community' have already made their way across the other side of the border, and have come to reside in a certain place, a 'space of belonging' is created. Making the journey then becomes a natural course of action, despite the level of risk involved (indeed, the risk is part of what is normal about it).

Governments believe they can control migration flows. Our evidence suggests this may be possible in some senses but not in others. Preventive migration policies, particularly those concerned with deterrence, appear to matter little (for some of the reasons outlined above). At best, direct controls like border fences and detention can divert flows, essentially passing the buck from one nation state to the next. But they do not appear capable of preventing migration. Thus, while such measures might alleviate individual countries' concerns, at the regional EU level they make no difference.

Of course, research focusing either on people in transit or on those still weighing up the decision of whether to travel might reveal a different picture. It is perfectly possible that some kinds of people are more put off by deterrence than others – and that it might play a preventive role in certain circumstances. This is important further work to be done. But in this study, we find that migration trajectories are influenced less by restrictive migration policies and more by things like perceptions of 'welcoming-ness', labour market opportunities and access to education.

For those with young children – and even for those without, but who are thinking long term – schooling is central. The (perceived) likelihood of getting a job matters too, as do safety and human rights. This is all part of what it means for a country to be seen as welcoming. Likewise, those we interviewed seemed more influenced by migration policies that made life a little easier (faster asylum processing procedures are just one example). Measures that incentivise movement and facilitate entry thus appear to have a bigger effect than those that make it more difficult – although this early hypothesis requires further testing.

5.2 Three recommendations to manage migration better

The evidence from this study suggests that, while individual member states can, under certain conditions, shift migration flows onto their neighbours – even if this is through 'race-to-the-bottom' measures like fences, teargas and asset seizure – this unilateral approach is largely ineffective at changing dynamics at the regional level. As one of our interviewees succinctly put it, 'When one door shuts, another opens.' The primary effect of route closure, far from compelling people to return, is to make journeys more difficult, risky and expensive – and to therefore reduce migrants' capacities to support themselves by the time they arrive.

The point is: it is not always possible to change people's minds about migrating. So, given that there is an inevitability to certain types of migration, and that barriers and disincentives to travel are not necessarily effective, **the only clear response is to manage it better.** European governments desperately need to reduce the human, economic and political cost of the current migration crisis. They need to work towards creating a higher quality of migration, so the sweeping developmental impacts we know it is capable of creating are realised and enhanced, rather than stifled as they currently are.

Based on our analysis, we propose three sets of policy recommendations to improve the management of migration into Europe, targeted at three specific stages of the migration process: (1) the journey itself; (2) arrival at European borders; and (3) entry and integration into European states.



1. Journeys: make them safer

Last year, 3,899 migrants died trying to reach Europe. Many more have been subject to physical injuries and psychological trauma, spending a fortune in the process of getting here. As this study has shown, it is not always possible to deter migration by continuing to make these routes more dangerous and expensive. Morally, making journeys safer must be the priority. Even better still is if people don't have to make *irregular* journeys in the first place.

Recommendations

Expand legal channels of migration: This would allow people to travel directly from one country to the next, removing much of the precariousness from the equation. By removing demand for their services, it would also have the added advantage of crippling the smuggling networks European leaders are so keen to combat through force (which has so far proven largely ineffective).

Implement humanitarian visas: Such a scheme would permit asylum seekers to travel legally to Europe through whichever means they can afford. Alexander Betts explains: 'Small consular outposts could be created outside the European Union, in places like Bodrum in Turkey or Zuwara in Libya [...] At these transit points people could be quickly screened and those with a plausible asylum claim would be allowed access to Europe' (Betts, 2015). Such an approach would actually prove fairer (and safer) than the status quo: direct flights to Europe are considerably less expensive than the average irregular journey.

Expand search and rescue missions in the Mediterranean: As one of several basic humanitarian options that could be scaled up, this is a clear choice. In 2014, the Italianled Mare Nostrum operation saved an estimated 170,000 lives, and there is very little evidence, including from our own study, to suggest these measures alone increase the likelihood of more people migrating.



2. Arrivals: create a faster, fairer EU system

EU institutions have struggled to mobilise a joint and coordinated response to the migration crisis. But the crisis is undoubtedly a regional one, and it must be dealt with as such. Our study shows that, while unilateral action may occasionally divert flows, it fails to alter the overall dynamics at the European level. Eurobarometer opinion poll data suggest the majority of EU citizens are actually in favour of stronger EU involvement in migration and asylum policy decisions across Europe (EC, 2015).

Recommendations

Invest in a better-functioning, EU-wide asylum processing system: Current unevenness in the way different EU member states treat and process asylum claims is part of what influences refugees' trajectories. In order to address this, and to help remove much of the uncertainty asylum seekers usually experience, the process must move faster and must be fairer. To ensure this, the relevant departments and organisations in member states need to be appropriately resourced. At the same time, those making decisions on applications need to pay closer attention to the realities of migration. There is a tension between the dynamics of migration and asylum procedures, which demand a linear story backed up by proof. As this paper shows, people fleeing well-founded fears of persecution often do not go directly from A to B, but rather pass through multiple countries. The fact that they do this does nothing to undermine their claim or question the credibility of their reasons for leaving.

Strengthen the EU's arbitration role: Failures to examine asylum claims rigorously must be highlighted and addressed. To that end, the EU's arbitration role should be strengthened. EU migration policy is a shared competency between member states and the EU. While the EU has limited scope to harmonise the migration and asylum policies of member states, it could be more active in holding them to account when they fail to comply with the rules (see Faure et al., 2015).

Reform the Dublin Regulation: As things stand, Dublin is creating a small number of winners (northern European countries) and a large number of losers (European countries at the EU borders, as well as hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers). This is because of the first-country-of-arrival rule, which states that asylum claims must be processed in the first EU country an asylum seeker enters. If migration and asylum are to become a genuinely shared responsibility across the EU, then the principles of regional solidarity and fair sharing need to be incorporated into Dublin. Reforms announced for March 2016 look promising with the first-country-of-arrival rule up for discussion. Reforms should also consider the preferences of asylum seekers, particularly given the fact that the social networks pulling them towards certain places are the same social networks that will help them get by should they arrive.



European politicians and the wider public need to start seeing migrants and refugees as a resource rather than as a problem. By executing policies that limit the agency of migrants and asylum seekers, host countries are missing out on the economic benefits of migration⁷⁸ and new arrivals are being robbed of their capacity to support themselves. It doesn't have to be like this. But policy change is unlikely to happen if public and political support isn't there – support that must be built on a recognition of the benefits of migration.

Recommendations

Communicate more effectively the social and economic benefits of migration: There is a large body of high-quality evidence demonstrating the extraordinarily positive impacts of migration, but not enough of it is getting into the public domain and discourse. The migration debate, at least in the UK, is remarkably fact-free. By establishing research and evidence as the basis for fresh discussion, politicians could begin to change the public narrative, thus enabling them to take bolder policy and political action that makes the most of migration.

Encourage and support circular migration: Labour market conditions strongly influence many migrants' decisions on where to go. When economic conditions deteriorate, most want to return or move elsewhere – if they are able to come back when conditions improve. However, this is often not the case (partly because getting there was so difficult in the first place). What this means is that people are essentially forced into permanent settlement or irregularity (Czaika and de Haas, 2014). By facilitating cross-border mobility, migrants are more likely to return and engage in circular migration (Constant and Zimmermann, 2011). This then helps remove cases of unwanted 'permanent' migration to Europe. For lessons on how such a scheme might work in practice, a number of successful cases already exist: the partnership between Colombia and Spain to encourage circular migration of low-skilled agricultural workers is just one example (see IOM, 2009).

Invest more in economic integration programmes: Packages that include language lessons and work skills training – tailored towards the economic needs of particular host countries – would (1) ease the transition of new arrivals, (2) increase their capacity to support themselves (as most aspire to) and (3) help fill job gaps in European economies. Of course, there would be an initial upfront cost in delivering such support, but this is a short-term expense that would be offset by the subsequent tax revenue generated.

Resettlement programmes for workers are another sensible option: Unlike traditional resettlement programmes that focus on the most vulnerable populations, these programmes resettle entrepreneurs or those able to work, and provide access to jobs, as well as short-term financial assistance. Initiatives such as the regional labour mobility programmes recently trialled in Brazil (geared towards Colombian refugees residing in Ecuador) can both facilitate economic integration and reinforce the principle of fair sharing on a regional basis (Montenegro, 2016).

⁷⁸ See Aiyar et al (2016) for a discussion on the potential economic impacts of refugees.

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Annex 1: List of interviews

No.	Name	Nationality	Gender	Date
B01	Nabil	Syrian	Male	13/07/2015
B02	Haifa	Syrian	Female	13/07/2015
B03	Khalil and Hind	Syrian	Male and female	14/07/2015
B04	Mohammed	Syrian	Male	14/07/2015
B05	Akberet	Eritrean	Female	14/07/2015
B06	Mohammed	Syrian	Male	15/07/2015
B07	Mohammed	Syrian	Male	15/07/2015
B08	Samer	Syrian	Male	15/07/2015
B09	Fatima	Syrian	Female	16/07/2015
B10	Mohammed	Syrian	Male	16/07/2015
B11	Madiha	Syrian	Female	16/07/2015
B12	Mousa	Syrian	Male	16/07/2015
B13	Nur and Halima	Eritrean	Male and female	16/07/2015
B14	Senait	Eritrean	Female	17/07/2015
B15	Amira	Syrian	Female	27/07/2015
B16	Rima	Syrian	Female	11/08/2015
B17	Focus group (male)	Syrian	Men	15/08/2015
B18	Focus group (female)	Syrian	Female	15/08/2015
B19	Hassan	Syrian	Male	20/08/2015
B20	Farid	Syrian	Male	21/09/2015
B21	Wedi	Eritrean	Male	17/9/2015
B22	Syrak	Eritrean	Male	17/9/2015
M01	Amin	Syrian	Male	20/07/2015
M02	Basma Dali	Syrian	Female	21/07/2015
M03	Serigne	Senegalese	Male	21/07/2015
M04	Adama	Senegalese	Male	22/07/2015
M05	Saliou	Senegalese	Male	22/07/2015
M06	Dauda	Senegalese	Male	22/07/2015
M07	Abdoulaye	Senegalese	Male	23/07/2015
M08	Mohammed	Syrian	Male	23/07/2015
M09	Ousmane	Senegalese	Male	18/09/2015
M10	Mara	Senegalese	Male	28/09/2015
M11	Salam	Syrian	Female	01/10/2015
M12	Fatou	Senegalese	Female	19/10/2015
M13	Jadis	Syrian	Male	19/10/2015
M14	Ansalam	Syrian	Male	19/10/2015
M15	Faowaz	Syrian	Male	27/10/2015

Annex 1: List of interviews (continued)

No.	Name	Nationality	Gender	Date
UK01	Fallau	Senegalese	Male	29/07/2015
UK02	Tekleab	Eritrean	Male	26/08/2015
UK03	Biniam	Eritrean	Male	26/08/2015
UK04	Rosina	Eritrean	Female	26/08/2015
UK05	Tirhas	Eritrean	Female	26/08/2015
UK06	Abdu	Eritrean	Male	27/08/2015
UK07	Samuel	Eritrean	Male	27/08/2015
UK08	Teweda	Eritrean	Male	27/08/2015
UK09	Huria	Eritrean	Female	02/10/2015
UK10	Dehab	Eritrean	Female	05/10/2015
UK11	Hadinet	Eritrean	Female	11/10/2015
UK12	Yassine	Senegalese	Male	16/10/2015
UK13	Abdul	Senegalese	Male	29/10/2016

Note: Some names have been changed at the request of interviewees.



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