Home Office

Research and analysis

Asylum seeker decision-making in journeys to the United Kingdom (2022)

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Executive summary

This study examines asylum seeker decision-making through an analysis of the contextual factors, processes, policies and practices that influence behaviours and decisions in journeys to the United Kingdom (UK). The

study draws on an extensive rapid evidence assessment (REA) which included a review of 200 academic and policy reports as well as 29 in-depth key stakeholder interviews with Home Office officials, academics and civil society organizations in the UK and the Middle East and North Africa. Drawing on behavioural science, findings from the REA and the interviews informed the development of a multidimensional decision-making model. The model captures complex interdependencies and feedback loops between the macro, meso and micro dimensions of asylum seeker decision-making. The model can be used by analysts and policy makers in conjunction with behavioural insight models such as COM-B, EAST and others, to help design interventions that are informed by system analysis and that account for complexity and emergence.

Overarching findings

Overall findings from this study confirm the findings of existing research that asylum seeker decision-making cannot just be attributed to a single factor, or even a set of factors alone. Asylum seekers may make choices, but those choices are ultimately constrained by various factors determined by context, time and rapidly shifting and evolving circumstances. Moreover, as asylum seekers make numerous difficult decisions, often relating not only to their own future but also those of their children and/or family members, those decisions can change across the migratory journey, often in unpredictable ways. In investigating asylum seeker behaviour, it is therefore recommended that the Home Office consider incorporating complexity theory – an approach that emphasizes interactions between various factors and feedback loops that constantly change the dynamics and characteristics of a system – within asylum policies and practice. The multidimensional decision-making model developed in this report serves as a conceptual framework for asylum policy and practice, as well as an instrument to consider complexity thinking in policy making and operational engagement in asylum processes.

There are several potential advantages to the use of complexity theory and our proposed decision-making model to understand asylum seeker decision-making and inform asylum policies and practice. A complexity approach might support the development of more effective policies that respond appropriately to non-linearity and that avoid assuming that a policy or set of policies can directly affect immigration figures without considering the broader social system within which asylum seeker decision-making unfolds.

A complexity approach could potentially enable the Home Office and other key stakeholders to review the UK's asylum policy and practice holistically, taking into account the vast number of factors at macro, meso and micro levels that interact with one another and generate feedback effects that

have an influence on an asylum seeker's decision-making process. By adopting complexity as an organizational and conceptual approach to understanding asylum seeker decision-making, there is potentially an opportunity to consider both meeting international obligations to provide protection to those who need it while also combatting trafficking and smuggling networks that exploit the lack of legal pathways and leave asylum seekers in the position of considering undertaking dangerous journeys in their search for protection. We propose a set of recommendations at the end of the report for consideration.

Specific findings

An analysis of the choice sets, factors or motivators, beliefs and expectations, and other key actors that have an influence on the decision-making process points out the necessity of approaching asylum seeker decision-making using a complexity approach that recognizes the multidimensional nature of decision-making. The analysis also points out the following:

- there is a diversity of factors that influence asylum seeker decision-making in choosing or ending in the UK; those are individual, familial, political, national and international, and unknowable or idiosyncratic
- to understand asylum seeker decision-making, one must treat not only asylum seekers but also other involved stakeholders, as adaptive actors whose decisions are interconnected and shift at various stages throughout the journey
- choices change across the migratory journey; chance encounters and opportunities can often be crucial in redirecting destination preferences or reaffirming the targeted ones
- asylum seeker perception bias of what awaits them in destination and transit countries significantly influences their decision-making and this is the case even if these perceptions do not correlate with reality
- smugglers exploit the lack of legal opportunities available to asylum seekers and can also offer services at great cost; the profile of smugglers varies widely from one country to another
- social networks, "the power of communities" and "word-of-mouth" influence asylum seeker decision-making; this includes selectivity (who does and does not migrate), timing and destination
- there is insufficient evidence that restrictive asylum policies in the UK have an impact on the number of asylum seekers coming to the UK
- there is insufficient evidence that other asylum policies, such as strategic communications and campaigns, have an impact on the number of

asylum seekers coming to the UK

- the availability of rights and refugee formal protection outside the UK is an important determinant for whether asylum seekers continue their migration journey to UK from other European countries
- the decision-making model proposed in this study serves as a starting point to understand emergent behaviour and thus unanticipated consequences of policies; it brings in a complexity approach and a systems perspective, which can help anticipate emergent behaviour and allows policymakers to track the components that have been affected and influence, in turn, asylum programming and policymaking

Recommendations

Drawing on key findings from the study, the authors put forward 2 key areas for action for the Home Office to consider:

Develop pathways to incorporate complexity thinking in Home Office policy and practice
To be fully effective, asylum policy should take into account the context within which asylum seekers make decisions, recognising the many factors at macro, meso and micro levels that interact with one another and generate feedback effects to influence asylum seeker decision-making. We have evidenced how asylum seeker decision-making is a complex process. Yet embracing complexity thinking enables us to understand and address the “messiness” and complexity involved in asylum seeker decision-making. As an illustration, the following practice could be adopted to attempt to enable Home Office policy and practice to integrate ‘complexity-thinking’ in the asylum space:

- staff training across policy and operational departments to promote understanding of ‘complexity thinking’
- capacity building to tackle complexity through on-going communication and initiatives, engaging different levels and roles across the organisation and monitoring effect on practice
- engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders (academics and the private sector, for example, through a research uptake taskforce or hub or a third party), to discuss the decision-making model and how it can be used to shape individual and collective practice

Strengthen the evidence base on asylum seeker decision-making
A lack of data prevents better understanding of the decision-making processes of asylum seekers to the UK. To more fully understand asylum seekers’ needs, vulnerabilities, experiences and decision-making from

countries of origin through their journeys to the UK, we need better data, both quantitative and qualitative:

- we recommend investing in expanding data infrastructure on asylum in the UK; this can be achieved through commissioning further, in-depth research in asylum seeker decision-making to the UK, spanning their journeys and experiences from their countries of origin, countries in-between and the UK
- we recommend research which offers granular analysis of the experiences of specific groups of asylum seekers, for example, female migrants, families and LGBTQ+, who are currently under-represented in existing research
- to cover even deeper ground, we recommend research which is intersectional in nature; asylum seekers are not a homogenous population; they have multiple and layered identities and social characteristics (for example, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability), which combine to create different modes of disempowerment and disadvantage in their countries of origin, and different experiences along the migration journey
- there are many civil society organisations, nationally and internationally, which engage with different cohorts of asylum seekers; these organisations can be a rich 'data' resource which can be drawn upon to expand the data infrastructure on how different identities and other markers of difference intersect to shape their migration experience

1. Introduction

Over the last 2 decades, there has been increasing evidence that asylum seekers have varying levels of agency when it comes to the decisions that they make, reflecting a wide range of factors that influence their decision-making across migratory journeys, including motivations to seek asylum, access to information, social networks and financing, choice of destination and how, when and with whom to travel. This evidence has challenged the idea of a clear dichotomy between those who are forced to move and those who move voluntarily (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessy, 2021; Crawley and Jones, 2020; Crawley and Skleparis, 2017; McAuliffe and Jayasurya, 2016; Hagen- Zanker & Mallett, 2016; Richmond 1993).

This study examines asylum seeker decision-making through an analysis of the contextual factors, processes, policies and practices that influence behaviours and decisions in journeys to the United Kingdom (UK). The objective of this study is to provide the Home Office with an extension to the evidence base with which to better understand asylum seeker behaviour, motivations and decision-making.

1.1 Background

In 2021, there were 48,540 asylum applications (relating to 56,495 people) in the UK, 63% more than the previous year[footnote 1]. This included 28,526 people detected arriving on small boats in 2021. This compares with 8,466 in 2020, 1,843 in 2019 and 299 in 2018 (Home Office, 2022). This recent increase in asylum applications is not unique to Britain, however. Driven by combination of conflict, political instability, environmental crises and economic insecurity as well as limited regularised routes for protection, the number of people seeking asylum in European countries has increased in recent years[footnote 2]. In France, 121,554 persons have been registered as asylum seekers by the Ministry of Interior in 2021 (compared to 93,264 in 2020) (ECRE, 2022a). According to Germany's Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), 190,816 asylum applications were submitted in 2021 in Germany, which is the highest number since 2017 when more than 222,600 people applied (ECRE, 2022b).

The literature on asylum seeker decision-making shows that behind the figures are various interconnected and complex factors which this study seeks to explain. The choice of migration modalities and destination is influenced and determined as much by borders in their different guises[footnote 3] as by a multiplicity of factors that span the individual, familial, political and international context. Former approaches to understanding asylum seeker decision-making such as 'push-pull' models based on principles of utility maximization, rational choice and full information, as well as wage differentials (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019) have been criticised on the grounds they are overly simplistic and economically deterministic, especially when it comes to forced migration (Geddes,2005). Some people are heavily constrained in their choices, for instance because of limited funds or due to geography and available travel routes (Koser and McAuliffe, 2013); while, for many others, destinations are determined by smugglers or agents (Gilbert and Koser, 2006; Crawley, 2010). This is particularly the case for those who are often unable to prepare for their journeys and may face additional constraints of financial nature (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019).

A better understanding of motivations for coming to the UK could help achieve combined objectives of better border control and increased humanitarian protection.

1.2 Conceptual framework

As outlined above, existing evidence on human mobility has challenged linear thinking on motivations, experiences and choice of destination in migration. To develop an in-depth understanding of the various factors that influence asylum seeker decision-making, this study draws on complexity theory as an overall conceptual framework, building on a limited body of work in this area (Willekens, 2012; Omer & Hatna, 2003; Massey et al., 1993). Instead of focusing on “push” and “pull” factors in human mobility or on “aspirations” and “capabilities”, a complexity approach enables us to understand how various factors (and the actions resulting from them) engage with one another and, in turn, contribute to the emergence and evolution of a complex system. The strength of a complexity approach lies in inviting us to understand how parts of a whole relate and engage with one another in time (Hiver, 2022).

According to Willekens (2012), a complex system is made up of agents or actors. Those agents can be individuals or institutions that interact with one another over time. The interaction gives rise to collective behaviour with characteristic patterns and processes. Actors then react to the patterns they create. A complexity approach then enables us to understand the interconnectedness between various factors and the feedback mechanisms that become important drivers of systems behaviour.

In applying complexity theory to asylum seeker decision-making, we focus on 2 dimensions of decision-making. First, we focus on locality and how asylum seekers, in the first instance, interact with a limited group of peers and are only indirectly affected by the actions of other members of the social system. Asylum seekers interact with parts of their community, agents and traffickers, their family and state actors, but collectively, all of them are only a small section of the society that affects the asylum seeker’s decision environment. Second, we focus on externality and how the actions of asylum seekers as individuals create an impact on other parties (such as other asylum seekers) and in turn, the latter’s actions and beliefs affect the asylum seeker.

This has significant implications for understanding asylum seeker decision-making and asylum policy and practice. Through analysing the locality and externality of asylum seeker decision-making, it becomes clear that a focus on the interconnectedness between various factors and the feedback effects resulting from it have a significant influence on social systems more broadly. This also means that it is not sufficient to approach factors that influence decision-making independently (Ille, 2023). Hence, our recommendations at the end of the report focus on how a complexity approach could be absorbed in asylum policy and practice.

1.3 Methods

The analysis presented in this study is based on primary data collected through 29 key stakeholder interviews[footnote 4] conducted online between February and August 2022, as well as an in-depth rapid evidence assessment (REA). The REA included a review of 200 academic and policy reports. The key stakeholder interviews were conducted with Home Office officials, academics and civil society organizations in the UK as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. All interviews were semi-structured and based on a series of research questions that addressed the respondent's understanding of asylum seeker aspirations and agency, the role of governments and policy makers within the UK and in other neighbouring countries as well as the influence of crosscutting issues, such as health shocks and COVID-19. Questions also addressed contextual factors that influence asylum seeker decision-making across their migratory journeys, both regular and irregular.

Drawing on behavioural science, findings from the REA and the interviews then directly informed the development of a multidimensional decision-making model. The model captures complex interdependencies between the macro, meso and micro dimensions of asylum seeker decision-making. The decision-making model should be used in conjunction with behavioural insight models in designing policies and interventions. The model approaches asylum seekers as adaptive actors that act in a partially strategic manner with other stakeholders, and in an environment that both shapes and is shaped by their behaviour. Underlying the model is that decision-making does not develop in a linear or predictable fashion – a key outcome from the REA and the interviews. The model also accounts for idiosyncratic or individual factors - "the unknowables" - which cannot be captured in the model, which may affect asylum seeker decision-making during difficult and lengthy journeys to the UK.

1.4 Definitions

To avoid definitional confusion, this section features definitions of key terms used in the study.

Agent: An agent is someone who facilitates the movement of people across borders in return for a fee. This facilitation can be done in a variety of ways through the provision of transportation, information, networks or fraudulent documents.

Non-refoulement: This is a fundamental principle of international law that forbids a country receiving asylum seekers from returning them to a country in which they would be in likely danger of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (OHCHR, 2018).

Refugee: A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries (UNHCR, 2022).

Asylum seeker: Asylum is protection given by a country to someone fleeing from persecution in their own country. An asylum seeker is someone who has applied for asylum and is awaiting a decision on whether they will be granted refugee status (Sturge, 2019).

Migrant: A migrant is a person who moves from one place to another. International migration refers to those people who leave their country of origin and move to another country. Different data sources define migrants in different ways. Migrants may be defined as foreign-born, foreign nationals or people who have moved to the UK for a year or more, among other possibilities (The Migration Observatory, 2019).

Transit countries: Those are countries that migrants cross on their way to their country of destination. Many migrants, however, do not have a clear destination when they start travelling. Once they have left their country, whether they decide to travel onwards and to where often depends on several factors (Council of Europe, 2015)[footnote 5].

Decision-making: Decision-making refers to the cognitive process of choosing between 2 or more alternatives, ranging from the relatively clear cut to the complex. Understanding decision-making is a major field of study, with intellectual roots in natural and social sciences. Importantly, although decisions are made by individuals cognitively (which is to say, through mental action), a more considered understanding of decision-making considers the ways that different levels of factors influence these cognitive processes; macro factors such as the economy, politics and the law and meso (intermediary) level factors, such as social networks, values, norms and media consumption, all play a part in the act of decision-making. Also, these factors change in their influence over time.

Agency: The ability to take action or to choose what action to take (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

Choice: Choice means the making of a decision between options; an act or the possibility of choosing. The Asylum seeker has different sets of choices, whether to leave, how to leave, and where to go and how to get there (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

Behavioural science: Behavioural science describes the study of human behaviour through the use of systematic experimentation and observation. Behavioural scientists study when and why individuals engage in specific

behaviours by experimentally examining the impact of factors such as conscious thoughts, motivation, social influences, contextual effects, and habits. Several disciplines fall under the broad label of behavioural science, including: Anthropology, Behavioural economics, Cognitive psychology, Consumer behaviour, Social psychology and Sociology.

Complexity: A concept used to describe a feature of a system in which many parts interact with each other in multiple ways, leading to the emergence of new properties. As such, complexity science is defined as "the study of the phenomena which emerge from a collection of interacting objects" (Johnson, 2009).

1.5 Limitations

The research for this study faced several limitations and challenges:

First, a key limitation has been not being able to interview asylum seekers as part of this research so the analysis here is based on second-hand accounts of the factors influencing asylum seeker decision-making (and in turn, a level of bias depending on the background, occupation and experience of the respondent in the asylum space).

Second, while existing quantitative data sets, such as those provided by the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford and the Home Office asylum data, are able to show patterns of migration to the UK, they are unlikely to reveal any insights into the decision-making behaviour of those coming to the UK to seek asylum.

Third, academic studies which include analysis of decision-making behaviour of those claiming asylum in the UK tend to be smaller-scale qualitative pieces which focus on a single country or region of origin or a single country of transit. This will largely be dependent on the location of the researchers' fieldwork and data collection and research interests. There is little qualitative (or quantitative) data which shows the migratory decision-making process of individual migrants from the point of departure in the country of origin, and which also tracks the decision-making process at different stages of the migratory process to arrival in the UK.

To address this gap in the literature, further research would need to be commissioned which would qualitatively explore the decision-making process at different stages of the journey with a) asylum- seeking migrants in the UK, and b) asylum-seeking migrants who may have considered the UK as a country of destination at some point on their journey, but who ultimately decided on another option or route.

1.6 Study outline

This study is divided into one substantive chapter and 3 framing chapters (Executive summary, Introduction and Conclusion). Chapter 3 is an analysis of the choice sets, factors or motivators, beliefs and expectations, and other key actors that have an influence on the decision-making process. It features a multidimensional decision-making model which serves both as a key outcome of this study and as a conceptual framework to understanding asylum seeker decision-making. The study ends with a conclusion and a set of recommendations to the Home Office.

2. Understanding asylum seeker decision-making

Building on the rapid evidence assessment (REA) and the key stakeholder interviews conducted for this research, this chapter examines the choice sets, factors or motivators, beliefs and expectations, and other key actors that have an influence on the decision-making process. The chapter then introduces a decision-making model that captures the micro, meso and macro motivators of asylum seeker decision-making and which should be used in conjunction with behavioural insight models (discussed in the following chapter) to account for complexity and emergence.

> **Key insights**
>
> 1. There is a diversity of factors or motivators that influence asylum seeker decision-making in choosing or ending in the UK. Those are individual, familial, political, national and international and idiosyncratic.
> 2. To understand asylum seeker decision-making, one must treat not only asylum seekers but also other involved stakeholders, as adaptive actors whose decisions are interconnected and shift at various stages throughout the journey.
> 3. Choices change across the migratory journey. Chance encounters and opportunities can often be crucial in redirecting destination preferences or reaffirming the targeted ones.
> 4. Asylum seeker perceptions (perception bias) of what awaits them in destination and transit countries significantly influence their decision-making, even if these perceptions do not correlate with reality.

5. Smugglers exploit the lack of legal opportunities available to asylum seekers and offer services at great cost. The profile of smugglers varies widely from one country to another.
6. Social networks, “the power of communities” and “word-of-mouth” influence asylum seeker decision-making. This includes selectivity (who does and does not migrate), timing and destination.
7. Causal links between specific migration policies and the flow of asylum seekers is heavily contested.
8. The availability of rights and refugee formal protection is an important determinant for whether asylum seekers continue their migration journey.

Drawing on the literature on decision-making theory (Usher et al., 2013; Beresford & Sloper, 2008), an asylum seeker’s decision-making process would broadly include 4 interconnected and interdependent key elements:

First, a choice set, which contains the feasible actions and alternatives available to the asylum seeker. These are distinct to each individual and depends on their capabilities and context. Alternatives should have some positive value which means that a ‘choice’ between something which is desired and something which is definitely not desired is not a true choice (Beresford & Sloper, 2008). As discussed below, in the case of asylum seekers, choices are often constrained at best or non-existent because of the contexts they are fleeing.

Second, a set of motivators or influencing factors, which are factors that affect the decision-maker and drive the individual actions. Individual asylum seekers are influenced not only by their own intrinsic motivation, but by the impact of their actions on peers as well as the latter’s effect on them in turn. Motivators, therefore, evolve and shift across the journey.

Third, beliefs and expectations, which define the extent of the knowledge of a decision-maker, as well as how information is processed. Information can be correct or incorrect and is not only subject to individual beliefs, but to public and peer information. Beliefs can be shaped through social interactions and those too can evolve and shift across the journey.

Fourth are other key actors. Asylum seekers do not operate in a social vacuum but are influenced and constrained by the actions and beliefs of others and hence, only act partially autonomously.

Asylum seekers are aware that their decisions are not taken in a static but adaptive environment. Consequently, they are adaptive decision-makers who interact with peers, other migrant, traffickers, and other stakeholders. In addition, the decision environment essentially depends on a dynamic

environment. An asylum seeker therefore revisits and potentially reverses earlier decisions.

The choice set, motivators, beliefs, and actors form a dynamic interdependent relationship throughout the journey.

2.1 Asylum seeker choice sets

At an abstract level, an asylum seeker has to make 4 different choices throughout their journey: Whether and when to migrate, country of destination, means and route. These choices are constrained (and sometime non-existent in situations of an active conflict for example) and they are not singular occurrences, but re-emerge and shift at different points throughout the journey[footnote 6].

Data collected for this study shows that asylum seekers come to the UK by choice (sometimes first or second choice) and by circumstance (such as protection needs). Evidence, however, suggests that circumstance trumps choice in asylum seeker decision-making and asylum seekers have limited control in selecting asylum destinations (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; McAuliffe and Koser, 2017). It is often the case that the country of destination is only roughly defined, and it is frequently driven by a decision-making process that satisfices and not maximises and therefore, does not lead to a singular result. The destination of choice may not be the best destination but one that is able to offer a viable future (Asylum seeker decision-making (ASDM) interviews, 2022). Simultaneously, those 4 choices are frequently either in part or collectively outside of the decision-making domain of the asylum seeker. Stakeholders, such as family, travel companions or traffickers (co-) determine these choices, or exercise coercion, either throughout its entirety or during certain stages of the journey (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessy, 2021; Czaika & Reinprecht, 2020; Smart et al., 2020; Cummings et al., 2015).

A majority of respondents interviewed for this study acknowledged that asylum seeker decision-making is unpredictable and does not follow linear thinking. Asylum seeker decision-making is context, time and individual-specific. Choices, therefore, change across the migratory journey. The following excerpts from interviews with civil society organizations that have a direct engagement with asylum seekers coming to the UK demonstrate the fluid nature of decision-making, acknowledging the range of factors which influence the decision-making process, which may be individual, familial, political, national and international.

> “I think some [asylum seekers] will have that final aim [the destination country]. Others will evolve as they make the journey as they begin to

> understand the costs and the benefits of where they find themselves."

> "I think that some asylum seekers leave with a clear sense that they want to come to the UK, but some also leave their homes not really knowing where they will go; they just want to go to a safe place."

> "[…] A lot of them said to me, particularly when people are making the journeys via lorry, that they didn't really have a concept - some of them were so young, they didn't really have a concept of where they would end up. It was literally like they would be told, this is how you get to Europe, but they didn't necessarily even choose the UK particularly. So I think it's a bit of a mixture in that some young people have a connection or a family member, or somebody here that they want to be close to, but for some other young people, I feel like it wasn't really necessarily in their hands about where they ended up."

> "[…] in many cases, the individual did not leave the country of origin with a specific goal to reach the UK, but that along the journey, they've been pushed into that decision."

This complex and fluid nature of decision-making was reiterated several times by our respondents. An academic respondent posited the infinite variety of circumstances asylum seekers find themselves in, along the migration journey, all of which are likely to influence decision-making. They also explained that even emotions have potential to influence the way migrants make decisions about their destinations:

> "[…] they change the trajectory because it means that different opportunities or options are open. They also change the trajectory because people might learn about other options. I also mentioned chance encounters before, so I think there's a few studies on that which do show that especially at these transit points, like intersections where people meet other migrants who have other pieces of information, or they might meet migration intermediaries including potentially smugglers. They do get new information and then that widens their choices and their opportunities. Also depending on how other people interpret or describe these different opportunities, they might change their mind too… Including feelings and emotions, and decisions that are taken when a migrant or a person is in an emotionally kind of hot state, compared to a cold state where they are maybe not currently emotional or stressed out about a certain issue, can look very different."

2.2 Key motivators (or factors)

Data collected for this study points out that there are 3 levels of motivators or factors that influence asylum seeker behaviour and decision-making across migratory journeys and those are micro, meso and macro-levels motivators.

At the micro level, we examine the smallest levels of interaction by the asylum seeker including the asylum seeker's own agency and cognitive and emotional readiness to undertake the journey. Analysis at this level remains under-researched and requires more micro data collected directly from asylum seekers themselves.

At the meso level, we examine interactions with and in-between groups. This includes key actors with whom the asylum seeker directly interacts, such as social networks, as well as smuggling and trafficking networks.

At the macro level, we examine broader social structures and institutions that influence asylum seeker decision-making. This includes broader state policies that seek to regulate and control the movement of people seeking asylum. This also includes political, environmental and socioeconomic drivers of mobility as well as health shocks and pandemics (such as COVID-19).

2.3 Micro-level motivators

2.3.1 Imagination, personality traits, emotions and values

Hagen Zanker & Hennessy (2021) explored, through conducting a literature review, characteristics at the most micro of levels (that is, what is inside of a person's mind), the way s/he sees the world and where s/he is located within it, his or her patterns of thought, feelings and behaviours, which shape and inform migrant decision-making. These are subjective and intangible, and include psychological, cognitive, emotional and behavioural factors, including the individual's personal and normative beliefs and value systems. The authors explained that current literature exploring the subjective and intangible factors which shape migration decision-making focuses on 4 areas, all of which contribute to migrant decision-making:

1. Imagination (the psychological processes people go through when thinking about migration, imagining and visualising themselves in a future time and place, p.10).

2. Personality traits (for example, curiosity, confidence in one's own abilities and extraversion, and other aspects of personality such as patience and adaptability, p.13) and attitudes to risk (tolerance or aversion).
3. Emotions (for example, joy, fear, anger or surprise) and feelings (individuals' subjective interpretations or meanings given to situations and sensations, p.17).
4. Beliefs and values (religious beliefs, moral values, political opinions or cultural traits, p.25).

With regards to imagination, they drew attention to the literature which shows that asylum seekers reflect on what other places would be like, both compared to staying and to other potential destinations. For example, Syrian asylum seekers and migrants regarded Germany as welcoming and having a 'good reputation' (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Mallett and Hagen-Zanker, 2018), whilst Finland is thought of as a safe country with human rights and a quick asylum process amongst Iraqi asylum seekers (Koikkalainen et al., 2020). Asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka perceived Australia to be a highly functioning society (McAuliffe and Jayasuriya, 2016). Colonial links to the UK among Sri Lankan and Somalians influenced their decision to claim asylum in the UK, due to perceptions of a strong historical bond and shared linguistic and cultural understanding (Robinson and Segrott, 2002).

Interviews conducted for this study highlight the centrality of an "imagined destination" to asylum seeker decision-making and the role played by social networks and diaspora communities in shaping an imagined (rather than real) version of seeking asylum in the UK. One civil society respondent who worked closely with asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean through Libya explained this as follows:

> "For one, even though they [diaspora] might be economically vulnerable wherever they live in Europe, they never show it back to their communities, because that would be interpreted as a sign of failure. So, they will always try to project this image of them making it there, living in much better conditions, trying to compensate maybe at the personal level for the fact that they do miss being home and they're missing being away from their communities. So, they always try to project this image of success, of living in relatively higher comfort, of having a higher purchasing power. I think they always talk about when their cousins or relatives come back to their home country maybe once, twice, maybe once a year, maybe once every two or three years, it's always an opportunity for them to get some kind of recognition for their success through their financial power, the economic power. So, they're there showing off their money, they're showing off that they put on their best clothes, and I think most of their cousins who remain in the country want a piece of that."

Research also points out that individual attitudes to risk, those are a strong predictor of migration. Bocquèho et al. (2018) found that risk tolerant asylum seekers were more likely to aspire to migrate and to actually migrate internally and internationally, and that experience of trauma influenced risk attitudes. Traumatized persons were, on the other hand, more likely to be risk averse, and more likely to renounce migration than others.

With regards to emotions, asylum seeker decision-making is emotionally charged. Emotions play a role in migrants continuing onwards on their journeys, even when things do not work out, and the social and economic costs are high. For example, Eritrean asylum seekers felt that their duty to move ahead became more compelling because of the accumulating emotional and social costs along the journey (Belloni, 2019). Research has also documented that guilt is an emotion central to key motivations in the migration process. (Baldassar, 2015), for example, noted that migrants may feel guilty because they have not been able to fulfil moral obligations of care to left behind family members. This guilt might influence their decisions to return. Conversely, migrants can feel shame and guilt when returning to their countries, particularly after a failed migration experience. These emotions may prompt them to re-migrate (Constable, 2014).

2.4 Meso-Level motivators

2.4.1 Social networks

Social networks have historically been shown to be a key factor affecting asylum seeker decision-making, with a role in influencing migration choices at every stage: from migrant selectivity (who does and does not migrate), timing and destination (Koser and Pinkerton, 2002). For example, Angolan asylum seekers travelled to the Netherlands in large numbers at the end of the 1990s not because of language, political or historical ties but attracted by an enlarging social network effect and the perceptions this fuelled (van Wijk, 2010). Similarly, Day and White (2003) and Crawley (2010) argued that pre-existing family connections remained important for refugees in the UK in spite of the shifting global geographies of movement. On the other hand, Spinks (2013) intimated that there may be a desire on the part of asylum seekers to break with the cultural norms and traditions of their country, or that there may be a fear of continued persecution in a destination country where a large immigrant community from the country of origin existed.

The role of information shared from relatives and other members of asylum seeker’s social network has often been referred to as the crucial element that lowers costs for prospective migrants. A civil society respondent explained that, for asylum seekers “the information that they’re searching for is just because they do want to lead a better life and have access to better opportunities for their lives.” Networks can, in fact, provide details on issues

such as transport arrangements, entry requirements, asylum procedures and social welfare benefits, as well as the detention and deportation policies of different destinations (Crawley, 2010). They can also aid in sourcing formal or informal employment opportunities and with subsistence until such opportunities are secured (Crisp, 1999; Neumayer, 2004). Crisp (1999) noted in addition that migrant networks provide means of mobilising the financial resources required for a person to undertake their migratory journey in the first place. A civil society respondent was of the view that:

> "the people that I know don't come through a trafficker or a third party like that; it's usually because they've heard from friends, they know someone in the country or they come on their own choice always… maybe they've done research online and they've spoken to - there's a group of people of certain nationalities living in the UK. They ask questions there and they find out that there are - what of support there is there, or what's the process like."

However, several instances are reported in the literature where information facilitated by social networks is either extremely limited or unreliable and even generated false expectations; with a frequent bias towards inflating positive achievements and experiences on the part of those who have settled in the destinations (Ghosh, 1998; Robinson and Segrott, 2002; Gilbert and Koser, 2006; Crawley, 2010). Relying on a sample of 87 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Colombia, Kosovo and Somalia, Gilbert and Koser (2006) provided empirical evidence on this and find that the majority of their respondents knew very little prior to choosing a destination - when their destination had not been chosen for them. Many had in fact surprisingly few friends or family members already in the UK, in some cases, they had been provided with false or misleading information by either their social networks or by trafficking agents. Brekke & Brochmann (2014) reported that stories from refugees who had successfully reapplied for asylum in second European countries 'played a key role in keeping the dreams of a prosperous future alive'. However, they also noted that some already-established migrants may feel a pressure to report positively on their new life, possibly encouraging others to make the move (p. 155) (see also Fiedler, 2020, below).

Similarly, information relayed to asylum seekers by their social networks in the UK may be inaccurate because social networks did not want to convey that they found life in the UK difficult. Civil society respondents pointed out how asylum seekers try to portray themselves as living in much better conditions than they actually are so as not to come across as having failed in the eyes of their families.

Conversely, social networks can also discourage the decision to migrate (Timmerman et al., 2014). Declining economic conditions, more restrictive immigration policies and hostile public opinion towards immigration all have

an impact on the nature of information shared across diaspora communities. Koser and Pinkerton (2002) found that information received from social networks was more valuable and trusted by migrants than information from other sources. They also found that such connections were established prior to a migrant leaving the country of origin and influenced the choice of destination in the early stages of the migration.

Yet, upon arrival, relationships with social networks may break down, creating even more uncertainty for the asylum seeker. A civil society respondent stated that:

> "[…] what we often find is that people will come here to be with a family member. Then because the circumstances of the family member is so precarious, that the relationship will break down, so the person will end up homeless again, or without a place to be, or living in very overcrowded and difficult circumstances … So the reality is, it's much more complex than the pull or push. Actually, you might have a superficial pull which the media talks about, oh, people come here because of family, because of the wealth, because of this, that or the other, but the reality is very different, I would say."

For some, the decision to come to the UK was largely opportunistic and motivated by the fact that it was possible to obtain travel documents or make use of an existing visa. In many cases, migrants have little or no knowledge of the UK. In some cases, asylum seekers may prefer a country in which they have few social networks or political ties[footnote 7].

Finally, the role played by social networks has often been analysed alongside that of trafficking networks or agents. It is argued that the latter may, in fact, be an effective substitute for social networks (see Collyer, 2005; Crawley, 2010). Spinks (2013) contended, however, that this may not be universally true. The evidence continues to suggest that social networks retained more importance than agents, at least in regard to the choice of destination (van Wijk, 2010). Crisp (1999) posited that established transnational social networks, aided by new transport and communications technologies, have greatly facilitated a considerable number of asylum seekers' journeys. This has led governments to introduce ever more strict measures to stem migratory flows, with the effect of encouraging potential asylum seekers and refugees to procure the services of traffickers, thus empowering these types of networks.

> **The influence of social media**
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> With the evolution of information technology, asylum seekers and agents have turned to online sources, particularly social media, for information about migratory routes. Social media offers a platform for migrants and

> asylum seekers to gather information beyond the traditional boundaries of their acquaintances. Facebook, for example, is used frequently to search for detailed information, even about potential agents. Agents themselves have also become pro-active in their search for clients and are increasingly inventive in providing information about their activities and services they offer. For example, Diba et. al (2019) illustrated how smuggling networks were increasingly embracing social media platforms in actively advertising their services to migrants. They drew attention to Facebook as a starting point for conversations between intending migrants and smugglers which then moved to WhatsApp or Viber for more detailed interactions and transactions.

2.4.2 Agents and smuggling networks

Agents, an umbrella term usually used to refer to smugglers and sometimes also to traffickers, have been widely recognised as an increasingly under-studied element in understanding migratory decision-making (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). Internal Home Office assessment suggests that over 90% of irregular migrants coming to the EU are facilitated by agents, and concluded that “it is almost certain that most migrants who cross the Channel by small boats are facilitated by Organized Criminal Groups (OCGs)” (Home Office, 2021a). Data collected for this study has confirmed the central role played by agents in enabling and facilitating the movement of people for asylum. This includes acting as: marketeers of certain destinations, facilitators of movement and sometimes even as decision-makers themselves in terms of choice of destination.

The profile of agents varies significantly from one context to another. Luigi Achilli (2016) challenged the view of migrants as exploited victims and smugglers as criminals driven solely by profit. In fact, smuggling attracted a good reputation among many migrant communities and a strong bond can exist between smugglers and migrants. Smugglers perceived themselves as service-providers filling gaps that cannot be met via legal channels, while migrants viewed them as philanthropists or even ordinary people engaging in entrepreneurialism. Achilli (2016) argued that trust and cooperation between smugglers and migrants appeared to be the rule rather than the exception, evidenced by deep social ties between the 2 groups. In their study, Hovel and Odtte (2017) showed that, such was the faith and trust they placed in smugglers, asylum seekers even described smugglers as “honest” smugglers or that they “helped” migrants. This outlook was confirmed by one of the respondents from the Home Office

> “[…] and you also have to accept, in some communities, these people are seen as helpful. They’re only demonised by us. If you’re a person travelling from a war-torn country and these people are saying they can help you, they’re helpful to you, aren’t they? It’s only us that sees them

> as criminals. In some countries, they're seen as good businessmen or helpful."

The business model for agents can be quite sophisticated and lucrative. As one Home Office respondent pointed out:

> "You're looking at supply chains all the way back to China, to actually purchasing the boats, boats being delivered, they get delivered to another country, then they get moved from that country to another country. Then they get purchased by crime groups who then bring them to launch sites and away you go. It's a huge logistical operation, in regards to, those sort of things. Lorries and HGVs is very, very different. You have drivers on payroll, certainly in, I think all over Europe, to be honest. Then you have opportunistic agents and OCGs who will utilise HGVs, lorries, where the driver is unaware. […] You eliminate one part of an OCG, there's always someone else there to take the place. You take out, say, an agent who's putting people in boats in northern France, within 2 weeks someone else will have taken his place. They're very adaptable."

As marketeers, agents can exploit the need of asylum seekers for a better life by crafting a compelling story about life in a destination country. In reality, however, travelling to the destination may well serve the interests of the agent. As described by a Civil Society respondent:

> "[…] they're [asylum seekers] told this information by the handler, the agent, the smuggler, who has an interest in making whichever country is most expeditious for them to take the asylum seeker to, as attractive as possible. Then that can lead to this gap between actually the reality, and the somewhat distorted perspective of the individual, a distortion perhaps instigated by their handler, that gives them a rosier picture than what, in fact, obtains in the country."

Home Office and civil society respondents highlighted the exploitative nature of the engagement between agents and asylum seekers. One civil society respondent pointed out that:

> "[…] This is their business. This is their bread and butter, basically, so it's always in their interest to paint this very beautiful picture of… They share stories always, 'Oh, I helped this guy. […]. Look at him now. He's in Paris. He's just bought an apartment.' There is always this storytelling about these very successful stories that took place, and people making

> it there, so I would assume that trying to preserve their interests will be about incentivising people."

Smugglers exploit the lack of legal opportunities available to asylum seekers and offer services at great cost to the asylum seekers. A civil society respondent relayed that few asylum seekers have financial resources, or can plan in advance, or have the means to research which country would suit them best.

> "For the majority of other people, if you are a group of Iranians or Afghans or Kurds coming and going to Turkey, and an agent, you pay some ransom to an agent, they took you to a room in Ankara or Istanbul, they keep you there. Once they move you out, although they promised everyone, 'We are going to take you to England', they dump you in Paris. They dump you in Bonn. They take you to Italy. Because you are vulnerable and helpless, they can dump you anywhere they want."

> **Trafficking in the UK**
>
> According to the Palermo Protocol, human trafficking is defined as "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs." Home Office, academic and civil society respondents distinguished between being trafficked for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation and being smuggled, which involves the provision of a service to an individual who is seeking to gain illegal entry into a foreign country. They emphasised that the 2 should not be conflated, they pose separate challenges and require different responses.
>
> It is difficult to determine the number of people being trafficked in the UK. Home Office data shows, however, that the number of referrals for the period April to June 2022 was 4,171 (NRM, 2022). This is the highest number recorded since the national referral mechanism (NRM) was introduced in 2009. Civil society organizations expect the real number to be much higher.

As facilitators of movement, agents facilitate and enable the movement of people across borders via a complex network of other agents. Respondents have also pointed out that finding an agent is not difficult. As one civil society respondent pointed out:

> "I don't think it's difficult to identify them, because it's easy to reach them for refugees. If I am a refugee living in Turkey and I want to go to

> Europe, the first question is not, ‘How can I find a smuggler?’, the first question is, ‘How can I find the money to pay the smuggler?’ Finding the smuggler is just like one phone call away and you can find them.”

In a study conducted to explore why the UK is a preferred choice of asylum seekers, Robinson and Segrott (2002) posited that asylum seekers choosing not to use an agent were usually left with limited migration choices. Those who made use of the services of agents were offered a range of possible destination countries. The options presented to intending migrants by the agent were often dependent on several factors pertinent to the latter. These factors include the ease with which the agent thinks they can get the intending migrant into a given country, the rate of demand for a certain destination country, profitability of that destination, the agent’s connection to migration networks who can assist with providing intelligence, facilities, and the personnel required to help with illegal entry. An academic respondent drew attention to the fact that smugglers change their business model as a way of engaging intending migrants:

> “From the Horn of Africa now there’s been a shift in the way that the smugglers work, so that whereas 5 or 6 years ago you would have to have all of the money up front to travel, and therefore the decision was made collectively by the whole family, the smugglers now have a system where you can travel now and pay later.”

Agents can influence the choice of destination, at times, even making unilateral decisions as to what they are. Respondents from the Home Office who had a direct role in engaging with asylum seekers mentioned that “it seemed that agents made decisions regarding destination for asylum seekers.” An academic respondent pointed out that the evidence shows that

> “[…] it is not unusual, which is that in many cases, the individual did not leave the country of origin with a specific goal to reach the UK, but that along the journey, they’ve been pushed into that decision. Persuaded, pushed, in some cases, in effect, the decision made for them. That would be made from third parties, like the agent, like their handler, the smugglers that they’re paying. In some cases, there is clear evidence that their agency is fairly minimal in actually selecting the UK as a specific destination country. In effect, the decision was made for them.”

2.4.3 The information ecosystem

Asylum seekers resort to several communication channels to access information[footnote 8] and this has an impact on their decision-making in terms of migratory route and other resources they would draw on during their journey and upon arrival to their destination. This study has found 3 key channels that define the information ecosystem within which asylum

seekers operate. The first channel is social media and the internet (Dekker & Engbersen, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2018)[footnote 9]. The second channel is social networks or “word of mouth” (addressed previously in this section), and this includes friends and family in source countries (ASDM Interviews, 2022) and those who have already migrated (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002), diaspora community groups (Mayblin & James, 2016) as well as smugglers and agents (Campana & Gelsthorpe, 2021). Finally, the third channel is official governmental campaigns (Browne, 2015)[footnote 10].

Social media acts as a ‘rich source of unofficial insider knowledge on migration’ (Dekker and Engbersen, 2012, cited in Cummings et al., 2015). Brekke and Beyer (2019) found that their study respondents (migrants in transit living in Khartoum, Sudan), had regular access to the internet. Almost all had smartphones with data packages. Those who did not have smartphones could access the internet regularly via internet cafes. They had profiles on multiple social media platforms; the most common platforms were Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber. The end-to-end encryption of WhatsApp communications meant this was the preferred service for most respondents. Respondents actively used social media to discuss migration-related issues. Their social media networks primarily consisted of friends, family, and the wider community. Information shared through these networks on social media were heavily relied upon as it is shared by trusted individuals.

Similarly, Dekker et. al (2018) posited that the majority of Syrian migrants in their study could access social media information both before and during migration through smartphones. However, they suggested that the use of smartphones is restricted, particularly during the migratory journey, due to fear of government surveillance or tracking. Syrian migrants preferred social media information that originated from existing social ties and information that was based on personal experiences. This information was considered more trustworthy and was put through filters, such as social networks, to verify its validity.

Information seen through social media, or the internet more broadly, can influence migratory decisions. Yet social media can convey false information. Fiedler (2020)’s research with 132 migrants found that they believed communication technologies facilitated the transfer of information across countries and allowed individuals to research any aspect of a country. However, the migrants also conceded that such information, even from trusted individuals, may not be true. Information on social media about the journey or living conditions upon arrival, may not be reliable. Migrants themselves suggested that those who had already migrated may feel pressure to prove they were not suffering by pretending that they were in a different country or that they were not living in refugee camps by sharing false images (Fiedler, 2020). This was also the view of our respondents. A civil society respondent held that

> “[…] social media is hugely powerful for young people and diaspora groups, newly arrived people love to share images of themselves standing in front of fancy cars and fancy buildings, of course, because they want their family not to worry about them and to be proud of all the… despite the expense and the hardship of trying to get to the place, that they’re doing all right.”

Respondents also pointed out that it is difficult to verify information because much of it appeals to people’s imagination and needs. One civil society respondent reflected on the impact of social media on Iraqi and Syrian asylum seekers and described how deciding on a destination is an outcome of “years of endless waithood in camps” and the prospect of a “better life elsewhere, anywhere” and that it is very much like “the American dream where anything is possible somewhere else.” Another civil society respondent from Libya emphasized the draw of a “better life” saying:

> “I just want to add a small detail, is that you come across a lot of information on social media that’s not correct. You have for example, they tell you, ‘This year, the French government will legalise 650,000 migrants working in the tourism industry, so if you’re there and you have some kind of experience working in the hotel industry, then go. You come and you will get your paperwork sorted for you.” yet such information may be in abundance. I know in the case of Tunisia, there are lots of local pages which are known to be portraying a very positive aspect of migration, about living abroad and trying to connect communities to help each other, especially from the working class.”

Home Office and non-governmental organisation (NGO) respondents caution that smugglers use social media to influence those seeking asylum, “We know that a lot of smugglers operate through social media.” One Home Office respondent explained that social media was “the biggest advertising for organised crime… they will advertise openly on sites, and also then you’ll approach them on your initial introduction, say, ‘Hey, I’d like to go to the UK’. ‘Right, okay my friend. Here’s my WhatsApp number, let’s discuss it in private messaging, encrypted’.”

Perceptions play an important role in asylum seeker decision-making and social media can contribute to shaping positive perception of a life elsewhere even if those do not correlate with reality. Robinson and Segrott (2002) and Zetter et al. (2003) argued that what migrants thought about host countries’ socio-economic and political environments and their migratory policies matter greatly. In fact, asylum seekers’ perceptions of migration policies as well as of living conditions in targeted destinations are often different to reality, but nevertheless just as, if not more, important to their decision-making; with the implication that prevailing legislations are

often not known or are misunderstood (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019 and Zetter et al. 2003).

An NGO respondent explained how asylum seekers make decisions to come to the UK based on an “idea.”

> “Whether this new policy that was introduced by the UK Government to send back migrants to Rwanda is a deterrent, I don’t think so. It’s very awkward to put this, but a lot of the people are under the assumption that because the UK is a country where civil and human rights are respected, there is always a way to fight a decision from government in local courts and that a human right or humanitarian justification will be found to support their case to stay in the UK.”

Townsend and Oomen (2015) noted that although policymakers tended to think of asylum seekers’ decision-making as informed by poor or insufficient information - in particular with regards to the dangers of maritime crossings - this is often not the case. They posited, in fact, that migrants were well-attuned to the risks and threats they stand to face but attached different importance to challenges, following a logic which is different to that predicted or expected by policymakers. For example, threats to the goal of long-term settlement may be accorded a greater weight than the risk to immediate safety. More insight is needed into the decision-making (at each step of the process) of those who undertake such journeys, especially how information is conveyed, and the effect on migrants’ decision-making process (p.6).

Civil society respondents suggested that the most difficult decision an asylum seeker has to make, is whether or not to leave their countries. Once this decision is made, whether or not they can access information about destination countries becomes a secondary consideration.

> “Whatever you can tell them, and the people who are taking all these risks is because of the difficulties they have in their countries of origin. Maybe the civil war or other difficulties, persecution. I think the decision they have already made to take this very, a tough difficulty, at some point that you travel with the boats and sink in the ocean. Any information after that I think won’t really make a big difference. That’s my feeling.”

Information campaigns targeted at (potential) migrants or asylum seekers in their home countries are one avenue through which governments and organisations aim to influence migrant decision-making. Campaigns generally include information about the procedural aspects of immigration and/or asylum, including removal and deportation procedures, and the risks

of irregular movement such as being smuggled or trafficked (Oeppen, 2016). Information campaigns have been launched by a number of different bodies including governments, the International Organization for Migration, EU institutions (Trauner et al., 2022), and the UNHCR (Scheel and Ratfisch, 2014). The UK has run information campaigns in Vietnam, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Punjab, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, although there is little information available about the contents of these campaigns (Weisz, 2018). Weisz (2018) reported that their use by the UK has not been as extensive as EU member states.

Campaigns can take a number of forms including face-to-face conversations; theatre performances, workshops, concerts, and roadshows; print media; cinema, TV, and radio shows; and more recently social media including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter (Trauner et al., 2022). Brekke and Beyer (2019) argued that social media platforms are well-suited to information campaigns as different formats of information, including written information, audio, graphics, and videos, can be shared and forwarded. Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud (2020, cited in Trauner et al., 2022) noted that running information campaigns using social media is practical and inexpensive. Information campaigns often rely on partnerships between a wide range of actors such as governments in the sending and receiving countries, NGOs, migrant returnees, and educational institutions (Pécoud, 2010, cited in Trauner et al., 2022), including collaboration between the EU and individual EU member states (European Migratory Network, 2019, cited in Trauner et al., 2022).

There is limited evidence regarding the impact of information campaigns on migratory decision-making. Tjaden et al. (2018) reported that “the use of information campaigns has far outpaced any rigorous assessment of the effects” (Tjaden et al., 2018: 6), with much policy debate relying on anecdotal evidence. They also noted that such campaigns often lack a defined aim or target population, hindering robust evaluations of their impacts. Similarly, Browne (2015) argued that available evaluations struggled to show causality between the campaigns and numbers of migrants arriving in the country (European Migration Network, 2012, cited by Browne, 2015). Previous evaluations of campaigns across various countries concluded that their impact was “at best neutral” (p. 4). Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud (2020) drew attention to the lack of effective evaluation tools to measure the impact of information campaigns.

Government in Norway prioritises ‘transparency, correctness, comprehensiveness and dialogue as key values’ in communication practices and strategies, including information campaigns. The latter should follow the main principles of government communication, but should additionally be based on careful research and evaluation and preferably rely on contact with target groups in their design (p.48). Furthermore, the literature anecdotally suggests information campaigns have very limited effect, with other factors such as poverty, inequality, conflict, and economic opportunity having a much stronger influence on decisions to migrate

(Browne, 2015). This was also confirmed in our interviews where asylum seekers' distrust of governments was repeatedly mentioned as one reason why information campaigns are not taken seriously (ASDM Interviews, 2022).

Weisz (2018) similarly suggested it was difficult to measure the impact of information campaigns but that it seemed to be limited. For example, one respondent reported that their only knowledge of the UK prior to arrival was lessons from school and that only richer individuals could access comprehensive information, suggesting information campaigns are not reaching all audiences. Similarly, whilst information campaigns have been launched by the European Union (Townsend and Oomen, 2015), they have achieved little in conjunction with stricter asylum policies or visa regimes. To begin with, stricter asylum policies or visa regimes may have the unintended consequence of shifting the responsibility on carriers to vet travellers, forcing asylum seekers to use unofficial routes (Gilbert and Koser, 2006). This meant asylum seekers will turn to agents or smugglers who, in fact, tend to inform them least about their journeys' arrangements or about the policies they face in the destination countries, yet often determine the final destinations.

Information campaigns can be ineffective for many reasons. They do not necessarily succeed in transmitting messages to deter potential migrants or asylum seekers. Browne (2015), in reviewing the literature on the impact of information campaigns, stated that dissemination was often very difficult, with the consequence that information does not always reach the intended individuals. A number of other practical issues, such as a lack of translation, illiteracy rates in target countries, and an inability to access the information may prevent their effective dissemination. For example, Spinks (2013) reported that potential asylum seekers often lack access to information sources which are taken for granted in developed countries, such as television, radio and internet. Instead, whatever they know is largely derived from word of mouth and such information can be vague, lacking in detail, or simply incorrect. Additionally, Browne (2015) noted that asylum and immigration policies and procedures were often updated regularly, meaning information campaigns quickly became outdated.

Finally, Spinks (2013) emphasised that, even where government-sponsored deterrence campaigns reached their target audience, they may be ignored or disbelieved. Multiple studies have shown that asylum seekers and refugees do not trust governments. This lack of trust in formal institutions is exacerbated in cases where asylum seekers had been forced to flee their home countries because of fear of persecution. Where migrants do not trust information provided by governments or international organisations, information campaigns have limited impact (Brown, 2015). It may be more effective for governments to disseminate information to asylum seekers by tapping into social networks wherever possible, for example by utilising migrant and refugee community organisations (Richardson, 2010).

2.5 Macro-level motivators

2.5.1 Political, historical, environmental and socioeconomic motivators

Political conflicts, including civil wars, insurgencies, sectarian violence, and ethno-religious violence, can drive displacement and need for asylum. In the Middle East and North Africa, conflicts between 2010 and 2019 have caused 2.9 million new displacements a year on average with internally displaced people now accounting for nearly 3% of the region's population, the equivalent of the population of the cities of Amman, Beirut, Damascus, Dubaï and Tunis combined. IDMC Director Alexandra Bilak holds that of the region's 7.8 million refugees and asylum seekers, a large percentage had been internally displaced for a significant period of time before deciding to seek safety and stability elsewhere (IDMC, 2021).

> **Escaping conflict: The case of Libya**
>
> Low and middle-income countries host the majority of the world's refugees. Most interviewees for a study by the Overseas Development Institute on displacement of Libyans following the 2011 uprisings, explained that they had deliberately chosen Tunisia, and particularly Tunis, due to its proximity to Libya and because the Tunisian government has a visa-free entry policy for Libyans. Additionally, "Tunisia's more stable security environment, relatively liberal social environment and family and cultural ties" were mentioned as having influenced their decision-making.
>
> See: El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, Sherine et al. (2019) "Protection of displaced Libyans: Risks, responses and border dynamics." ODI Working Paper.

Historical motivators include pre-existing cultural influences and ties, such as educational content or language, as well as physical infrastructural ties, such as the existence of direct flight connections between countries, inevitably make it easier for migrants' preferences to be set towards specific countries to which theirs is linked by past colonial relations (Massey, 1998; Hooghe et al., 2008). This is effectively linked to an increased chance of successful integration that the existence of cultural ties at the micro-individual level implies for migrants (van Amersfoort and van Niekerk, 2006). It follows that trying to understand the current patterns of transcontinental migration, especially in the Global North, without contextualising them within the colonial relationships of the past, is to attempt a reconstruction of the present that is a-historical and at best incomplete (Hansen and Jonsson,

2011; Mayblin and Turner, 2020). According to Mayblin and Turner (2020), modern day migration policy cannot be effectively shaped without engaging fully with the colonial legacies of the past and incorporating them into the understanding and tools used for migration governance.

Environmental motivators influence migration dynamics. Climate change poses risks to income for rural households in many developing countries. It is likely that diversification through internal migration will increase in importance as a risk management strategy (Waldinger, 2015). It can also drive people to seek asylum in other countries. In the Middle East and North Africa region, for example, sudden and slow-onset disasters have triggered 1.5 million new internal displacements across the region over in the last decade, a significant percentage of which would seek to find safety in more stable countries (IDMC, 2021). The Global Compact on Refugees, affirmed by an overwhelming majority in the UN General Assembly in December 2018, recognizes that “climate, environmental degradation and disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements” (UNHCR, 2018). It is important to note, however, the evidence on climate-induced/ environmental population movement is largely contested because the focus tends to be on extreme events and not the harder to track, slower changes resulting from climate variability or environmental degradation (Teye, 2017). Peters at al. (2021) argued, however, that if international climate mitigation and adaptation efforts are not strengthened, “climate change will continue to accelerate and could become a stronger factor in displacement and migration in contexts where people are already highly vulnerable” (Peters et al., 2021: 2).

Social factors also play an important role in driving the movement of people for asylum. Individuals who live in countries where there is a criminalisation of the LGBTQ demographic are more likely to want to escape such conditions to move to settings where they can live without persecution. In 72 countries, same-sex relationships are criminalized and in 8 of those, are punishable by death (WEF, 2018). The same holds for religious minorities, who in certain parts of the world, face daily threats to their existence. In such cases, a preference is usually expressed towards Western countries with long traditions of secularism and multiculturalism, where there are strong legislations to protect the rights of all minority groups and freedom of religious belief.

Social factors intersect with economic opportunities. As explained earlier, social networks can act as providers of information and facilitators of the movement of people for asylum and this can also include facilitating economic opportunities for them once they have arrived to destination countries. Interviews conducted with civil society respondents from the Middle East and North Africa pointed out that the existence of a black market in Britain meant that asylum seekers are able to work until their asylum applications are processed. Respondents also mentioned that there was a perception that the size of black markets in other European countries can be smaller and that this has made Britain a draw to asylum seekers.

LGBTQ+ rights to protection

The UN Geneva Convention stipulates that sexual orientation and gender identity constitute solid grounds to claim refugee status. A 2011 EU Directive also specifies that sexual orientation is one of the categories – together with race, religion and nationality – for which people might be at risk of persecution.

In 2020, there were 1,012 asylum applications lodged in the UK where sexual orientation formed part of the basis for the claim (LGB asylum applications), representing 3% of all asylum applications (Home Office, 2021b).

2.5.2 State asylum policies and border control

To respond to the increase in irregular migration, destination states have strengthened border control and their immigration policies. The enduring assumption in public policy debates is that restrictive migration and asylum policies and strengthening border controls (air, sea and land) significantly impact asylum seeker decision-making, particularly where deterring irregular migration is concerned. The European Union's agreement with Turkey in 2016, Australia's deterrence and offshore process policies since 2001 and the UK's recent Nationality and Borders Act 2022, are all examples of border strengthening through policy, legislation and surveillance to influence asylum seeker decision-making and reduce irregular migration (Missbach, 2019; Gray Meral, 2016).[footnote 11] Existing evidence, however, indicates the correlation between state policies and strengthening border control on the one hand, and asylum seeker decision-making on the other, is highly disputed if not denied. Research has found that tightening migratio policies is ineffective given the complexity of people's choices to migrate (ASDM Interviews, 2022; Crawley & Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Cummings et al., 2015). Restrictive visa and asylum policies can have deflection effects, pushing asylum seekers who have no access to legal/regular channels of asylum into irregular channels. Moreover, while tougher border controls can reduce entry to asylum seekers, they can also result in the rerouting of asylum seekers to other destinations or via other routes (ASDM Interviews, 2022).

Impact of state policies on asylum seeker decision-making

In a study that drew on in-depth interviews with 250 Syrians, Eritreans and Nigerians and which examined the destination preferences of those crossing the Mediterranean in 2015 and the extent to which they were aware of, or influenced by, policies intended to control and manage their arrival, the evidence showed that preferred destinations are rarely based on the migration policies devised by different governments.

> See: Crawley, Heaven & Hagen-Zanker, Jessica. (2018). “Deciding Where to go: Policies, People and Perceptions Shaping Destination Preferences.” International Migration.

This was also confirmed in interviews with the Home Office where this “rerouting” of asylum seekers was pointed out. One Home Office respondent referred to the impact of using juxtaposed controls whereby border controls on certain cross-Channel routes would take place before boarding the train or ferry, rather than upon arrival after disembarkation. Those controls were designed to detect and stop illegal migration. The Sangatte Protocol referred to below was signed between France and the UK in 1991 to provide border checkpoints to be set up by France at the Eurotunnel Folkestone Terminal in Cheriton, Kent and for border checkpoints to be set up by the UK at the Eurotunnel Calais Terminal in Coquelles, France. The respondent pointed out the following:

> “[…] once we’d signed the Sangatte treaty, and that set up the juxtaposed controls, that did reduce - it filtered people into a legal route. It also did put up fences, which is the second half of that question, which appears to have stopped people taking that route. It hasn’t stopped them coming. That’s the difference between that legalistic means of stopping people and physical means of stopping people. I think physical means, in my experience, tends to displace people. It doesn’t stop them from coming.”

By contrast, the availability of rights and refugee protection is an important determinant for asylum seeker decision-making. Where countries are not members of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, asylum seekers may be left without legal protection. Spinks (2013) noted that this was the case for those countries neighbouring refugee-producing countries, leaving asylum seekers at risk of refoulement. In her study, Afghan and Iraqi refugees cited a lack of a legal framework providing protection in the country of first asylum as a reason for moving to Australia. This also accounted for the movement of Somali asylum seekers towards Europe (Spinks, 2013).

2.5.3 Secondary migration

Another contextual factor for seeking asylum in the UK is the possibility of secondary migration from other countries in Europe or other destination countries[footnote 12]. International law does not prohibit onward migration by asylum seekers. Once asylum seekers reach a country, the literature reports various factors which influence whether they decide to settle in that country or migrate onwards. The reasons for moving onward are multifaceted (ASDM Interviews, 2022; Crawley, Düvell, Jones, McMahon & Sigona, 2017; Cummings et al, 2015; Kuschminder, de Bresser & Siegal, 2015).

Asylum policies in transit countries can be a key factor. This includes systems for processing asylum applications and border security measures. Asylum seekers may avoid entering certain countries for transit purposes (if they had planned another country as their destination which is not always the case), especially if these countries increased the numbers of police patrols and surveillance measures, if they adopted push-back policies, or if they themselves became areas of conflict such as the case of Libya (Kuschminder, de Bresser and Siegal, 2015).

> **Refugee experiences in "transit" countries**
>
> There are several illustrative examples of why and how the UK can be a secondary asylum destination.
>
> In Greece, Kurdish refugees struggled to survive whilst trying to obtain refugee status, eventually giving up and moved on to the UK (Jordan and Düvell, 2002).
>
> Congolese refugees, asylum seekers, and rejected asylum seekers living in the Republic of Korea left South Korea due to limited rights granted to them and the lack of financial support from the government (Kwon, 2013).
>
> Libya has traditionally attracted migrants to its labour market. However, when the security situation deteriorated in Libya, many migrants felt they had no choice other than to move on (Crawley, et al, 2017).

Respondents from civil society organizations emphasized that it is not always the case that asylum seekers are familiar with policies of destination countries at all, or how policies of one country compared to others.

> "Policy, as a pull factor or as a repressive factor, there wasn't that much knowledge of that. Still less comparative knowledge of how the UK compares with other countries that they might have ended up in or desired to move to."

Other respondents from civil society organizations highlighted that asylum seekers do not always make rational or calculated choices. One respondent stated the following:

> "You don't think logically, so you're not going to sit down and have these political discussions, or read the newspaper, or read on social media about the British government's border policy. That's not the space you'll be in when you're living in a camp."

While differences in asylum policies do not necessarily influence asylum seeker decision-making, there is evidence that differences in the asylum reception system, support for social integration and the comprehensiveness of welfare regimes all influenced asylum seekers' decisions as to whether to stay or move onwards (Munteanu, 2007; Molodikova, 2014; Brekke and Brochman, 2014). Allsopp (2017)'s study of unaccompanied minors arriving in UK highlighted its welfare state as influential in encouraging onward migration from Italy, where there was heavier dependence on familial and church support networks. The ability to access welfare meant that there was less pressure to enter the labour market, and consequently, less risk of exploitation. More recently, Balcilar and Nugent (2019), in analysing 4,433 household responses from Syrian refugees in Turkey, concluded that the availability of good quality services (for example, housing provision in towns or cities, healthcare, security services), led to refugees being significantly less likely to migrate onwards. The range of support a country can offer is an important consideration for whether migrants settle in that country. A Home Office respondent suggested that migrants would likely not travel to the UK if they could access support elsewhere:

> "So in order for that to happen [migrants not travelling to the UK] we'd have to be looking at a situation where a European country on the route to the UK offers a significantly more generous package to asylum seekers and refugees than we in the UK do."

Onward migration may be necessary due to a lack of social, economic, or legal opportunities in the first country (Cummings et al, 2015; Kirişci and Kolasin, 2019). Asylum seekers may contend with poor living conditions or unrealised ambitions in the first country (Düvell, 2014, cited in Koser and Kuschminder, 2016). Zimmerman (2009) reported that Somali refugees chose to continue their journey where they believed they could attain a greater quality of life, not just immediate safety. The study argued that 'safety was not all that they [refugees] sought because it was not all that they had lost'. Koser and Kuschminder (2016) surveyed 1,056 Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Pakistani, and Syrian migrants living in Greece and Turkey. In Greece 58% of respondents assessed their current living situation as bad or very bad. This number was lower in Turkey at 46% (see also Kuschminder, de Bresser and Siegal, 2015 and Kuschminder and Waidler, 2020).

The availability of employment was identified in the literature as a key factor affecting asylum seekers' plans to migrate onwards or remain in a country. This was found to be the case in Turkey as Afghan, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees did not have the right to work (Koser and Kuschminder, 2016). Koser and Kuschminder (2016) found that that 63% of those who hoped to leave Turkey reported that not being able to find a job had contributed to this, with those who were unemployed significantly more likely to want to migrate onwards compared to those with employment (Koser and Kuschminder, 2016). Those living in Turkey with temporary protection can

apply for a work permit. However, these are required to be renewed annually through a complicated and expensive application process, worsening their employment prospects (Kouider, 2021). Alhousari (2020), however, reported conflicting studies on the impact of employment opportunities in a particular country on migrants' decision to gain entry into that country; some studies 'underline[d] the perception that somewhere is a good country due to the existence of work opportunities simultaneously with freedom and human rights' whilst others highlighted that knowledge about 'work opportunities' were not a factor in determining destination selection (Alhousari, 2020: 7).

The choices that asylum seekers are able to make will also be influenced by their country of origin, age, gender, socio-economic status and education, as well as their links with others who can help facilitate the journey and open up possibilities (Crawley, 2010). Koser & Pinkerton (2002), Collyer (2007) and Lutterbeck & Mainwaring (2015) highlighted the role of 'spontaneous social networks' who disseminated information in transit, as likely to encourage secondary migration, especially if migrants have time to process this information and make decisions about their futures. Lindley & van Hear (2017) reported, in the case of Somali and Tamil Sri Lankan Europeans from continental Europe to the UK, that Somali migrants were impressed with the comparative easy of opening a business in the UK, compared to countries in mainland Europe. Higher education often appeared more available in the UK, for children but also for their parents as mature students. The presence of relatives and friends in the UK meant that families might share childcare responsibilities more easily and that children might experience less social isolation at school.

2.5.4 Pandemics and health shocks

There is evidence to suggest that COVID-19 had profoundly affected the movement and travel of migrants seeking asylum. Doliwa-Klepacka & Zdanowicz (2020) presented Frontex data documenting the impact of the pandemic on immigration flows to the EU in the early months of the pandemic. They compared border data between March and April 2020. In April 2020, the total number of detected clandestine border crossings along the main European migration routes fell by as much as 85% (to around 900) compared to March 2020. This was the lowest figure since Frontex started collecting border data in 2009. Further, the number of illegal border crossings between March and April 2020 fell by 99% via the Eastern Mediterranean (Turkey sea route), by 94% through the Western Balkans, by 29% via the Central Mediterranean route (via Libya), and by 82% through the Western Mediterranean route.

The movement and travel of those seeking asylum were also influenced by increased border controls across Europe during the pandemic. These include forced returns and pushbacks at ports and border checkpoints, which directly led to a decrease in asylum applications in Europe in 2020. States additionally introduced legal and political changes to limit and restrict the numbers of those seeking refuge, despite questions around whether

these actions risked contravening the principle of ‘non-refoulement’ (Meer & Villegas, 2020). The UK and some EU member states even temporarily suspended their resettlement and humanitarian protection programmes. To put the impact of these controls in context, data from the European Asylum Support Office showed that asylum applications in EU member states dropped to 8,730 in April and 10,200 in May 2020, a decrease from 34,737 in March and 61,421 in February. In June 2020, asylum applications increased to 31,500, but still remained significantly below pre-pandemic levels (Ghezelbash and Tan, 2020).

In the case of the UK, our interviews as to the effect of the pandemic on numbers of asylum seekers arriving in the UK is mixed. A Home Office respondent remarked:

> “The pandemic had an impact in the early stages. We certainly saw a dip in intake in the first few months of the pandemic and when I talk about the first few months, I mean of its impact in the UK, so probably March 2020 onwards… We haven’t seen a drop-off in certain nationalities which could be attributed to COVID.”

Following the lifting of pandemic related restrictions, another Home Office respondent anticipated that numbers of asylum seekers arriving will start to increase:

> “I think now, as COVID restrictions are lifting, the ability to travel from outside the EU into the EU, make your way to the coast, that’s becoming a lot easier, so we’re seeing newer arrivals from source and transit countries getting onto small boats.”

Academic respondents were cognisant that:

> “[…] [the pandemic] made travelling very difficult and more risky, so just impossible to fly from one place to another…people’s movement, even across land, through borders and things was more constrained. That certainly had an impact on discouraging people from moving.

> […] It had quite a significant impact across the asylum system as a whole, whether it’s refugee family reunion visas issued, asylum claims, applications made, decisions on asylum applications. Yes, it had an effect across the board.”

A civil society respondent went so far as to question why asylum seekers would stop seeking refuge in another country during the pandemic when their priority was seeking safety and refuge from war and persecution:

> "I don't think so. I think, looking at all those countries that, well, I would call them generating asylum seeking and refugees, like Syria, like, what do you say about COVID if you are in Damascus or another part of the country that has largely been destroyed? What do you say about COVID in Iraq? What do you say about COVID if you are in Afghanistan, if you are in Somalia, if you are in Eritrea, where there is a war? If you are a Kurd in southern and eastern parts of Turkey?"

Not all civil society respondents held this same view. One respondent indicated a decrease in the movement of asylum seekers

> "[…] during the pandemic it has been decreased, for sure. Basically, number one reason was the economic reason, because during the pandemic people had less money, access to money was not so easy. Restrictions of movement was another factor, so yes, I believe that it did affect."

The legitimacy of travel restrictions on asylum seekers has been controversial. Travel restrictions to halt the spread of the virus resulted in controls which, according to the UNHCR and the IOM, risked a violation of the Geneva Convention and limited the rights of those in need of international protection (cited in Crawley, 2021). Crawley (2021) and Doliwa-Klepacka & Zdanowicz (2020) drew attention to how the politics of fear and 'othering' historically associated with migration, was explicitly played upon by politicians to draw links between the spread of COVID-19 and the freedom of movement. Examples cited included Italy's Matteo Salvini blaming African migrants for the rapid virus transmission, Hungary's Viktor Orban holding the Iranian migrants responsible for the escalation of the virus; and Donald Trump terming it the 'Chinese virus'.

We note the effect of the 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' announced by the European Commission in September 2020 and measures restricting access to territory in Europe and international protection. The reduction in flights, airport closures and reduced staffing capacity meant a de facto discontinuation of Dublin III transfers by some EU member states (Meer & Villegas, 2020), which had an impact on the functioning of the Common European Asylum System (EMN, 2020). As the pandemic worsened, a number of EU states announced the suspension of Dublin transfers[footnote 13] and in practice, restrictions on air travel meant that even planned transfers could not go ahead. This resulted in a shift of state responsibility in 'thousands' of cases (EMN, 2020: 23).

Looking forward, O'Brien and Eger (2020) predicted that global restrictions imposed on migration in 2020 would, when fully lifted, lead to a 'spike' in movement across Russia and the OECD countries. Conversely, Simon et al (2022) argued that individuals (especially the young) may be less likely to decide to migrate if they had confidence that their government managed the post-pandemic recovery period effectively. Their research in post-pandemic Gambia challenged some of the 'classic models' of migration by postulating that in a global event such as a pandemic, would-be migrants may find security in 'familiar anchors', even if they appeared worse than alternatives abroad.

2.6 Actors

Asylum seeker motivations are closely interlinked with other key actors that have an influence on asylum seeker behaviour and decision-making. For example, social networks are both key actors as well as key contextual motivators for asylum seeker decision-making. The relevance of an actor depends on the current behavioural environment and the physical space in which the asylum seeker interacts and is defined by whether the actor directly or indirectly influences the decision-maker either based on their actions or their beliefs. Relevant actors are generally stakeholders and can be members of the family, peers (for example, colleagues and the extended family), traffickers and other agents, state actors (for example, policemen, border control officers, drivers/conductors, but also organisations (for example, civil society organisations or non-governmental organisation that directly influence the asylum seeker's decisions or change the decision environment and indirectly change her decisions).

2.7 Beliefs and expectations

Building on the previous sections, motivators operate in conjunction with beliefs. Asylum seekers have limited knowledge of their prospects, and the legal and social conditions in the host country may push them to resort to sources of information that have a strategic incentive to exaggerate or withhold information. In addition, the lack of information curtails feasible actions and in turn, the choice set. Behavioural economics has identified several behavioural biases mostly within the context of consumption. However, some of these biases are also at play in asylum seeker decision-making.

First, projection bias may play a role in their decision-making. It is a feature of human thinking when individuals believe that their motivations and beliefs

are constant over time and that others have the same priority, attitude or belief that one harbours oneself, even if this is unlikely to be the case. This could play out in how asylum seekers engage with one another, with smugglers and social networks where the belief of a “better life” elsewhere is projected by them onto others.

Second, asylum seekers may be overconfident. When exposed to future unknown environments, the decision-maker overestimates her own abilities and agency. Consequently, the success of others encourages potentially less able asylum seekers to attempt similar journeys. One civil society respondent highlighted that for Syrian refugees, for example, the success of others from the same village or city meant that more people from the same community were encouraged to take on the journey. The actual experience, however, of crossing borders is much more difficult in practice. In one case, a Syrian asylum seeker tried to cross the Channel 18 times and was successful only on the 19th attempt. In another case, another Syrian asylum seeker was locked up in a detention centre in Libya for 8 months before s/he was able to bribe one of the guards, get out and cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

Third, asylum seekers may exercise reference dependence which means that outcomes (such as whether or not they are successful in securing asylum) as well as related benefits and costs are evaluated in reference to the existing status quo. As one civil society respondent mentioned, “we often hear that they [asylum seekers] have nothing more to lose and that life anywhere is better than in a refugee camp.”

Fourth, asylum seekers’ probability weighting can be quite different from what policymakers or others perceive. Regarding “who”, they [asylum seekers] may place more weight on small probabilities and less weight on high probabilities when evaluating actions and associated risks. This can cause decision-makers to overestimate the likelihood of favourable outcomes of their actions. The literature shows that those perceptions of a better life matter to asylum seekers even if they do not correlate with reality and this leads them to expect a successful outcome from their journeys. The importance of perceptions attached to host countries’ socio-economic and political environments and to their migratory policies cannot be understated (Robinson and Segrott, 2002; Zetter et al. 2003). In fact, asylum seekers’ perceptions of migration policies as well as of living conditions in targeted destinations are often different to reality, but nevertheless just as, if not more, important to their decision-making; with the implication that prevailing legislations are often not known or are misunderstood (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019 and Zetter et al. 2003). In interviews with Home Office officials, for example, it was pointed out that often asylum seekers have a limited understanding of the UK’s asylum policies although in other cases, are aware of a disconnect between policies and realities. Even if an asylum application is refused, there is limited capacity to enforce the return of migrants to their countries and as a result, they fall into a “limbo”[footnote 14]. Without the capacity to work legally in the

UK, they end up working for the black market and become a “burden on the economy” as one official described. This view was confirmed in interviews with civil society organizations as well.

Other behavioural biases that may apply but warrant further research (and data collected directly from asylum seekers) include the following:

- just-world fallacy: the incorrect risk assessment can further be exacerbated by the belief in a divine justice, that is, that a morally fair outcome is owed to the decision-maker
- hyperbolic discounting: this bias defines a situation in which the decision-maker prefers smaller current rewards (or avoids current costs) over future proportionally higher returns; in addition, it causes decision-makers to underestimate costs that are incurred in the future compared to the current benefits, which (in addition to probability weighting) explains the high-risk proneness of asylum seekers
- social preferences: concern for other, identity effects, such as in-group/out-group dynamics, can cause a decision-maker to choose actions that are detrimental to their own security and health; in particular, the following play a role:
  - social conventions as well as internalised norms can have an adverse effect on the individual by influencing the perceived benefits of the decision-maker’s choices
  - social pressure and coercion limit the choice set of the decision-maker, especially if choices need to be made collectively
- menu effects: decision-makers demonstrate behavioural biases when exposed to a larger choice set:
  - choice avoidance: the availability of a too large choice set can lead to decision fatigue and the decision-maker resorts to a default option
  - preference for familiar and salient options: similar to choice avoidance, decision-makers do not consider the choice set in its entirety but focuses on more salient choices or options that have seemingly successfully worked for others; over time, such preferences internalise conventions and turn them into social norms (for example, the culture of migration in Senegal, see Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016); the effect can be exacerbated by idealisation and misperceptions that are reinforced by peers
- opaque costs: decision-makers ignore or are unaware of intransparent costs that a decision or action entails which may either lead to inefficient choices or decision-reversals at later stages of the decision process.

2.8 A multidimensional decision-making model

Drawing on behavioural science and the analysis of choice sets, motivators, actors and beliefs and expectations of asylum seekers, we developed a multi-dimensional decision-making model (below) to capture visually those 3 levels of influence that shape decision-making as well as the feedback loops and effects resulting from the interaction between those factors. For idiosyncratic factors related to evolving circumstances (emergence) and micro-level motivators that are specific to the asylum seeker and which interact with meso and macro-level motivators, we have created a cross-cutting factor which we call “the unknowables.” The next section features 2 fictitious case studies, drawn from the data collected for this study, and which illustrate the strategic interactions between macro, meso and micro-level motivators as well as between motivators, choice sets, actors and beliefs.

The decision-making model below highlights 3 key features of asylum seeker decision-making:

First, it shows that the process is driven by a plethora of factors, some of them are personal or individualistic, others are collectivist and related to how asylum seekers relate to their context.

Second, it emphasizes that the process is dynamic and not static. Decisions made by asylum seekers are revised and changed frequently as information and motivation change throughout the journey.

Third, the decision-making process takes place within a complex evolving social framework. This framework is characterised by interlinked elements that pertain to the individual/micro level as well as higher order elements, such as local customs and norms, and legal barriers at the state level.

To keep the model both comprehensive and comprehensible, it relies on several simplifying assumptions. While the motivations of asylum seekers to leave their country of origin as well as their decision-making process is driven by idiosyncratic goals, perceptions, and motivations, the model relies on an abstract representation of “the asylum seeker” that encompasses the general characteristics of the latter that we have identified in the literature and in our interviews. A suitable decision-making model must treat not only asylum seekers but also other involved stakeholders as adaptive actors whose decisions are interconnected and occur at various stages throughout the journey. Consequently, the model does not only specify the elements that directly affect individual decision-making but incorporates the wider systemic aspects.

> **Limitations of the model**
>
> Since we model the decision-making process of an average/representative asylum seeker, the model cannot explain idiosyncratic choices of individuals but only larger trends.

> The model relies on information that is biased. Interviews have been conducted with representatives and not with asylum seekers directly.
>
> Second-hand information is derived from asylum seekers who have actively chosen to leave their country and have successfully gained access to the UK. No information is available from those who have not attempted the journey or have not succeeded in coming to the UK.
>
> Information is based on individual statements and not actions. Interviewees can therefore only state motivations post-migration and with a significant time gap. Statements as a result suffer from ex-post rationalisation and do not truly reflect the motivations and cognition processes of asylum seekers at the beginning and throughout their journey. Some crucial motivators might therefore not be addressed by the model and the decision-making process may come across as more rational than it truly is.

2.9 Illustrative case studies

The following 2 case studies are fictitious. Elements of those stories are taken from the literature as well as interviews conducted for this study. The purpose of those case studies is to illustrate the various aspects of the decision-making model as well as strategic interactions between its various components. They demonstrate the particular importance of using a dynamic model that treats the decision-makers as an adaptive and boundedly rational agent who acts as part of a larger social system.

2.10 Walid's story

Walid is in his early thirties when the civil war in Syria breaks out. He has just finished his medical studies and was planning to work at the Assad University Hospital in Damascus. Unable to find a job as the hospital freezes all open positions, he plans to return to his hometown in Palmyra. Upon arrival, he realises that Daesh has taken control of province and that his family has been killed.

He plans to leave for Germany via Turkey. However, his cousins are already in Turkey and they have been stuck in a camp for 18 months. One of his uncles is currently living in Byblos and Walid decides to take the car to cross the border to Lebanon. He has $2,000 but pays $200 to get help to cross the border as well as another $200 to various militia who stop him on his way to Byblos.

He spends 6 months in Byblos but is unable to find work and generate income. He is increasingly exposed to discrimination as the Lebanese blame Syrians for the increase in rent prices. His uncle believes that Walid can have a better life in Europe and will be able to work as a physician. He recommends an agent, who charges $1,000 to get Walid to France (given Walid's French education) which his uncle pays. He hears from others that a refugee boat just sank of the coast of Tripoli, but since his uncle has already paid the agent, he sees no alternative, and he also considers himself a good swimmer. He makes the trip by dinghy to Cyprus, but the agent is unwilling to help Walid further. He registers as a refugee and stays in one of the government-run reception centres waiting for his case to be processed. After 18 months, he has not received any news from the local authorities but is allowed to live outside of the reception centre. While he is not allowed to work, he receives a monthly welfare cheque from the government.

Other members of the community at the reception centre tell him that they rent an apartment in the coastal village of Chloraka. He stays there for 3 months, but the government decides that refugees are no longer allowed to rent property in the villages after frictions grow between refugees and locals. Unwilling to return to a reception centre, he decides to leave Cyprus.

A local agent offers to take him to Germany because there are more livelihood opportunities there. He asks his uncle to wire $1,500 upfront to the agent and another $1,500 to an insurance office that only pays the agent after successful arrival. The agent takes him to Greece by boat and provides him with instructions to cross the border to Hungary via Macedonia and Serbia on foot. He successfully makes the trip in 8 weeks and he is expected to meet the contact of the agent in Budapest. He is caught by the Hungarian police who take him to a centre. When he does not cooperate, they use a taser and beat him. Unwilling to stay, he asks his uncle another time for money, but it takes his uncle 2 months to wire the amount. During this time, Walid stays in the centre under appalling conditions. After Walid receives the money, he takes a taxi to Munich through Austria for $500 and contacts a member of his extended family who hosts him in her house. After moving in, he applies for refugee status in Germany.

2.10.1 Discussion

This case study exemplifies the non-linearity of the journey and how constrained choice sets are for asylum seekers. While Walid initiated his journey with the aim to return to his parents and later to France, he is confronted with various obstacles throughout his journey that inhibit him from reaching his original country of destination in a direct manner. At each step, his choice set, beliefs, and the set of stakeholders with whom he interacts changes. After the return to his home place, Walid evaluates his choice set based on his resources (here mainly financial, social, and based on available time) as well as the experiences of his cousins, anticipating that their experience is a good proxy for the outcome of his choices. He has limited knowledge of the cost and implications of migrating to Lebanon as well as the potential of establishing a viable future in Byblos. He mainly

focuses on leaving his country of origin only to realise that sustainably settling in Lebanon is infeasible. Generally, the number of unknowns and the volatility of his decision environment render Walid's choices progressively myopic.

The case study demonstrates various behavioural biases that increase Walid's proneness to take risks. His decision to take the risk of leaving the country by dinghy is partially driven by behavioural biases. The payment of his uncle is considered by Walid as an investment leading to a moral obligation (social preferences) to use the means as initially planned despite putting him at serious risk. He further demonstrates an overconfidence in his own abilities and control of the situation on the dinghy. At later stages in his journey, he relies predominantly on a small social network that is composed either of family members or other refugees in the camps. His actions are constrained by the lack of financial resources as well as information about viable alternatives. However, his first encounter with the agent in Lebanon makes him more wary and he learns to hedge his risks by using an insurance office when employing a second agent.

In addition, the situation in Chloraka, reveals how individual actions and changes at the meso/ local level interact. The decision to allow asylum seekers to move outside of the refugee camp relieves pressure on the centres. However, the asylum seekers move into the same locations which leads to a concentration in available apartments in the small surrounding villages. These dynamics create frictions between the villagers and the asylum seekers which makes it necessary for the local authorities to intervene. The intervention deprives Walid of his livelihood since he derives his income exclusively from the monthly welfare cheque not being allowed to work. The unsustainability of this situation creates a market for agents who exploit the need of asylum seekers to move to the mainland.

> **Principal-agent problem**
>
> The principal-agent problem is a conflict in priorities between a person or group, and the representative acting on their behalf. An agent may act in a way that is contrary to the best interests of the principal.
>
> The asylum seeker interacts with different stakeholders and at least in part, anticipate and strategically react to the actions and beliefs of others. Other stakeholders can possess information that is not available to the asylum seeker and have a different incentive structure that does not align with the motivations of asylum seekers. Stakeholders can then exploit information and power asymmetries as well as behavioural biases for their own benefits in a way that is detrimental to the aims of the asylum seeker. This is particularly the case if stakeholders (such as agents) are in a client relationship with the asylum seeker and have a monetary dependence. The mutual dependency between principal (asylum seeker) and agent (smuggling agent), the financial interest of

> the latter and their information advantage over the asylum seeker in combination with different incentives and motives leads to a principal-agent problem. The agent actively withholds information to truncate the asylum seeker's choice set thereby affecting his/her beliefs and financially exploiting him/her.

2.11 Bilen's story

Bilen is a 34-year-old widow from Eritrea, who has 3 children (12, 8, and 6 years old). Her family has a decent standard of living and she initially wished to stay in her hometown Bibinna. Her brothers as well as her brothers-in-law and their families have successfully migrated to the US, Canada, and Western Europe. While alive and encouraged by his parents, her husband has therefore planned their leave to Europe, but has died suddenly 6 months ago. Now without protection from her husband and family, she fears that her oldest 2 boys will be drafted for national service at SAWA Defence Training Centre, a military camp. She knows that life is very hard in these camps and that children are subject to abuse, even torture and are rarely allowed to see their family. She therefore decides to flee the country and cross the border to Sudan.

Her late husband had established a connection with a smuggler who promises her to take her to Libya for a total of $2.000, since Sudan will not be a safe place for her and her children. However, she is concerned that the smuggler cannot be trusted, especially since being captured at the border will imply prison and likely worse. She reaches out to her brothers-in-law who recommend another smuggler but who charges $2,500. She opts for the more expensive but more trustworthy smuggler who successfully takes her to Libya via Sudan and suggests that she tries to reach Italy. Twice she has to bribe local authorities and is at risk of being imprisoned. On foot and with the help of locals, she makes her way to Zuwarah. Using her last resources, she pays $2,000 for a small boat which takes them and others to Lampedusa. Her boat capsizes on its way, but her family and she are rescued by local fishermen and brought to Sicily. In Sicily, her data is recorded, and she is transported to Pisa where she stays with her children for 14 months. During this time, her application for asylum is not processed and she is unable to work and exposed to harassment by other refugees. She befriends a Sudanese woman who suggests leaving Pisa by train to Marseille, but she has to leave the train in Ventimiglia because the Italian police is searching the train. Bilen and her children cross the border on foot and continue their way to Marseille. At the central train station, she sees a train leaving for Calais and, remembering that one of her brothers-in-law lives in London, decides ad-hoc to board with her children. Stranded in Calais for 4 weeks, she tries to sneak into a lorry every night and eventually succeeds. In London, she is processed, she and her children are allocated

accommodation, and she receives support from the local Eritrean community.

2.11.1 Discussion

The case illustrates that while the trajectory of an asylum seeker may appear strategically planned and direct, it can still be driven by myopic decision-making. Initially, Bilen had no incentive to leave the country, but changes to her personal and family's circumstances require her to leave the country. She understands that Sudan would not be safe for her children and her, but after her arrival in Libya, she predominantly relies on the advice of others and in doing so, follows an established trajectory to the UK. The case further shows that migration can become an established convention, even a norm under which people of a certain age are expected to leave for a western country. The mechanism is self-reinforcing as the pressure to leave increases and peers report having successfully migrated to other countries. In addition, the case demonstrates the role of trust in determining the sources of information. It is not the cheapest smuggler whom Bilen choses, but the one who is recommended by trusted peers. These peers play a significant role for determining whether information is credible and used to make decisions in the future. The set of trusted peers can further change throughout the journey leading to complex feedback effects: the trusted sources of information do not only determine the actions taken and the migration trajectory, but the latter also determine who is perceived as trusted and therefore which information is considered credible to determine actions and future steps.

2.12 Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided an overview of the various components in the decision-making process for asylum seekers including choice sets, motivators (macro, meso and micro), actors and beliefs and expectations. It has also put forward a multidimensional decision-making model that provides a simplified visual representation of the complexity of asylum seeker decision-making. The chapter confirms findings from the literature that highlight that asylum seeker decision-making cannot be attributed to a single factor or set of factors alone. It is context-specific, time-specific and individual-specific. To model decision-making, contextual factors and the multidimensionality of asylum seekers' decisions across time and space need to be accounted for. Moreover, the interplay between different motivators and contextual factors is important to consider in understanding asylum seeker decision-making.

3. Conclusion and recommendations

Our study has explored several inter-linked themes: The UK Policy Context and the choice sets, motivators, actors and strategic interactions of asylum seeker decision-making. The study points out the potential advantages of integrating complexity theory – an approach that emphasizes interactions between various factors and feedback loops that constantly change– within asylum policies and practice.

Findings from our literature review and interviews with 29 expert stakeholders have added to our understanding of asylum seeker behaviour, motivations and decision-making. Findings from our study also indicate ways in which Home Office policies around asylum intake and those aimed at reducing dangerous journeys to the UK, addressing irregular entry of asylum seekers and tackling organised crime, could change. We state the main conclusions from our study before turning to the recommendations for change.

Two main conclusions emerge from our study:

Decision-making is complex, multidimensional and non-linear

There is a diverse range of factors that influence asylum seeker decision-making to the UK. Decision-making is shaped by factors on many levels; individual, familial, political, national and international. Whilst our study has revealed many of these factors, our findings also confirm that some factors are unknown and unknowable. Even if we were able to capture all of the factors influencing decision-making at a single point in time, this information may be outdated, as decision-making shifts and changes across the migration journey. Choices change across the migratory journey due to asylum seekers coming across better opportunities or meeting new people who offer them alternatives. Asylum seekers may themselves come across information which they did not know about previously, persuading them to change their minds about a particular destination countries. The challenge is for policy to understand and anticipate the complexities surrounding asylum seeker decision-making.

There are data gaps which prevent us from understanding asylum seeker decision-making

A further conclusion is that we need additional data in order to understand asylum seeker decision-making. We lack evidence and data which makes it possible to account for the process and temporal considerations that shape decision-making as it unfolds across the migration journey. For example, we may understand the motivations of asylum seekers for choosing the UK as

a destination country, and the actions they take to make their journey to the UK possible. But there is a myriad of other situations which we still do not understand, for example, how and why decision-making shifts across migratory journeys, or the decision-making processes of migrants who do not make it to the UK, or the role of agents and human smugglers in influencing asylum seeker decision-making in coming to the UK.

In this section, we make recommendations as to actions the Home Office can adopt to address the gaps we have identified in the conclusions. We believe that they will promote a more holistic understanding of asylum seeker decision-making and improve policies around asylum intake and those aimed at reducing dangerous journeys to the UK. Our recommendations also have relevance for other organisations engaging with asylum seekers.

3.1 Consider incorporating complexity thinking in Home Office policy and practice

The Home Office should take into account the context within which asylum seekers make decisions, recognising the many factors at macro, meso and micro levels that interact with one another and generate feedback effects to influence asylum seeker decision-making. We have evidenced how asylum seeker decision-making is a complex process. Complexity thinking, is intended to enable us to understand and address the “messiness” and complexity involved in asylum seeker decision-making. The following examples illustrate how Home Office policy and practice could integrate ‘complexity-thinking’ in the asylum space.

Staff training to promote understanding of ‘complexity thinking’, for example, through a series of seminars, participatory workshops, dedicated courses, talks delivered by behavioural experts. Our decision-making model is a useful template / prototype to start a discussion. Such training will be particularly relevant for staff responsible for immigration policy development and enforcement and implementation so that ‘complexity thinking’ can inform policy / regulation development of, for example, border force strategies; asylum processing; returns and removals, including agreements with other states; tackling organised immigration crime.

Capacity building to tackle complexity through on-going communication and initiatives, engaging different levels and roles across the organisation and monitoring effect of practice. We recommend cultivating collective thinking and reflection on ‘complexity’ across Home Office policy and operational arms, through information sharing and collaboration between different units and functions.

Engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders (academics and the private sector, for example, through a research uptake taskforce or hub or a third party) to discuss the decision-making model and how it can be used to shape individual and collective practice. Multi-stakeholder engagement will build a common understanding of the complexity of asylum seeker decision-making. Such relationships and partnerships generate opportunities for learning on all sides, gather crucial evidence and information and develop mutual consensus about ways in policy can accommodate complexity thinking.

3.2 Strengthening the evidence base on asylum seeker decision-making

A lack of data prevents our understanding of the decision-making processes of asylum seekers to the UK. We are aware that quantitative data on specific aspects of migration is available in databases at The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. The Home Office itself also publishes specific asylum data. Such quantitative data, whilst helpful in showing patterns of migration to the UK, is unlikely to reveal any insights into the decision-making behaviour of those coming to the UK to seek asylum. Academic studies which include analysis of decision-making behaviour of those claiming asylum in the UK tend to be smaller-scale qualitative works which focus on a single country or region of origin or a single country of transit. In all, there is little quantitative and qualitative data which shows, in detail, the migratory decision-making process of individual migrants from the point of departure in the country of origin, and which also tracks the decision-making process at different stages of the migratory process to arrival in the UK.

To more fully understand asylum seekers' needs, vulnerabilities, experiences and decision-making from countries of origin through their journeys to the UK, we need better data, both quantitative and qualitative.

We recommend investing in expanding data infrastructure on asylum in the UK. This can be achieved through commissioning further, in-depth research in asylum seeker decision-making to the UK, spanning their journeys and experiences from their countries of origin, countries in-between and the UK. Studies should also explore the decision-making process of asylum-seeking migrants who may have considered the UK as a country of destination at some point on their journey but who ultimately decided on another option or route.

Research should investigate the intersection between macro (institutional/systemic level) and micro (situational, asylum seeker

experiences) levels to see how they interact with one another and generate feedback effects that influence asylum seeker decision-making.

We recommend research which offers granular analysis of the experiences of specific groups of asylum seeking migrants, for example, female migrants, families, LGBTQ+, who are currently under-represented in existing research.

To cover even deeper ground, we recommend research which is intersectional in nature. Asylum seekers are not a homogenous population. They have multiple and layered identities and social characteristics (for example, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability), which combine to create different modes of disempowerment and disadvantage in their countries of origin, and different experiences along the migration journey. While some reasons for migration are common amongst asylum seekers (war and conflict, environmental degradation, poverty), many others choose to flee their countries because their social characteristic make them vulnerable to political persecution and human rights violations (gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and religion). Research can differentiate between social groups of asylum seekers, their needs and the factors informing each group's decision-making.

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1. It is worth noting here that the number of asylum applications has overall fallen. According to Sturge (2022), the annual number of asylum applications to the UK peaked in 2002 at 84,132. After that the number fell sharply to reach a twenty-year low point of 17,916 in 2010. The number rose steadily again throughout the 2010s and then sharply in 2021, to 48,540, which was the highest annual number since 2003.
2. In 2020, there were around 6 asylum applications for every 10,000 people living in the UK. Across the EU27 there were 11 asylum applications for every 10,000 people. When compared with EU countries, the UK ranked 14th out of the individual countries in terms of the number of asylum applications per capita (Sturge, 2022).
3. In Geddes (2005), territorial borders are defined as the sites where sovereign capacity to include or exclude from a state is exercised, but other entities such as organisational or conceptual borders are equally important for asylum seekers and migrants of different motivations as they have a very tangible potential to exclude. Geddes (2005) defines organisational borders as those created by institutions such as the labour market, welfare state and citizenship; while conceptual borders are defined by ideas about who ‘belongs’ and the basis for belonging to some given political community.
4. It is worth noting here that 30 interviews were conducted but one interview was retracted by the respondent so the analysis here is based on 29 interviews.
5. Koser and Kuschminder (2016) suggested that a transit country refers to a country in which there are significant numbers of migrants who wish to move onwards, even though they may already be partly settled, for example through working. Some studies argued that asylum-seeking migrants often did not have an intended destination when leaving their country of origin (Collyer, 2007; Hamood, 2006; Schapendonk, 2012; Düvell, 2014; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Grillo, 2007). If so, they cannot be said to have a ‘transit’ country in mind. Thus, the concept of ‘transit’ countries has been strongly critiqued because it assumes that everyone is ‘on the move’ until they reach the UK. In reality, ‘transit’ countries are often destination countries (Crawley and Jones, 2021).

6. There is also a literature that questions whether drawing distinctions between “migrants” and “asylum seekers” make sense in practice. As research by the Overseas Development Institute points out, existing evidence shows that asylum seekers and economic migrants “often have similar reasons” for undertaking difficult journeys to Europe and that “one person may fall into both of these categories at the same time.” A key motivation for asylum seekers and economic migrants alike is the need to have a “secure livelihood” and, that refugees can be motivated by the need for a secure livelihood in their decision to migrate to Europe does not discredit “their claim to refugee status as a protected category of persons under international and domestic law” (Cummings et al., 2015:2). Interviews conducted for this study with civil society organizations point out that those categories can change across a journey, so someone can start a journey as an economic migrant and become an asylum seeker during the journey because of their changing circumstances.
7. Collyer, M. 2004 ‘The Dublin regulations influences on asylum destinations and the exception of Algerians in the UK’,” “Journal of Refugee Studies 17(4), 375-400.
8. The literature reports that asylum seekers, in fact, know very little about the nature of asylum policies in countries of destination prior to arrival, and much of what they think they know is often incorrect, or only partly correct. This research challenges the widely held view that asylum seekers have access to information about destination countries upon which they make calculated choices (Crawley, 2010). Gilbert and Koser (2006) found that asylum seekers in the UK knew ‘virtually nothing’ about governmental policy on migration before arriving. This is reinforced by Crawley and Hagen-Zanker (2018) who showed that asylum seekers had limited knowledge about the migration policies of different European countries prior to arrival.
9. Sanchez, G.; Hoxhaj, R.; Nardin, S.; Geddes, A.; Achilli, L. & Kalantaryan, R. S. (2018) ‘A study of the communication channels used by migrants and asylum seekers in Italy, with a particular focus on online and social media (https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/195350637.pdf)’, European Commission.
10. Browne, E. (2015) ‘Impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration’ (https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HQ1248.pdf), GSRDC Research Report
11. Between 2001 and 2007, Australia implemented Pacific Solution I, a policy that processed asylum claims on Manus Island (Papua New Guinea) and Nauru. Under this policy, Australian officials were seconded to the islands in order to process requests for asylum and resettle those found to be in need of protection in Australia. In 2012, Pacific Solution II was launched and under this policy, asylum requests were assessed by the administrations of Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Missbach (2019) argued that Australia has used this policy to refuse to accept any resettlements from these offshore centres (Missbach, 2019). The UK’s

recent Nationality and Borders Act 2022 follows a similar model (although it remains unclear how it will evolve). It introduces a 2-tier asylum system whereby those who enter the country “illegally” (mostly by sea through small boats crossing the Channel or by land on lorries) and are successful in securing asylum have fewer protection rights compared to those that claim asylum through legal routes (mostly by air) such as the UK’s resettlement programme. It also introduces the plan to process asylum claims in Rwanda (UK Parliament, 2022).

12. According to the UNHCR Executive Committee, secondary migration refers to “The movement of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for different reasons move from the country in which they first arrived to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere” (UNHCR Executive Committee, Conclusion No.58 (1989).
13. The process of transferring an asylum claimant where the responsibility for assessing the asylum claim may rest with another EU members state.
14. Since 2002 the majority of asylum seekers have not been permitted to enter the labour market, or take up any of the ‘shortage occupation’ jobs which they might legally access if they have been waiting for more than 12 months for a decision on their asylum application (Mayblin 2019). These restrictions are in place explicitly to counter the perception that irregular migrants are ‘pulled’ to the UK by generous welfare benefits or the enticement of labour market access while their asylum application is decided. Mayblin suggested that this policy imaginary emerged as dominant in the early–mid 2000s, within a context where the numbers of applications for asylum had increased significantly. However, Mayblin and James’s (2016) systematic review of the evidence on pull factors did not find any research evidence which confirmed welfare rights and labour market access as pull factors (Mayblin and James 2016).