



European Asylum Support Office

# The Push and Pull Factors of Asylum- Related Migration

## A Literature Review

November 2016

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Prepared by Maastricht University \* and the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) of the  
International Organization for Migration \*\*  
for the  
European Asylum Support Office

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# Significant Pull/Push Factors for Determining of Asylum-Related Migration

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NOVEMBER 2016

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# I. Project introduction and scope of work

The purpose of this project is to provide a comprehensive review of the literature examining significant factors that influence population movements, the decisions of migrants to leave their countries of origin, and the decision to subsequently claim asylum in the European Union (EU), within a push/pull framework. This framework views human mobility as the result of specific factors that either attract an individual to migration (pull factors) or that repel the individual from continued stay in his/her place of habitual residence (push factors). These factors may relate to different levels of characteristics or systems (e.g. micro-, meso-, macro-) and may or may not interact with one another to shape mobility outcomes. Based on a broad review of the academic literature, as well as 'grey' literature produced by non-academic institutions, research within this project generated 1) an overview of migration models that could be relevant for explaining asylum-related migration, and 2) a list of 'push', 'pull' and 'intervening' factors that have been consistently identified in the literature as relevant in influencing or shaping such mobility patterns.

Some clarification is needed on the main concepts used throughout the report. Asylum-related migration refers to migration that has either the intended purpose of seeking international protection in a given country, or which ultimately results in an individual applying for protection in the recipient country. The latter situation may include people for whom the intention to apply for international protection emerges *en route*, in transit countries, due to emerging circumstances (e.g. political or economic insecurity, access to information via networks), or individuals whose decision to seek asylum emerges only *upon arrival* to the destination country, for instance as a result of the person's access to new information about the country's immigration regulations, whereby the asylum avenue may be the only viable alternative to remain in the country legally.

In the attempt to identify relevant factors determining asylum migration to Europe, the literature review went beyond the legal definition of an asylum seeker as a person seeking 'safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaiting a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments' (IOM, 2011). This was necessary due to the nature of asylum migration flows to Europe, which can be referred to as 'mixed migration', meaning 'complex population movements including refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants' who often move irregularly, i.e. without the requisite documentation (IOM, 2011). In view of such complexity, the review presented here covers the literature on forced and irregular migration, as well as the broader literature on economic (labour) migration.

Within this exercise, push and pull factors are considered to shape two interrelated processes: 1) migration in general, and 2) migration to a particular destination country. Different factors or sets of factors may play different roles in each of these processes. For instance, factors explaining migration 1) often originate in the household/community/country of origin (e.g. unemployment, gender discrimination, conflict), while factors influencing migration 2) are more likely to be destination-specific (e.g. presence of co-ethnic community members, perception of the country as having a permissive asylum regime, language similarities) or process-specific (e.g. a smuggler has chosen a destination).

In both stages, specific contexts or circumstances are likely to yield different factors that significantly shape mobility. For instance, contextual conditions in countries of origin – such as natural endowments, political structures, economic systems, demographic structures and other such factors influence mobility in often unique ways. Similarly, personal characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity or age) are likely to influence the relevance of certain factors in explaining mobility decisions; for instance, the threat of female genital mutilation may be a push factor primarily for girls and women, and it will be more prevalent in certain national contexts than others. This suggests that explanatory push/pull factors that are relevant or meaningful for one population or group of migrants are not necessarily as relevant for another because of differences in contexts or personal characteristics. Therefore, such contextual differences need to be factored in when seeking to identify the determinants of migration and destination choices.

Literature that engages different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives has addressed the factors that may predict or explain specific types of movement. These different bodies of literature, including both

academic and non-academic literature, have been reviewed in this project. The purpose of the literature review — to provide a comprehensive overview and synthesis of the push and pull factors that influence asylum-related migration — required a systematic approach, and was conducted in two stages.

During the first stage, literature that addresses the determinants of asylum-related migration was collected and compiled into a centralised database. This systematic review included studies that investigated two separate but related decision-making processes: 1) those related to the decision to migrate, including for asylum-seeking purposes, and 2) the choice to seek protection in Europe in general, and a given European country in particular. Both academic and grey literature was included in this stage, as was literature that is both theory-based (e.g. literature that provides predictive frameworks for movement) and empirical-based (e.g. literature based on studies of actual population movements and the factors that influenced that mobility). Results of this first stage were outlined in an inception report produced in December 2015. This first deliverable provided an initial list of keywords used in search engines to identify relevant resources, a preliminary database of the literature, and an abbreviated annotated bibliography, summarising key studies that addressed the determinants of migration.

The second stage consisted of providing a deeper review of a number of selected studies. This review entailed the use of qualitative methods to determine the extent of relative consensus or divergence on the importance of identified determinants of asylum-related migration. A general overview and synthesis of the existing literature on theoretical migration models that may be relevant to explain asylum migration was also conducted. Full details of the proposed research stages can be found in the technical proposal and the revisions to the technical proposal provided in November 2015.

This report is the deliverable envisioned during the second stage of the research, and provides three outputs. The first is a listing of keywords used in search engines to identify relevant literature. The keywords used in this list were drafted in consultation with the project team and expanded, following feedback received upon completion of the inception report, to be more inclusive of concepts identified differently in various discourses or languages (e.g. illegal migration versus irregular migration). The final list of keywords used to search for literature is provided in the Annex (Section V.1).

The second output is a detailed database of literature that addresses the determinants of asylum migration, and of migration to specific destinations. The database provides basic bibliographic information on the studies, such as the author, publication name, year of publication, and publisher. Additional information is provided on the type of migration the study addressed (e.g. economic, forced), the theoretical approach and methodology used, main identified factors and whether each impacts migration at origin ('push factor'), transit ('intervening factor') or destination ('pull factor'). Different kinds of literature are included in this database, namely academic research, policy or positioning papers, briefs, and research reports. The intention of this review was to capture not only empirical studies that identified factors within specific study settings, but to also review literature that proposed theoretical frameworks that predicted movements given specific conditions.

Details on the methodology used for selection of keywords, collection of relevant literature, compilation of the database, as well as limitations of this exercise are described in Section II. The literature database will be uploaded as a searchable online tool in the section of the EASO website dedicated to the Research Programme. The database will be periodically updated, and a contact form will permit to signal new publications or publications which are missing from the database, and propose them for inclusion.

Finally, this report provides a synthesis of the literature on determinants of asylum migration (Section III), and a discussion of factors that have been consistently (or inconsistently) identified as significant in shaping migration or individual decision-making processes (Section IV). The report concludes with some reflections on identified gaps in the literature and future research needs.



## II. Methodology and limitations

### II.1 Methodology

The first phase of the literature review involved the identification of relevant literature, its compilation into databases, and preliminary synthesis of literature into an annotated bibliography. This process and the resulting annotated bibliography were provided in the project inception report, which was delivered in December 2015. As the annotated bibliography was a key input for the preparation of this literature review, the process used to identify resources included in the annotated bibliography and its subsequent extension must also be described here.

The process of identifying literature began with a systematic search using trusted search engines such as Web of Science and Google Scholar. A list of search terms was used to guide the literature search. Supplementary to this, IOM conducted a search of its internal library database – an extensive library containing mainly migration-related resources, including both academic and non-academic ones. As both IOM and Maastricht University/UNU-MERIT are embedded within larger networks of migration and development specialists, practitioners, and researchers, the search generated a significant volume of research and data from different sectors, including academia, international organisations, and regional governance institutions. All relevant resources were compiled in a literature database created in Excel, which listed the author, title, keywords, and search engine used. The call for references and systematic literature search produced an initial listing of over 480 resources. Following the submission of the inception report, the selected literature was subsequently extended by identifying relevant resources — particularly on forced migration and asylum-related migration flows — from the reference lists of the previously identified literature, as well as from further web searches based on an additional relevant keywords. The use of this snowballing technique and extension of the web search resulted in the addition of 30 literature sources to the resource database.

Following the initial identification of literature, specific literature was then selected for more thorough review. From within the first database, specific articles were identified for expanded description based on their direct relevance in identifying push/pull factors that influence asylum-related migration. Articles that addressed specific case studies (e.g. predictors of highly-skilled migration of Canadians to the US) or had limited direct relevance to identifying the determinants of asylum-related migration were excluded from extended analysis. The articles selected for inclusion in this step were summarised in the Excel database. Within that summary, aspects such as the methodology employed in the study, the data source, the sample, key findings, and identified push/pull factors were detailed. This stage resulted in the extended description of 147 resources.

Among those resources identified as being the most relevant for the current study, a sub-set were chosen for inclusion in the annotated bibliography and then for this final literature review. The characteristics upon which literature was selected included:

- number of citations, scaled to year of publication;
- relevance to wider migration discourse;
- relevance of sample population (e.g. asylum seekers, refugees, 'mixed migration' flows) and/or geographical scope (e.g. Europe as destination, transit countries with Europe as destination);
- appropriate analytical methods (assessed e.g. by sample size, sampling frame, sample selection, data representativeness).

Such characteristics were used to guide selection of literature into the final review but were not always clearly applied given difficulties in determining characteristics of study design (such as sampling methods). Other aspects of literature, such as relevance of literature within the wider migration discourse, were also more subjectively judged. This review represents a pragmatic compromise between comprehensiveness and topical relevance and should be read in conjunction with the literature databases, which provide broader overviews of literature.

The two deliverables produced within this project provide two different approaches to the literature. Within the first deliverable (the inception report), selected literature was ordered into an abbreviated annotated bibliography, which included 35 selected resources. The annotated bibliography listed literature in APA format and introduced each resource with a 150–200 word summary. These summaries provided an introduction to the resource, the objective of the article/paper, the analytical methods used, the determinants of migration identified in the research, contributions made to the literature, and the limitations of both the resource itself and its wider theoretical approach. The second deliverable (this literature review) provides an integrated review of the literature in which different strands of literature are considered and related to each other. This review not only synthesises the literature addressing the push/pull factors of (asylum) migration to different destinations, which can be found in Section III below, but also discusses points of convergence/divergence across the literature, and further areas of research needed on the determinants of asylum-seeker migration flows. This discussion can be found in Section IV.

## II.2 Limitations of the research on ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors

Research on the determinants of migration and on significant factors shaping migrants’ decisions is characterised by a series of limitations both on a conceptual and on a methodological level.

On the conceptual level, there are serious limitations with the commonly used (yet often critiqued) push and pull framework as an explanatory tool for migration decision-making processes, as argued by several scholars (cf. de Haas, 2008). Whilst such a framework can be useful to categorise the reasons that may prompt movement, it makes strong assumptions about the way individuals respond to stimuli; it presumes that an individual can make cost/benefit decisions based on full information, in markets tending to a general equilibrium, far from the complex reality of human mobility. As such, the model fails to explain why, for instance, people respond differently to the same ‘push’ and ‘pull’ forces, and why emigration and immigration occur simultaneously in the same areas (Castles et al., 2014), or why the vast majority of the world’s population does *not* migrate.

Moreover, the framework does not consider how conditions in countries of origin and destination interact with other factors in determining migration decisions, such as migrants’ characteristics and aspirations, how those aspirations are formed, and circumstances encountered along the journey. As demonstrated by the literature reviewed in this report, these interactions all play an important role in shaping actual migration flows. In sum, the push-pull model is inadequate to explain the complexities of migration as a phenomenon embedded in broader socio-economic and political processes (de Haas, 2008).

Such complexity is all the more evident in asylum-related migration decision-making, where the dichotomy between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ movements, or between economic and political motives, often does not apply. In an attempt to move beyond such dualistic view of reasons for migrating, Richmond (1993) suggested a continuum between *proactive* (voluntary) and *reactive* (involuntary) migration, where most migration decisions would be the result of both volition and constriction, albeit to varying degrees (also cf. Betts, 2013). However, most quantitative studies on forced and irregular migration appear to fall short of adopting the interdisciplinary approach needed to analyse the complex realities of asylum migration.

Several methodological limitations render the adoption of a more encompassing approach quite difficult. The challenges of investigating forced migration movements are well described in a widely cited paper by Jacobsen and Landau (2003), where the authors also note that, being particularly prone to methodological flaws, research on forced migration may often yield problematic policy recommendations. Such methodological issues need to be considered in both qualitative and quantitative research on the underlying causes of asylum migration.

Qualitative studies on irregular and forced migration are often conducted on relatively small samples of populations, without use of appropriate sampling techniques, where samples may therefore not be necessarily representative of the larger population under analysis. This is also due to the difficulty in having a clear sampling frame in qualitative research on irregular and forced migrants, as the size and distribution of the target population is hard to know. To overcome this limitation, researchers often make use of snowball

sampling techniques to identify a group of respondents, which may affect the validity of results given the likelihood of selection bias and non-randomness in sample selection. While sampling frame may be more of an issue in the context of quantitative research, it does nonetheless concern qualitative studies as well, and should therefore be seriously considered in the methodological design of such studies.

For instance, interviews with asylum seekers from a specific country in the same destination upon arrival may be useful to gather some knowledge on that particular group. Lacking a control group, however, it would be hard to identify the *causes* of asylum migration from that specific country, as it is not possible to isolate the effect of certain characteristics on migration decisions from other socio-economic or political factors that affect migrants and non-migrants alike.

Research on asylum migration is also made difficult by the logistical challenges of collecting reliable, comparable and disaggregated data, particularly in the case of irregular migrants (Koser, 2010). Researchers may encounter difficulties in accessing relevant populations, particularly those that are in tenuous economic and legal situations. Moreover, there are significant ethical issues with research involving vulnerable groups such as irregular and forced migrants given their political and legal marginalisation, namely confidentiality issues that may affect their security (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003).

As for quantitative studies on asylum migration, which are still relatively few, a significant methodological challenge lies in quantifying and measuring complex variables to be included in empirical models, for instance ‘migration policy’ variables. Proxy indicators used for such factors – e.g. dummy variables to indicate adoption of a specific policy measure – may be too simplistic, which imposes a certain degree of caution in the interpretation of results. In this regard, however, a number of promising efforts toward the systematic classification of migration policies deserve some mention – e.g. the cross-institutional International Migration Policy and Law Analysis (IMPALA) database, the Determinants of International Migration (DEMIG) database of the University of Oxford, and the Immigration Policies in Comparison (IMPIC) project of the WZB Berlin Social Science Center, to name a few <sup>(1)</sup>.

Lastly, it must be emphasised that research on asylum migration is made more difficult by the fact that such realities are often rapidly changing, based on a variety of context-specific factors. It is rarely possible to make longitudinal and geographical comparisons of different groups of migrants, for instance comparing different groups over time and in various locations, revealing the variation that is needed to empirically test the significance of certain factors in shaping migratory decisions, relative to others.

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<sup>(1)</sup> For more information on the IMPALA, DEMIG, and IMPIC projects, see, respectively: <http://www.impaladatabase.org/>, and <https://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/completed-projects/demig>. For an overview of migration policy indices, see Helbling et al., Eds. 2013. How to measure immigration policies, *Migration and Citizenship, Newsletter of the American Political Science Association. Organized Section on Migration and Citizenship* 1(2), and Bjerre et al., 2015. ‘Conceptualizing and Measuring Immigration Policies. A Comparative Perspective’ *International Migration Review*, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/imre.12100>.

## III. Literature Synthesis

A great deal of academic and policy literature has addressed the factors that shape human mobility decisions and subsequent migration trajectories. Ravenstein's seven 'laws' of migration (1885, 1889) provided the basis for the push-pull migration framework that would gain traction in later decades. The theoretical contributions of Lee (1966), whose overarching theory of migration identified four levels of factors that influence population movement, cemented the push-pull framework as one of the most lasting conceptual tools used in migration studies.

Given its influence on subsequent literature, the push-pull framework developed by Lee must be explored in more depth. Lee's theory of migration suggested that there are four types of factors that shape mobility: 1) factors associated with the origin area, 2) factors associated with the destination area, 3) intervening obstacles, and 4) personal factors. In both area of origin and destination, there may be factors that act to hold, retain, or attract people (pull factors) or those that repel people (push factors). Such factors vary for individuals, whose subsequent mobility decisions will be shaped by a different experience and perception of factors. Lee noted that simple cost-benefit calculations do not incentivise migration, as individuals will likely experience a 'natural inertia' or propensity to remain (rather than migrate) that must be offset by strong incentives to migrate. The migration decision will also be influenced by the 'intervening obstacles' that exist between any two given origin and destination points. Such corridor-specific factors, such as physical distance and policy regimes, may influence how feasible a move is for any given individual (Lee, 1966).

The theory of migration proposed by Lee has had lasting impact on the way the underlying causes of mobility are conceptualised, which is clear when reviewing the body of related literature that has been published since. The language developed by Lee—in describing movement as influenced by *push factors*, *pull factors*, and *intervening obstacles*—has remained within the migration lexicon and is used by migration scholars of different disciplines (e.g. economics, sociology, demography). While individual authors—both academic and policy alike—have contested the appropriateness of the 'push/pull' dichotomy, many have continued to add to this framework through explorations of the underlying factors that shape human mobility.

The literature reviewed in this section is organised according to the factor level (e.g. micro-, meso-, macro-) and factor domain (e.g. economic, social). This organisation has been chosen as some studies identify interconnected push and pull factors that relate to the same underlying conceptual dimension (e.g. micro-level economic incentives), which allows for easier comparison of factors that are identified in studies with similar underlying frameworks.

### III.1 Economic 'Rational Actor' Approaches to Explaining Migration

Much early literature on the factors that influence migration, particularly within a given origin/destination country dyad, anticipated that mobility resulted from micro- (individual) level economic incentives and disincentives created by larger economic structures. Early neoclassical economics theories of migration envisioned that individuals acted rationally to the end of maximising utility; individuals would be expected to move when the benefit of moving (or the cost of staying) generated the highest financial return on labour.

Within this area of migration studies, many authors suggested that the economic structures within specific geographical areas will influence the mobility decisions individual economic agents make. Lewis (1954), as one of the earliest examples, suggested that larger economic structures, namely the expansion of capitalistic systems, would support large-scale reallocation of labour from agricultural to industrial settings. He proposed that as capitalist or industrial societies and economics expanded, they would develop a great demand for cheap labour. **Subsistence-agricultural workers from the countryside were predicted to relocate themselves to meet labour demands, enticed to urban areas by the wage differential that would exist between subsistence or low-paying agricultural work and relatively high-paying wage jobs in the industrial sector.** According to Lewis, this process should eventually result in an equilibrium in which the urban labour market is saturated and rural-dwellers will no longer be incentivised to move to the city

because the wage differential no longer exists (Lewis, 1954; Ranis and Fei, 1961). This idea represents an important tenet of neoclassical theory in that equilibrium will eventually be reached through migration, at which point migration in large numbers will cease. In their 1961 work, Ranis and Fei acknowledged the contribution made by Lewis but criticised his assumption that there would be a limitless supply of cheap labour. They note that there must also be growth in the number of subsistence or low-wage agricultural workers if industrial growth and its growing demand for labour are to be met (Ranis & Fei, 1961; Arango, 2000).

The work of Lewis (1954) and Ranis and Fei (1961) laid the foundation for neoclassical economics to be applied explicitly to the field of migration. In extensions of Lewis's work to rural-urban and eventually international migration, rational individuals with full knowledge of perfectly functioning markets would conduct a personal cost-benefit analysis to determine whether or not a move would be financially beneficial. Todaro's 1969 work expands on the traditional rural to urban migration behavioural model by introducing a rural-urban *expected* income differential in place of the simple wage differential approach used by Lewis (1954). Specifically, Todaro's model suggested that migrants are not always immediately absorbed into the urban labour market and that this wait time before obtaining a job is considered by potential migrants during the decision-making process. **Accordingly, Todaro identifies the primary determinants of labour migration to be a conjunction of the rural-urban income differential and the probability of obtaining an urban job (employment rates) <sup>(2)</sup>.**

Harris and Todaro (1970) expanded on Todaro's 1969 work by further examining the equilibrium concept first introduced by Lewis (1954). The Harris-Todaro model proposed that in a setting with an institutionally determined minimum wage that is higher than agricultural earnings, each additional job created within the urban sector would correspond to a rise in the *expected* wage, which would in turn incite rural-urban migration. Harris and Todaro therefore proposed that labour migration would arise from expected wage differentials between the urban and rural sectors. Accordingly, the migration of rural workers to the urban sector would cease only when equilibrium is reached, i.e., when urban unemployment reaches substantial enough levels that the urban-rural wage differential declines to zero. This model valuably provided insight into how changes in wage and production levels in both rural and urban economies would affect rural-urban labour dynamics, but it has since received heavy criticisms for oversimplifying migration processes, particularly by assuming that rural-urban migration would inevitably result in higher unemployment given finite employment supply.

While the works previously discussed have each studied migration from a macro-level perspective, Borjas (1989) focused on the micro-level and explained in greater detail the cost-benefit analysis process that Lewis (1954), Ranis and Fei (1961), Todaro (1969) and Harris and Todaro (1970) assumed governs migration decision-making processes on an individual level. Adopting the neoclassical economic principle of individual utility maximisation, Borjas proposed the idea of an 'immigration market'. This immigration market functions on an international scale and sorts potential migrants across potential destination countries, with individuals making cost-benefit calculations while taking into account the availability of financial resources and the migration policies imposed by origin and destination countries. **Accordingly, Borjas identified the determinants of migration to be international income differentials, the legal and policy environment in both origin and destination countries, and an individual's financial resources.** Echoes of Lee's theory of migration (1966) can be seen in the work of Borjas, who not only identified simultaneous push/pull factors such as wage differentials but also identified intervening obstacles such as national and bilateral migration policy regimes as shaping movement. Borjas's work provides a first suggestion of *migration selection*, that is, underlying traits or features (such as economic resources) that determine who enters migration and who does not.

It is important to note that Borjas's examination of the migration decision-making process on an individual level also included the idea that migrants consider costs and benefits and move to where expected returns are greatest *over time*. This idea was further developed by Sjaastad (1962), who envisioned migration

<sup>(2)</sup> The role of income differentials, (anticipated) unemployment, and sector-specific wage growth between rural and urban areas as drivers of migration have been further explored by a number of authors. Notable contributions include Bhagwati and Srinivasan (1974), Fields (1975), and Cole and Sanders (1985); full references are provided in the annex.

as an investment decision. Within this conceptualisation, migrants would consider their individual knowledge and skill sets, in conjunction with other factors such as age and gender, to determine their expected lifetime return on a migration investment. If the investment is seen as favourable, migration is expected to occur. **Accordingly, Sjaadstad identified individual skill set, income distributions in both sending and receiving societies, and the expected lifetime return on a migration investment as primary determinants of movement.** Serving as one of the first contributions to identify human capital as a driver of migration, Sjaastad's work is valuable in that it implies that migrants have different skill sets and are in fact a heterogeneous group. This helps to explain why some people chose to migrate and others don't, as each individual's expected lifetime return on migration will vary.

A large number of studies have empirically tested neoclassical migration theories, utilising different samples from different regions of the world. Most of these studies support the idea that wage differentials and employment rates/ economic growth in the destination country are predominant drivers in migratory movements. Several of these studies also highlight the role of human capital in the migration decision-making process. Whereas some studies examine the trajectories of individuals who migrated at some point, others study the intent to migrate; this difference is noted when possible. While the findings of these studies support neoclassical theory, many also find affirmative evidence for network theory, which is addressed in Section III.5 below.

In testing the Harris and Todaro model, Neto and Mullet (1998) examined the interactive effects of wage differentials, employment opportunities, and the presence of networks on the *intent* to migrate. Within their sample of Portuguese adolescents, they found that **the intent to migrate was higher among those with connections to a network and that the effect of a wage differential on the intent to migrate was larger when employment opportunities were good versus when employment opportunities were bad. They also found that the effects of a wage differential and of good employment opportunities were higher when the network condition was met.** These findings suggest that the factors identified in neoclassical theory (largely wage differentials and employment opportunities) do not impact migrant intent singularly but rather meaningfully shape migration intentions in combination with facilitating factors such as the presence of networks.

Finding similar results to Neto and Mullet (1998), Ruysen et al. (2012) examined the determinants of bilateral immigration flows to 19 OECD countries from both developed and developing countries, from the years 1998 to 2007. **The authors found that higher income and growth rates in the destination country were primary attraction factors for immigrants, and short-term increases in the employment rate of destination countries had a positive effect on immigration originating from both developed and developing countries.** Stepping outside of neoclassical theory, the authors also found evidence of strong network effects and noted that such effects need to be included in a migration behavioural model to maintain accuracy.

While Neto and Mullet (1998) examined the intent to migrate and Ruysen et al. (2014) analysed determinants of aggregate migration flows, Docquier et al. (2014) studied both elements. Using World Gallup surveys and national censuses for 138 origin and 30 destination countries between 2000 and 2010, the authors first analysed the factors that influence an individual's chance of joining a pool of potential or aspiring migrant. **The authors found that both the size of the network of previous migrants and the average income in the country of destination were the most influential factors in predicting migration propensity.** Next, the authors examined the factors that encouraged *potential* migrants to become *actual* migrants, **discovering that destination country economic growth is the main economic motivator.** They also noted that college-educated individuals were more likely to actually migrate but not more likely to aspire to migrate, illustrating the idea that a certain level of resources are necessary to initiate a migration journey.

Gross and Schmitt's (2012) study more readily tested Sjaastad's human capital theory and investigated how the influence of economic factors on the likelihood of migration varies across skill levels. Specifically studying international immigration to France, they found that the degree of influence held by a particular motivating factor is highly dependent upon the skill level of the migrant. **Networks of friends, family, and acquaintances, and relative incomes are the most important motivators for low-skilled workers to**

**move. Highly-skilled workers, however, were found to be motivated to migrate based on differentials in standards of living or returns to their specific skill set.** Accordingly, lower-skilled migrants may need to rely on the cost-lowering effect of networks to make their migration journey a reality and to learn about migration opportunities. Higher-skilled migrants, in contrast, may have more resources and can plan their migration based on where they will receive the greatest return for their skills, not based on where they have social connections. This study is valuable in that it shows that different types of migrants with different skill sets may be influenced by different combinations of factors, once again highlighting how heterogeneous migrants are as a group.

The studies reviewed have provided substantial evidence of the interplay between economic factors and migration propensities within a neoclassical economics approach, but all are limited in that they only sampled migrants with the legal right to residence and stay. An Altai Consulting report from 2013, however, specifically examined the motivating factors among a flow of 'mixed migrants' (e.g. migrants with differing motivations and intentions) passing through Libya en-route to Europe. Based on in-depth interviews with migrants and key informants, **the study concluded that the main drivers of transit-migration to Libya included better employment opportunities in the destination country, wage differentials, and a relative ease of getting to Europe from the transit country.** The authors do note, however, that migrants in Libya are a very mixed group, and the sample included migrants whose intentions of migrating varied widely, including for employment abroad as well as asylum.

While certain elements of neoclassical theory, such as wage differentials as a main motivation for migration, are strongly supported by empirical evidence, the assumptions and simplicity of economic, rational-actor mobility frameworks have been heavily criticised by theorists. Critiques have centred around the exclusive focus of such studies and theories on economic factors, their focus on the individual as a decision-maker, assumptions of perfectly functioning markets, assumptions about the complete knowledge and rationality of actors, and the treatment of migrants as a homogenous group. The strongest application of neoclassical theory today seems to be through its combined application with other migration theories, thereby increasing its explanatory power and applicability to various migrant situations. Boswell (2008) notes that while purely economic theories fail to explain the complexities of migration due to their problematic assumptions, they do indeed provide benefits such as the ability to measure and predict individual behaviours. She suggests that these types of theories then be applied in an interdisciplinary approach to research.

## III.2 Economic Structures and Processes as Drivers of Migration

In contrast to the previous studies, in which economic processes were envisioned to shape the decision-making processes of individuals, historical and structural theories of migration describe movement as a more macro-level phenomenon in which individual agency is subordinated to structural demands. Within structural studies of migration, the penetration of capitalist systems into developing countries are thought to displace the poor residents of rural areas, who migrate to urban centres in developed countries to meet increasing demands for cheap and exploitable labour. Piore (1979), one of the most influential writers in the field, argued that international migration emerges from four characteristics of advanced industrial societies; 1) structural inflation, or the tying of wages to social status; 2) motivational problems, or the lack of upward social mobility found in low-wage jobs; 3) economic dualism, or the existence of a capital-intensive primary sector and a labour-intensive secondary sector which creates unstable low-paid jobs that are unattractive to native workers; and 4) the demography of labour supply, or the decreasing number of native women and teenagers willing to take low-paid jobs. These four factors, in addition to Piore's conceptualisation of immigrants as focused almost exclusively on income and not social class, **create a long-lasting structural demand for immigrant labourers within the developed world.** Piore's work is influential in that it is the most prominent contribution to dual labour market theory, which represents a significantly alternative explanation of migration than is offered by neoclassical theories.

A complementary explanation of the global forces causing international migration was provided by Wallerstein in the world systems theory. Wallerstein's seminal works (1974, 1980) aimed to establish a theoretical linkage between flows of migration and global capitalist expansion. His approach divided the world into a core of capitalist nations that control the global economy and poor periphery nations

that supply the labour, land and resources necessary for capitalism to flourish. The encroachment of multinational corporations into the periphery, specifically into its agrarian and rural-based economies, is predicted to trigger significant changes, driving farmers from the land and creating low-wage employment in urban areas. This trend, in addition to the capitalist core's structural need for low-wage, exploitable labour, ensures large flows of both internal as well as international migration. **Accordingly, Wallerstein identifies migration as an involuntary reaction to the worldwide expansion of capitalism.**

While these two schools of thought may seem to be very similar in their conceptualisation of what causes migration, Arango (2000) clarified important differences between these approaches. While both theories examined the macro- or structural-level demand that developed countries have for cheap and often foreign labour, Piore's dual labour market theory stressed that this demand is in itself a cause for migration. In contrast, Wallerstein's world systems theory focused more specifically on the displacements and dislocations caused by capitalist penetration to explain the driving force behind international migration <sup>(3)</sup>.

As an addition to the body of historical/structural theories explaining international migration, Cohen's 1987 work argues that international labour migration is in essence a form of modern-day slavery. Cohen proposed that capitalist systems have always been dependent on unfree labourers, such as slaves, and that if capitalism is compatible with slavery, then it is also compatible with other unfree forms of labour. Cohen offers international labour migrants as an example, noting how such migrants face restrictions in obtaining citizenship and equal rights, as did slaves, but must provide labour as a condition for the right to enter or remain in a territory. **He further argued that the individual decision to migrate is made within the structural limitations of the capitalist system and must contend with forces such as immigration restrictions and regulations, opportunities for employment and housing, and transportation costs.** While Cohen's work does take an overwhelmingly negative view of migration, it advances the historical-structural school of thought by incorporating migrant agency, noting that migrants challenge oppressive structures through striking, protesting, and unionising.

The historical/structural school of thought represents a complete juxtaposition to the neoclassical outlook on migration. Theorists in this school of thought generally agree that migration is, at least to some extent, forced or involuntary in nature due to larger structural factors at work. The level of analysis changes from the micro- to the macro in its focus on large structural/ global forces that determine the movements of the (largely rural) poor. With this movement from the micro to the macro level, historical/structural theories were criticised for eliminating the role of an individual migrant's agency and assuming that migrants automatically respond to global structural demands, regardless of personal aptitudes or aspirations. Furthermore, theorists in this realm are also criticised for idealising living conditions in pre-capitalist, rural-agrarian societies, ignoring realities such as feudalism and tenet farming.

### III.3 Migration as a Household Risk Diversification Strategy

Beginning in the late 1970s, literature started to emerge that attempted to reconcile structural labour demands with individual-level economic aspirations by focusing on more meso-level economic decision-making processes. The new economics of labour migration, or NELM theory, was perhaps the best known conceptual framework that arose in response to the critiques levied on both neoclassical and structural economic theories. Tenets of what is now known as NELM were first introduced by Mincer (1978), who examined the effects of family ties on the likelihood of migration. Specifically, he assessed how characteristics such as marital status, labour market attachment of wives, and marital instability affected the likelihood of an individual undertaking migration. **While Mincer's contribution fell short of an original theoretical contribution, it did formalise the idea that an individual considers their family members and the economic outlook of these family members when making a migration decision.**

The idea that family or household members may impact the migration decision-making process was extended to a great degree by Stark and Levhari (1982), who are largely considered the founders of the

<sup>(3)</sup> Extensions to such structural approaches to mobility have been provided by a number of authors, including Sassen (1988), Sassen-Koob (1978), Portes and Walton (1981), Papademitrou & Martin (1991), Petras (1981), Morawska (1990). Full references to these works are provided in the annex.



NELM approach. Using theoretical economic modelling, the authors elaborated on the role of risk as an explanatory factor of rural to urban migration in less developed countries. Citing evidence that rural to urban migration often does not result in higher wages, the authors proposed that a rural household vulnerable to economic and climatic shocks may choose to place one of its household members in an urban environment as a way to diversify risk and secure an income source isolated from the shocks endemic to agriculture. **Accordingly, Stark and Levhari identify the primary determinants of migration to be risk diversification and obtaining access to credit.** This conceptualisation implied that individual decision-making is the product of household-level strategies that anticipated utility maximisation of a larger economic unit, which introduced the concept of risk into the migration equation.

Stark and Bloom (1985) expanded on Stark and Levhari's previous work by noting that migration decisions, migration costs, and migration returns or benefits are all shared between a migrant and a corresponding group of non-migrants in the country of origin. The authors suggested that remittances are a manifestation of informal contractual agreements between migrants and the households from which they move, which ensure that all members share the costs and benefits of migration, thereby dispelling the idea that migrants send remittances for purely altruistic reasons. These agreements may vary based on the bargaining power of the family versus the migrant; factors such as high urban unemployment will increase the bargaining power of the family as its support gains importance, and vice-versa in the event of agricultural downturns. Stark and Bloom conclude that this constantly changing informal contract highlights the 'dynamic comparative advantage of the family' and that their theory not only helps to more accurately explain migration, but also helps to explain the non-migration of others in the face of high wage differentials.

The NELM theory was again extended by Stark and Taylor in 1989, when the idea of relative deprivation as a migration motivator was introduced. **This study envisioned migration as a household-level strategy in which the aim of maximising income is undertaken in comparison to a reference group of peer households, as well as in absolute terms.** The authors based their theory on data of Mexican migration to the U.S., noting that relative deprivation, or comparisons of household income relative to the incomes attained by members of a peer group, can play a major role in Mexico-U.S. migration.

A large body of empirical evidence has supported the tenets of the NELM framework, most of which has examined the role of remittances in shaping migration patterns (Massey et al., 1993). Taylor (1999) noted that remittances, dependent upon origin country conditions, can help reduce production and investment constraints placed on remittance-receiving households. Lucas and Stark (1985) arrived at a similar conclusion in their empirical study of remitting immigrants in Botswana. In examining why some migrants remit more than others and for different lengths of time, **the authors concluded that instead of pure altruism, immigrants in Botswana remitted as fulfilment of a risk diversifications strategy and to redistribute the gains their family invested in them in sending them on their migration journey.** The authors coined this phenomenon 'tempered altruism' and noted that it supports the NELM conceptualisation of migration as a well-planned, household level risk diversification strategy.

Constant and Massey (2002) also found empirical evidence for NELM through their study on the migration strategies of guest workers to Germany. The study compared neoclassical and NELM-related motivations for international migration and created 'theoretical profiles' for each migrant. Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, they found that about three quarters of their sample fit into a neoclassical migration profile (that is, individuals migrated to Germany with the intent to settle permanently and maximise their lifetime earning potential). The remaining quarter of the sample, however, fit a NELM theoretical profile better in that such migrants were target earners who actively remitted their earnings and planned to return to their country of origin once their savings target had been reached. Accordingly, this article identified migrants as a heterogeneous group, with different migrants adopting varying migration strategies based on their needs, resources and aspirations.

More contemporary evidence on the value of the NELM framework was provided by Altai Consulting in their 2015 report on the key drivers of migration within ECOWAS countries and Mauritania and for migration from ECOWAS countries to Europe. Drawing on in-depth interviews with both migrants and key informants in Niger, Mauritania, Senegal, and Nigeria, **the study concluded that the main 'push' and 'pull' factors for migrants in the region tended to be a lack of job opportunities in the origin country and social pressure**

**to earn a higher income to provide familial support.** The report cautioned that each country and national group needs to be analysed within its specific context to derive more accurate results.

While many tout the advantages of NELM and the great improvements that it made to the field of migration theory, some remain unconvinced. Abreu (2012) argued that while NELM purports to represent a ‘new third way’ between the economics-based neoclassical theory and historical structural theories in its reconciliation of structure and agency, NELM is still driven by an assumption of rationality and optimisation. The only improvement such a theoretical framework adds to the neoclassical economics approaches is that it assumes incomplete knowledge and imperfect markets on behalf of decision-makers. Abreu also noted that commonly adopted methodologies to measure migration drivers relied on micro-level units of observation despite the focus on households, which does not take into account patterns and phenomena at the structural or transitional level, where the most influential driving forces of migration are to be found. The theories discussed in the following sections of this review will attempt to address further questions that NELM still leaves unanswered.

### III.4 Structural Feedback Mechanisms and Migration Systems

The literature reviewed so far has addressed how economic processes in the origin country, generally in combination with a desired destination country, shape individual or aggregate migration movements. Within much of this literature, social drivers or larger processes that influence migration were not well incorporated into the underlying theoretical frameworks used to predict movement. In contrast, theories such as the migration systems theory (MST) envisions family- and community-level feedback loops as well as rural and urban environmental stimuli as key drivers of migration.

Mabogunje’s seminal 1970 paper introduced the migration systems theory framework as a way to explain rural-urban movement beyond wage differentials. The framework described the factors and processes that allow an individual living in a rural environment, such as a village, to become a permanent urban resident. **Mabogunje identified environmental stimuli in a rural area (such as proximity to an urban centre), family- or village-level constraints, attitudes about the desirability of migration, family resources and land ownership responsibilities, urban employment and housing opportunities, and positive and negative information feedback channels from current migrants as key elements of the migration decision.** Mabogunje’s work envisioned migration as a non-linear, circular, and self-modifying phenomenon in which the experiences and perceptions of current migrants and their community members affect subsequent migration decision of other community members. This study focused on rural-urban migration in an African context, but the framework has since been expanded to address international mobility.

Building on Mabogunje’s introduction, Fawcett (1989) proposed a conceptual framework that detailed the ‘non-people linkages’ that bind international migration systems and the implications of these linkages on migration patterns. The framework divided linkages into four categories: 1) state-to-state relations, 2) mass culture connections, 3) family and personal networks, 4) and migrant agency activities); three types of linkages (tangible, regulatory, and relational linkages) are also identified. The matrix of interactions between levels and types of linkages suggests that factors of varying levels and complexity shape individual movement. Influential networks may include structural, macro-level factors (e.g. inter-state relations) in addition to meso- and micro- level factors (e.g. family networks, individual agency). Fawcett proposed several hypotheses on the effects of the different linkages and their influence on migration patterns relative to one another. **The author argued that family relationships influence migration in a way that structural factors cannot due to an undiminishing power of familial obligation. Family migration and networks are influential factors within migration patterns, as family members abroad act as trusted sources of information, relate information in a more accessible way, and function as role models for the origin community.** Fawcett’s work is influential in that it expands on the types of linkages and feedback mechanisms included in the MST approach.

Additional elaboration on the MST framework was provided by Zlotnik (1992), who suggested that migration systems emerge as a result of sustained economic, geopolitical, and socio-cultural linkages between states but are characterised by different ‘hierarchies’ that exist within a migration system. Zlotnik proposed that

an *explanatory* hierarchy can be seen by the importance of factors within a given migration corridor (comprised of an origin and destination country dyad) that do not necessarily predict migration of origin or destination countries singularly, outside a specific dyad. An *exposure* hierarchy may also operate in which the size of bilateral migration flows expands and contracts over time depending on the relative tenure of origin/destination countries within a given system.

Empirical tests of the MST framework have been prepared by DeWaard et al. (2012), who tested MST empirically in Europe. Using available migration reports from sending and receiving countries in the EU and Norway between 2003 and 2007, the author used exploratory cluster analysis to identify migration patterns across clusters of countries. Analysis suggested that there are three functioning ‘migration systems’ within Europe: five countries are the core of Europe, 14 countries are the periphery, and 8 countries form an intermediate region. **DeWaard notes that migration flows within these three systems are most influenced by relational ties (past colonial ties or shared nation-state building experiences) and regulatory ties (consistent migration policy based on shared membership in economic or political associations or circles).**

The idea of migration systems as constantly evolving, self-modifying, and perpetuating mechanisms has led several authors, including Rajendra (2015), to note that once a migration system is in place and functioning, it is sustained by the growth and existence of migrant networks. Meso-level informal associations constructed by migrants and their acquaintances can play a particularly strong role in ensuring the perpetuating of migration within an origin-destination country pair. *Network theory* is accordingly a complementary explanation of international migration; whereas MST explains how migration movements begin, network theory explains how it continues.

### III.5 Social Networks as a Means of Sustaining Migration Flows

Migration networks have received increasing attention as a potential facilitating factor in continued migration flows, as has been evidenced by several empirical studies already covered in this review (e.g. Bahna, 2013; Neto and Mullet, 1998; Docquier et al., 2014; Gross and Schmitt, 2012; Ruysen et al., 2014). Arango (2000) noted that migration networks are essentially ‘interpersonal relations that link migrants or returned migrants with relatives, friends or fellow countrymen at home’ (p. 291). These networks carry and diffuse a wide array of information and assistance, including information on employment prospects and labour force demands in various destination countries, linkages to specific employment opportunities and accommodation, as well as feedback mechanisms about the migration experience in general. The prominence of these networks in assisting potential migrants in their journey has been documented by empirical studies conducted among different types of migration populations.

Massey (1987), for instance, has studied the impact of migrant networks on international migration patterns between Mexico and the U.S. Using two Mexican data sources, a nationally representative survey, and a simple random sample of households, he found that the existence of migrant networks significantly lowered the cost of international migration for prospective migrants. **Specifically, migrant networks lower the direct, opportunity, and psychological costs of international migration and increase migration returns through improving the probability of U.S employment and decreasing the likelihood of arrest or deportation.** Accordingly, networks work to increase the overall likelihood and continuation of international migration movements. Massey noted, however, that this explanation of self-perpetuating, international migration is limited to shorter time frames, as in the long term, wage differentials may change significantly and the impact of networks may decrease.

Similar conclusions were drawn by Haug (2008), who studied migration intentions among Bulgarians using the 2001 Bulgarian census and Italian migrants in Germany using the German Socio-Economic Panel. This study **found that social capital in the destination community has positive impacts on emigration intentions and return migration, whereas social capital in the place of residence has negative impacts on return migration.** She concludes by stating that an interdisciplinary approach that utilises both economics and sociology is most conducive to migration research.

Epstein and Gang (2006) also explored the role of networks in shaping the choices of destination among potential migrants. The authors note that, in contrast to the assumptions made in neoclassical economics models of migration, migrants will seldom have perfect information about a particular destination. Some destinations will be objectively better for a given migrant than others due to features such as the migrant's resources, skill set, local economic opportunities, etc. Migrants must use information gathered from family and friends (especially those who are current or former migrants) in deciding what destinations are most suitable. Apart from actually seeking advice on their migration journey, Epstein and Gang note that potential migrants gather information simply by noting where others in their neighbourhood or community migrate to and later modelling their own behaviour on those observed movements. In a later work, **Epstein (2008) elaborated further on this type of behaviour, calling it 'herd behaviour': people go where they have observed others go, with some assumption that those before had information on the destination and had made an informed decision.** Epstein notes that herding can explain the initial clustering of migrants in particular destinations. The positive externalities associated with migrant networks arise only after sizable clusters of co-nationals have formed in a particular destination area, which addresses a later-stage mobility trend than is implied by herd behaviour. Epstein also proposed that herd behaviour can explain why migrants continue moving to areas with saturated labour migrants, which would be expected to not occur when migration networks supply information on local economic conditions.

Böcker's 1994 study of Turkish chain migration to the Netherlands suggested that the power of networks may decrease over time. In-depth interviews with migrants revealed that the longer migrants have been living in the destination country, the less inclined they are to support family reunification claims and facilitate the migration of a network member. Böcker argued that social ties weaken over time and will eventually lead to a deterioration of the positive externalities potential migrants in the origin country may receive from network belonging. **Accordingly, network ties or social resources are often constrained and limited by other factors such as economic power or restrictive immigration policies in the desired destination country.** The Böcker study found that restrictive Dutch immigration policy towards Turks resulted in a reduction of legal migration channels besides family reunification that would allow for right of entry and stay. Therefore, networks of extended family members who were already in the Netherlands were heavily utilised in the absence of other legal alternatives.

Collyer (2005) found a similar pattern when examining why asylum seekers apply for asylum in countries where there is no co-national group of significance. Specifically focusing on Algerian asylum seekers in the UK, Collyer found that many asylum seekers in his sample had familial ties to France but were not able to utilise these ties due to restrictive French immigration policy, which set strict criteria on who could and could not apply for family reunification. **Accordingly, the value of social capital may be dependent upon other factors such as policy restrictiveness or personal economic resources.** While Collyer stressed that network theory is still valid as the majority of Algerian asylum seekers have familial ties to France and do in fact apply for asylum in France, his sample suggests that intervening constraints such as policy can shape how network ties can be leveraged by different categories of migrants.

A review provided by de Haas (2010) further suggests that network and migration systems theory cannot explain why some initial migration movements do not result in the creation of large migrant networks or even migration systems. He also notes that these theories are silent on the possibility that there are feedback mechanisms that may undermine migration or structural processes that work to counter the continuation and growth of migration flows, which again emphasises the need to explore the role of migration systems and networks within the larger policy and social contexts in which they are embedded.

### III.6 Cumulative Causation

As a complementary idea to MST and network theory, the concept of cumulative causation incorporates feedback mechanisms at all levels (macro, meso and micro) to explain how migration movements are perpetuated. Massey (1990) reintroduced the concept of cumulative causation as a way to synthesise existing migration literature that was fragmented along critical dimensions of disagreement to create a theory of migration that offers greater explanatory power. **He defines cumulative causation as changes in social and economic systems caused by migration that make additional migration more likely to**

**occur.** For example, migration creates migrant networks, which make labour migration a more probable risk diversification strategy. Greater labour migration then works to further expand migrant networks and lower migration costs for future migrants. Accordingly, factors set in motion by an initial act of migration may encourage additional migration movements through differential effects on multiple channels. Such a concept incorporates broad social structures in exploring how the spatial and temporal dimensions of migration evolve in response to migration and shape subsequent individual- and household-level mobility decisions.

Empirical evidence of cumulative causation has been provided by Fussel and Massey (2004), whose exploration of movement with the Mexico-US corridor revealed how layered levels of feedback shaped mobility trajectories. Using data from the Mexican Migration Project, the authors examined the applicability of cumulative causation in communities of different sizes, finding support for the theory only in small cities, rural towns, and villages. Cumulative causation was not evidenced in large urban areas. **The authors identify community-level, migration-related social capital as the principal feedback loop for the functioning of cumulative causation** and note that at the large-scale urban level, this feedback loop is cancelled out by family-level, migration-related social capital and a strong pull of the urban labour market. Accordingly, the theory of cumulative causation can only be applied in certain settings where community-level interaction is quite strong. Fussel (2010) later expanded empirical testing of the theory of cumulative causation and found supporting evidence (of varying strengths) in different countries throughout Latin America, including the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

### III.7 Socio-Economic Development and Migration Transition

The creation and perpetuation of migration movements may not be attributable only to micro- and meso-level mechanisms but may also reflect larger changes in the socio-economic situation of the country at large. Whereas the previous literature addressed how certain individuals are influenced in their mobility decisions, literature within the transitions theory framework proposes that migration in different forms emerges as a country transitions across different thresholds of socio-economic development.

The migration transition theory asserts that the relationship between migration and socio-economic development can be visualised as an inverse U-shape. As countries develop and experience increased levels of communication, growing networks, and population growth and urbanisation, mobility increases in the short run, but in the long run income convergence and home preferences cause mobility to taper off (Vogler and Rotte, 2000). In his foundational 1971 work, Zelinsky combines Ravenstein's (1885, 1889) and Lee's (1966) laws of migration with the theory of demographic transition, which states that socio-economic development transforms societies from a premodern near-equilibrium of high mortality and high fertility to a modern near-equilibrium of low mortality and low fertility. Based on this merging, Zelinsky (1971) asserted that as a community modernises, levels of physical and social mobility will increase. **Specifically, Zelinsky identified population growth, a decline in rural employment opportunities, and economic and technological development as key drivers of migration.** An important aspect of the mobility transition hypothesis proposed by Zelinsky is that different forms of migration emerge at different stages of development. Zelinsky proposed that residential mobility is very low in premodern societies, with only limited rural-rural mobility occurring in response to activities such as trade or marriage partner exchange. As a society develops, rural-urban migration will sharply spike, and international migration of the highly-skilled and of rural populations to colonial frontiers will start. Late transitional societies — those approaching higher development — will then be characterised by decreasing but still considerable rural-urban migration, declining (permanent) emigration to foreign destinations, and a rise in circular mobility. Advanced societies, which are at the upper-most end of the development spectrum, would be predicted to have consistent but low levels of rural-urban migration, increased mobility between urban areas, limited emigration and strong transnational mobility, and significant *immigration* of migrants of varying skill levels. This aspect of the mobility transition theory highlights that **technological and economic development will correspond to different forms and directionality of population movements, with emigration spiking during the late transition period and declining as a country reaches advanced development stages.**

The migration transition literature has been significantly extended by Skeldon (1997), who proposed a new, systems-based framework through which migration and development trends can be analysed. Rejecting the overly simplistic developed versus developing country binary, he instead divides the world into five distinct 'development tiers' that represent the transition from agricultural, labour, and capital-intensive industries to knowledge-based economies. Specifically, these tiers are labelled as 'the old core, the new core, core extensions and potential cores, the labour frontier and the resource niche'. With the addition of sub-tier demarcations, Skeldon argues that the nuanced effects of development on different kinds of societies can be better distinguished than if countries are simply split into categories such as developing/developed or rural/urban. Skeldon's work also introduced the concept of the nation state to transitions theory, hereby introducing structure into a theory that was before mostly focused on demographic and economic transitions. **The inclusion of state structures lead to the incorporation of colonisation and decolonisation in predicting migration patterns, as such processes created and fortified cultural and structural links between former colonisers and colonies that that shaped migration patterns.**

Many studies have been conducted to test the underlying tenets of transitions theory. Studying the case of Mexican migration to the U.S., Massey's (1988) work explored how capital accumulation and forces of modernisation transformed the culture, institutions, and technological base of a society in a way that altered the course of its development. His work suggested that **while in the long run development will likely lead to decreased levels of emigration, in the short run it will produce much higher levels of emigration as societies are transformed from rural and agrarian to urban and industrial.** Massey's work not only provided an empirical application of Zelinsky's mobility transition hypothesis but had critical implications for migration policy, leading to recommendations that the U.S. government increase opportunities for legal migration from Mexico to achieve long-term economic development.

While Mexico is a common case study for the study of transitions theory, empirical studies have also focused on other geographic areas. Icduygu et al. (2001) empirically tested transitions theory in Turkey using the 1996 District-level Socio-Economic Development Index of Turkey and the 1990 Census to determine the relationship between degrees of local development and international migration flows. The authors found that emigration ceases when poverty levels are higher or more extreme. **The authors concluded that inhabitants of middle-level developed districts participated most frequently in international migration, with those from the poorest and the richest districts participating in international migration less frequently.**

In the African context, Flahaux and de Haas (2016) studied emigration from multiple countries from 1960 to 2010. Their findings refuted the idea that migration from Africa is always the result of conflict or poverty, instead suggesting that a large proportion of African migrants move due to family, educational, or employment reasons. Such motivations and possibilities for movement generally arose only for those individuals within countries in the middle of the development distribution. The authors also noted that contrary to common perceptions, most African emigration throughout time and at present has occurred intra-regionally, within the continent, with the majority of migrants headed for regional hubs instead of Europe.

Lastly, Vogler and Rotte (2000) provided additional nuance to the discussion of the relationship between development and migration with their study of emigration from 86 African and Asian countries to Germany between 1981 and 2005. Their results confirmed the inverse U-shaped relationship between migration and development predicted by the migration transition hypothesis. **They found that medium-to-high levels of development corresponded to higher migration propensities but also found evidence that wage differentials and GNP per capita had a positive effect on migration magnitude.** Furthermore, they noted that population growth and other direct indicators of development were not directly correlated with migration behaviours, contradictory to what was predicted by Zelinsky, but rather population growth and population urbanisation can contribute to spill-over effects that do lead to higher levels of migration.

The predicted empirical link between demographic transitions and migration trends has been disputed by other authors, including de Haas (2010). De Haas found that the relationship between these two transitions is indirect, with population growth alone a poor explanation of large migration flows. **He suggested that high population must be supplemented with high unemployment and slow economic growth to impact**

**migration behaviours.** Noting other issues within transitions theory such as the implied singular path towards development and the 'myth of the immobile peasant', de Haas did not reject the central tenets of the theory but instead suggested revision by introducing the idea of 'stagnation and reversibility' in which a variety of internal dynamics can cause a transition process to halt or even reverse its course.

### III.8 Conflict and Insecurity as Drivers of Migration

In much migration literature that addresses the underlying factors that shape mobility, conflict and violence as drivers of migration are often implicitly included in explanatory frameworks but not addressed in much depth. Conflict has been noted as a prominent driver of migration in certain regions and has been found to have a decisive impact on the magnitude of migration flows, however; Naude (2010), for instance, found that within sub-Saharan Africa, an additional year of conflict raised emigration by 1.7 per 1,000 inhabitants. This section will accordingly review studies that have found conflict, insecurity, or political instability to be key drivers of migration.

Offering evidence from Colombia, Ibáñez and Vélez (2008) analysed data from the Survey for Internally Displaced Populations in the year 2000 to investigate the drivers of displacement in Colombia. **They found that actual violent events, in addition to perceptions of violence and a generalised lack of security, were central determinants of forced population movements.** Drawing on the cost-benefit calculation prominent in neoclassical theory, the authors note that **modelling forced displacement critically differs from traditional migration modelling in that the threat of violence to oneself vastly increases the costs of staying.** In another application of neoclassical theory to forced migration flows, Moore and Shellman (2004) used a global sample of countries with data spanning from 1952 to 1995 to identify the drivers of forced migration. They found that, in concurrence with rational choice theory, people evaluate the magnitude of the threat they are facing within the migration decision-making process; the greater the threat, the higher the number of people who decide to migrate. **The authors concluded that within their sample, violence outweighed political and economic variables as the prominent driver of migration.**

Other research, such as that of Crawley (2010), challenges rational choice theory. This study on the determinants of forced migration flows based on 43 interviews with refugees and asylum seekers in the UK **found that conflict is the single biggest push factor for asylum-seeker migration to the UK.** While Crawley asserts that asylum seekers are not passive in their journeys and base their decisions to migrate on the risks and opportunities implied by their countries of origin, age, gender, socio-economic status, education level, and social network, the majority of the sample did not intend to migrate to the UK and landed in the country by chance. **Crawley suggested that such findings disprove the common assumption that asylum seekers make an informed, rational, economically motivated decision regarding their destination countries.** While the initial decision to leave the country of origin may be based on a cost-benefit analysis, the specific country of destination is often the result of chance rather than planning.

Forced migration flows have also been assessed through the lens of macro-level structural changes. Davenport et al. (2003), for instance, conducted a fixed-effects analysis of forced migration trends using pooled, time-series data that covered 129 countries between 1964 and 1989. The authors found that across the sample countries, threats to personal security were the most prominent drivers of population displacement across international borders. **Such forced migration flows were found to occur particularly among countries transitioning towards a democratic political system due to the higher likelihood of conflicts erupting during times of political instability and transition.**

Other studies have highlighted the role of migration systems and networks in influencing destination choice. For instance, Robinson and Segrott (2002), who interviewed 65 asylum seekers in the UK, found that most asylum seekers did not plan their migration trajectories based on pre-determined countries of destination but just prioritised finding a safe place. **For those individuals who did actively decide to go to the UK, however, destination choice was influenced by the existence of social networks of family or friends already living in the country, the ability to speak English, and the belief that the UK is a safe and democratic country.** Havinga and Böcker (1999) similarly found that **asylum seekers' social networks and**

**the presence of colonial ties between the origin and destination countries were influential throughout the forced migration journey.**

Not all forms of conflict and violence may be expected to lead to the same kinds of migration decisions and journeys, however. Schmeidl (1997) proposed that different categories of violence or instability lead to different levels of forced emigration. Using a pooled time-series analysis over a twenty-year period (1971–1990), he concluded that: **1) human rights violations produce fewer refugees than do measures of generalised violence; 2) civil wars fought without foreign military interventions push fewer people to apply for asylum abroad than do civil wars fought with foreign military intervention; and 3) ethnic rebellion, while being a significant cause of refugee migration, does not seem to lead to massive population movements.** Furthermore, Schmeidl noted that economic hardship holds only marginal importance in comparison to conflict as a determinant of mass migration movements.

Other research has suggested that the types of risks individuals are willing to accept in their migration journeys relate to the different levels of violence they face in the origin country. Studying migration flows across the Mediterranean, particularly along two routes (the western and central Mediterranean routes), Altai Consulting (2015b) **found that social, political, and economic instability inspired migration flows but that individuals fleeing greater threats to their personal security were willing to traverse more dangerous and uncertain migration routes.** The study found that individuals who embarked along the much more dangerous Central Mediterranean route tended to be more vulnerable in terms of economic and personal security and generally faced a greater threat of violence than those taking the western Mediterranean route. The relationship between (perceived) risk in the place of origin and the risks migrants are willing to accept along the migration journey suggests that asylum seekers also make calculated decisions related to their personal mobility but that those decisions are more constrained by serious threats to personal safety.

Authors such as Vervliet et al. (2014) suggest that the motives of migration change through the migration journey, even within forced migration flows. By interviewing 52 unaccompanied, asylum seeking Afghan minors after their arrival in Belgium, **the authors found that the minors' first motive of migration was fear or danger of being forcibly recruited by the Taliban. A second motivation for migration was noted to be desire for better education and employment opportunities abroad.** Once the minors arrived in Belgium, however, their main aspiration switched from finding a secure environment to studying and obtaining residence documents. Accordingly, the authors concluded that migration drivers and motivations are not fixed but are instead dynamic and change as the migrant is exposed to new surroundings and ways of life. Furthermore, the relative importance of different mobility factors change across the life course, suggesting that the decision-making process will differ for the same individual as s/he ages and is faced with different age-specific obligations, expectations, or aspirations.

Much of the literature on the factors that shape migration flows and flow directionality recognises that there are seldom single drivers of migration; it is difficult to attribute migration to single factors, such as conflict, given strong interlinkages among push/pull factors. Migrants may choose mobility for a multitude of reasons. **Reasons for migration are often correlated: for example if there is conflict in an area, employment and economic security as well as physical security will all suffer.** Cummings et al. (2015) note that it is unfair to attempt to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants, as both may experience human rights violations. Furthermore, Wood (1994) and Betts (2013) have both contested the definition of a refugee extracted from the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Wood argues that the legal definition of a refugee does not encompass the complexities that characterise forced migration, as forced migration can be driven by non-political factors such as access to natural resources, economic well-being, and more. Betts echoes this sentiment, arguing that the term 'refugee' should be applied to all 'survival migrants', meaning any person suffering from grave deprivations of the most basic human rights.



## IV. Discussion

The synthesis provided in Section III shows that a vast and diverse body of literature has attempted to identify the reasons why people move, both within and across international borders. The heterogeneity of the literature is evident in several areas: 1) the variety of theoretical approaches used; 2) the level of analysis considered (micro-, meso-, macro-level, or a combination of these); 3) the broad typologies of population movements addressed (labour migration, forced/irregular migration, or both); 4) the geographical and temporal scope of the analysis; 5) the methodology utilised (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, or based on secondary data), and; 6) the type of factors considered, commonly referred to as ‘push’, ‘pull’ and ‘intervening’ factors, following Lee’s widely used conceptualisation (1966).

This section aims to assess the extent to which certain factors determining migration, including asylum-related migration, have been consistently (or inconsistently) identified in the reviewed literature. In order to facilitate the analysis, factors have been divided into two groups indicating, respectively, relative consensus and divergence. Each group will contain references to factors identified both in the broader migration literature, and specifically within the forced and irregular migration strand, as the broader migration literature has often only marginally addressed conflict and violence as factors shaping mobility. As mentioned in the introduction, the impossibility to clearly separate motivations underlying economic/voluntary versus forced/involuntary movements should always be kept in mind.

Given the heterogeneity of the literature under consideration, it is challenging to compare studies and adopt clear criteria for identifying the level of consensus or divergence on the importance of particular factors. For quantitative studies included in the literature database (Annex V.3), the importance of different factors was identified based on whether a given variable was found to exert a statistically significant influence on the outcome of interest (e.g. migration propensity). Comparing the importance of factors addressed within qualitative studies is more challenging. For comparing qualitative studies, some subjective judgment had to be exercised, based on relative consensus by migration theorists and scholars on the salience of that particular factor in explaining mobility.

Single factors have generally been grouped under major categories (e.g. socio-economic, political, demographic, proximity, environmental, policy) due to difficulties in comparing and identifying the extent of agreement (disagreement) on specific variables. Most studies cannot be directly compared or generalised because of their specific study design, sampling, country focus, and specific operationalisation of concepts. For example, two authors may both broadly test a factor relating to wage differentials, but the specific operationalisation of that factor (e.g. the difference in anticipated earnings in the same job in country x and country y, or the difference in anticipated lifetime earnings in country x and country y) can change the functioning of that factor in an empirical model, particularly when the models engage different sample populations. As such, it is important to bear in mind that it would be difficult to identify universally significant factors. Similarly, divergence in the empirical literature on the significance of specific factors should not be seen as disagreement by migration scholars on the actual relevance of those factors. Instead, that divergence can be understood as an inconsistent identification that may be attributable to a variety of reasons (e.g. model specification, sample population, item scoring). In some cases the different contexts or migrant groups under investigation may explain discrepancies, as some examples will show. Factors listed under the relative divergence category should ultimately be seen as factors whose relevance appears to be deeply interlinked with other variables at play, and whose significant impact may therefore be harder to isolate. Even for factors where consensus appears stronger, however, it is rarely possible to single out a separate effect.

This section cannot provide an exhaustive overview of agreement or disagreement on all the factors identified as relevant in shaping human mobility, including asylum-seeker mobility, but is rather an attempt to meaningfully summarise available knowledge on migration determinants, and should be read in conjunction with the literature database available on the EASO website. The rest of Section IV will outline gaps in the literature, particularly concerning forced and irregular migration, and suggest ways in which these could be addressed in future research.

## IV.1 Determinants of asylum-related migration: elements of relative consensus

### a) Socio-economic factors

Although the neoclassical economics theories of migration have generally been criticised for their overly simplistic view of migration processes, particularly the assumption that individuals act as rational, utility-maximising agents with full knowledge of perfectly functioning markets, several of the factors identified under such theories are still regarded as particularly salient in explaining migration determinants.

**Actual and expected wage differentials** and **differences in living standards** between communities of origin and destination consistently emerge as significant factors in shaping human mobility, both internal and international, as initially proposed, under varying assumptions, by Lewis (1954), Ranis and Fei (1961), Harris and Todaro (1970) and Borjas (1989). Several studies included in our review provided empirical evidence on the significance of income differentials (e.g. Ruysen et al., 2014; Docquier et al., 2014, Ruysen and Rayp, 2012), including the explanation of migration flows to Europe from large sets of countries (see, for instance, de Haas, 2011 and Peridy, 2006).

Even considering the broad agreement on the relevance of wage differentials in explaining international mobility, the impact of cross-country income differences will also depend on other variables. As seen in Section II, wage differentials may have a stronger influence on migration intentions when analysed in conjunction with the skill levels of migrants, good employment opportunities in the destination country, and the presence of migrant networks (Neto and Mullet, 1998). Intervening factors such as **individual poverty constraints and economic hardship** may limit people's ability to migrate even in the presence of a desire to migrate linked to expected higher earnings in the destination country (Czaika and de Haas, 2012).

The **availability of employment opportunities** in destination countries, usually proxied by **employment rates or economic growth**, or the **perceived difference in job opportunities between origin and destination**, have also been quite consistently identified as a significant macro-micro-level factor in shaping migration decisions. Again, however, the importance of such factors generally varies depending on other variables, and will not be equal across migrants with, for example, varying skill levels or familial situations: highly educated migrants may respond differently to increasing growth rates in destination countries, relative to the low-skilled (Docquier et al., 2014); factors such as the quality and availability of housing, as well as prospects for quality of family life in the destination country may influence household-level decisions beyond the sole availability of employment opportunities (Clark and Maas, 2013).

Migration scholars also tend to broadly agree on the tenets of human capital theory (Sjastaad, 1962; Borjas 1989) whereby migration decisions are shaped by the **expected lifetime return on the migration investment** (Burda, 1995; de Haas, 2010). In this sense, migration can be seen as a form of human capital investment, where returns largely depend on a person's location, as this will affect the ability of an individual to utilise his or her skills (Clemens and Ogden, 2014). Again, as seen in Section II, the impact of expected returns on human capital on migrants' decisions to migrate may be different according to migrants' skill sets: for the highly skilled, such consideration may have a larger weight than for the low-skilled, who may be more heavily influenced by the cost-lowering presence of family and acquaintances networks in destination countries (Gross and Schmitt, 2012).

On the meso-level, as initially advanced by NELM theorists, **family risk diversification** and the **possibility to obtain access to credit** through incomes transferred by a migrant household member have been confirmed as significant variables by various empirical studies included in this review. In certain instances – again depending on migrant characteristics, family situation and the broader context – migration can therefore be explained as an investment strategy not only for an individual but for an entire household. For instance, Vervliet et al. (2014) documented how a large majority of Afghan unaccompanied asylum seekers in the UK interviewed in the context of the study mentioned that the decision to migrate was made together with a family member.

Combining and adapting the principles of NELM theory with network and transition theories, prominent migration scholars would also agree that **access to information** about the living standards in the destination country, via **formal and informal networks**, made easier by the ease of communication brought by technological developments, are instrumental in shaping **individual aspirations**. The presence of various types of **networks** potential and actual migrants can rely on as a source of information (at the planning stage or during the journey) has been repeatedly identified as an important factor in shaping migration intentions or facilitating and perpetuating migratory movements. Relevant literature also seems to show that migration networks may be particularly important in influencing destination country preferences (Epstein and Gang, 2006). The relevance of migrant networks may vary depending on, among other factors, the time frame considered (with social ties potentially becoming less relevant in the long term) or restrictive migration policies in destination countries, which may offset the positive impact of networks (Böcker, 1994).

The presence of family and friend networks appears to be highly relevant also in analyses of **forced migration movements** and has been found to influence **destination country preferences** in certain cases, although studies in this context are still limited by small sample sizes (Crawley, 2010; Robinson and Segrott, 2002; Havinga and Böcker, 1999). As highlighted by a recent ODI assessment of drivers of asylum-related migration to Europe, irregular migration is, in most cases, the result of a collective effort made by families in which family, social and religious networks, increasingly facilitated by the use of social media, play a crucial role in deciding the timing and circumstances of individual movement (Cummings et al., 2015). In the same context, the role of **human smuggling networks** is increasingly being recognised, particularly in relation to asylum-seeker movements to Europe (Koser, 2010; Hatton, 2004).

On the macro-level, migration scholars would also generally confirm that human mobility is shaped by the inherent characteristics of global capitalist expansion – namely the **structural demand for cheap and exploitable labour in industrialised countries** – coupled with **social dynamics** (e.g. limited native labour supply or unwillingness of native workers to take on low-paid, unstable jobs). Although such theories are limited in that they mostly do not incorporate the role of migrant agency, and may have a somewhat more limited applicability in the current global economic reality, structural economic factors such as skill and labour gaps in advanced economies may influence migratory processes and define the limitations within which migration decisions are made (Cohen, 1987; Fargues, 2014).

Again, this factor needs to be analysed in conjunction with other variables to explain differential mobility patterns. Labour gaps in certain sectors, such as domestic care, will likely attract more female workers, determining gender differences in migration flows (van der Velde and van Naerssen, 2011). Some authors have argued that persistent labour demand in destination countries, coupled with absence of labour migration schemes (migration policies) may cause an increase in irregular migration (de Haas, 2011). More empirical evidence on the relative salience of structural labour demand as a macro factor attracting migration to Europe is needed to gauge the extent to which these theories can inform an understanding of current migration flows.

Finally, a relatively large extent of consensus can be found on the salience of **economic and technological development** in explaining increasing outward international mobility in societies transitioning from rural and agrarian to urban and industrial – i.e. the central proposition of transition theories of migration. Empirical evidence reviewed in Section II related to different migration corridors (e.g. Mexico–U.S., Asia and Africa to Germany) and at varying time periods confirms that countries in the middle of the development distribution experience greater emigration or show higher emigration propensities, as capital accumulation and modernisation increases people’s financial resources and aspirations to emigrate. Again, personal aspirations and desire to migrate are likely to be shaped by intervening factors, such as network connections, and are like to vary according to migrants’ personal characteristics, e.g. gender, skill levels and family considerations (Flahaux and de Haas, 2014).

## b) Political factors

A relative degree of consensus on political factors as significant determinants of migration emerges more strongly in the forced and irregular migration literature. Conflict, violence, insecurity and political instability have been identified as significant underlying causes of migratory movements in certain areas,

by using different analytical specifications, depending on the context. The forced and irregular migration literature included in our dataset contains a relatively limited number of quantitative analyses (cross-country comparisons and case-studies) based on a variety of theoretical approaches – from neoclassical to sociological theories of refugee movements – and a set of qualitative studies often based on in-depth interviews with asylum seekers.

Although meaningful comparisons are particularly hard to make in this literature due to vast differences across studies, results generally converge on the importance of **conflict, violence, (real or perceived) threats to personal security, political instability, and human rights abuses** as determinants of migratory movements in certain contexts.

Scholars have used a variety of categorisations for violence in different contexts, ranging from **dissident violence versus state-sponsored violence** (Shellman and Stewart, 2007), **'continuous' versus 'discontinuous' levels of violence** (Gibney et al., 1996), actual **violent events** (Ibanez and Velez, 2008), **ethnic rebellion, and generalised violence**. Some studies identified the differential impact of different patterns on internal relative to international migration, on the size of the displacement they caused, and on their relative salience in determining asylum-related movement, finding that some violence patterns may impact migration on a greater scale than others. Melander and Öberg (2007) have also attempted to assess the effect of separate elements, such as **geographical scope** and **intensity of the fighting** in the same context of generalised violence, concluding that the former is more relevant than the latter in determining people's decision to flee. However, it is hard to aggregate these findings and identify what specific factors are more or less relevant, given their large contextual dependence.

The difficulties of clearly **separating the political from the economic dimension in analyses of forced and irregular migration processes** also strongly appears in the literature. As seen in Section III, certain studies do show that conflict may be a far more relevant determinant of irregular migration than economic hardship when the two are analysed in conjunction (Crawley, 2010; Schmeidl, 1997). Correlations between various factors acting in countries of origin, transit, and destination make it difficult to isolate the role of independent drivers (e.g. political transition, economic stagnation) on asylum-related migration movements. On the one hand, conflict, generalised violence and political instability have a significant impact on people's economic security; on the other hand, underdevelopment may be a crucial factor in the increased likelihood of conflict (Castles, 2003).

Particularly in the case of the recent increase in irregular migration flows to Europe, as argued in Cummings et al. (2015), migrants seem to be driven by a **combination of conflict, political instability, and economic insecurity**, which makes any attempt to distinguish between forced and economic migrants meaningless. Routes and motivations vary between individuals, and can change during the often long and convoluted journeys to Europe, depending on conditions encountered in transit countries as well as the migration policies in place in transit and destination countries (Kuschminder et al., 2015).

## IV.2 Determinants of asylum-related migration: elements of relative divergence

### a) Demographic factors

The reviewed literature shows a somewhat inconsistent identification of a significant effect of demographic variables on migration. While it is commonly assumed that demographic pressures are a key determinant of migration, as predicted in Zelinsky's (1971) transition theory, there is divergence in the literature as to their role. Some literature identifies demographic change as a major structural determinant of human mobility. Other literature suggest that demographic pressures are only relevant when combined with other macro/meso factors, such as economic growth and availability of employment opportunities in origin countries or migration policies in destination countries. Quantifying the impact of demographic factors on migration is methodologically challenging, as population variables both affect and are affected by migration patterns and are therefore likely to be endogenous in migration models.

Some empirical evidence confirms a statistically significant impact of indicators of demographic pressure such as **population growth, total fertility rates, and population density or size** on human mobility. For instance, Hatton and Williamson (1998) found a significant effect of (lagged) fertility on emigration rates from Europe to the Americas in the 19th and early 20th century. In an analysis of the immigrant population in the U.S., Kritz (2001) notes the consistent presence of a direct relationship between origin countries' population size and the share of immigrants from those countries in the U.S. The study also shows a significant impact of population density on immigration; however, population growth does not appear to have a linear relationship with migration, as migrants in the U.S. are more likely to originate in countries with moderate population growth rates (Ibid.). Kim and Cohen (2010) concluded that population size of origin and destination countries were among the most important predictors of immigration flows into 17 wealthy countries between 1950 and 2007.

The **share of young adults in the total population** in origin countries has been identified by some other studies as a significant factor in determining higher emigration rates (Mayda, 2006) or net immigration rates into certain countries (Hatton and Williamson, 2005), confirming the neoclassical assumption that migrants move to maximise their expected lifetime return on the migration investment. Particularly Hatton and Williamson (2005) argue that the demographic imbalance between the south and the north played an important role in world migration historically, and is likely to continue to determine human movement: an increase in migration pressure, mainly driven by economic and demographic factors, **coupled with more restrictive policy regimes in destination countries**, could result in **greater irregular migration**.

Some scholars argue that although demographic and migration processes are often deeply interlinked, demographic pressure has no direct effect on migration; its effect is largely influenced by economic prospects (employment opportunities) in origin countries (de Haas, 2010). This would explain why high population growth is not associated with an increase in emigration rates from the fast-growing Gulf States, and why, conversely, low fertility rates in stagnant economies in eastern Europe correspond with high emigration rates (Ibid.). The effect of demographic factors also appears comparatively limited relative to socio-economic and political processes in de Haas's analysis of Mediterranean migration patterns (2011). In a study on migration trends in sub-Saharan African countries, Naudé (2010) also finds that population density and the share of youths in the population affect migration only indirectly, in conjunction with economic hardship, conflict and political instability in origin countries. Similar conclusions are reached in Schmeidl (1997).

## b) 'Proximity': historical, cultural and geographic factors

The literature shows some divergence on the impact of **proximity indicators between origin and destination** – be it **historical (past colonial ties), cultural (linguistic similarities), and geographic (physical distance)** – on migration patterns. Existing links are assumed to be important determinants of migration; spatial dependence between countries can stimulate mobility between them as well as the consequent formation of networks and socio-economic ties which can perpetuate bilateral migration flows. Within the neoclassical theory, proximity is assumed to reduce the physical and psychological costs related to migration, thereby facilitating mobility.

Countries with a **shared colonial past** may have similar institutions and political ties that stimulate movement between the two. In the broader economic migration literature, research by Mayda (2005), Pedersen et al. (2004) and Grogger and Hanson (2011) suggests that past colonial relationships have an impact on bilateral migration flows. However, in a later study, Mayda (2010) does not identify any significant effect of past colonial relationships on migration flows into 14 OECD countries; common language also appears to be statistically insignificant, once wage and income differentials, demographic and geographic factors, and changes in migration policies in destination countries are considered. This may suggest that political and economic factors may offset the influence of a shared colonial past on bilateral migration patterns.

Evidence on the relevance of colonial ties in the irregular and forced migration literature is equally mixed and context-dependent. Havinga and Böcker (1999) found that a shared colonial past between origin and destination countries was an important factor in shaping destination choices of asylum seekers in the Netherlands, Belgium, and to a greater extent, the UK. However, in one of the first quantitative

analyses of asylum migration to the European Union, Neumayer (2005) does not identify any significant effect of colonial ties on asylum flows. In a recent paper, shared colonial history across various source countries was also not found to influence asylum-related flows to the same destination country (Barthel and Neumayer, 2015). However, the effect of historical ties may be altered, among others, by migration policies in destination countries: for instance, these may have contributed to explain the increase in the number of Algerian asylum seekers in the UK (as opposed to France), as documented by Collyer (2005).

Contrary to results in Mayda (2010), **linguistic similarities** between origin and destination appear as significant factors in determining bilateral migration flows in Grogger and Hanson (2011), a study on positive selection of immigrants (by education level) in OECD destinations. This may indicate that the effect of a common language might emerge particularly strongly when migrants' skill levels are also included in the analysis: the perceived returns to skills in countries where migrants can speak the language are likely to be higher especially for the highly-skilled.

In the asylum-related migration context, language similarities appear as generally important factors in shaping the destination choice of asylum seekers, both in qualitative (Robinson and Segrott, 2002) and quantitative studies (Neumayer, 2004). The network effects emerging from linguistic proximity language between a set of source countries and a destination country may also have an impact on asylum flows to the latter (Barthel and Neumayer, 2015).

**Geographic proximity between origin and destination** appear to significantly influence asylum destination choices in various studies (e.g. Yoo and Koo, 2014; Kim and Cohen, 2010; Neumayer, 2005), particularly when analysed in conjunction with the presence of migrant networks (Neumayer, 2004: 2005). Gibney et al. (1996) found that although refugee populations from a specific country are dispersed across various third states, refugees do tend to go to choose a 'safe country' that is *closer* to their place of origin.

### c) Environmental factors

Man's inability to cope with natural forces as a factor determining human mobility was already identified by Petersen (1958) in what he described as 'primitive migration', or movement triggered by ecological pushes. However, the effect of **climate change and environmental degradation** on human mobility may often be mediated by intervening factors, either on the meso-macro level – such as migration policies and social norms (Petersen, 1958) – or on the micro-level – e.g. migrant resources (Renaud et al., 2011). The extent of forced displacement will also be largely dependent on the ability of affected individuals and communities to cope with or adapt to the consequences of environmental stress, as well as the capacity of national governments to assist the affected communities (Renaud et al., 2011).

Measuring the specific impact of environmental change on human displacement is particularly challenging because such impact is deeply linked with social, political and economic processes. For example, **natural disasters and environmental degradation** may have co-determined the Haitian exodus to the U.S., in combination with other factors, such as the desire to improve one's economic situation and to respond to violence or political hostility (Shellman and Stewart, 2007). Afifi (2011) shows that environmental issues such as droughts, soil degradation and deforestation significantly influence migration decisions in Niger, as they aggravate economic insecurity. By affecting people's resources, increasing environmental disruptions may also change people's reactions to political threats such as conflict and violence (Raleigh, 2011). However, some scholars argue that environmental factors are more likely to be significant for internal rather than international migration patterns (de Haas, 2010).

### d) Migration policy factors

The impact of **migration policies** on migration trends and decision-making processes is the subject of a rich and ongoing debate in the literature on migration determinants. Immigration regulations in origin, transit and destination countries are identified as significant intervening factors in influencing migration in a number of empirical analyses, but not quite so in others. While there is no doubt that international migration is broadly shaped by the policy and regulatory environment in which it occurs, the effectiveness

of migration policies in specific contexts (namely forced migration) is still contested. According to some scholars, this is, again, largely due to conceptual and methodological limitations (Czaika and de Haas, 2013).

Generally, restrictive migration policies in destination countries may increase the cost of international migration for prospective migrants, while more relaxed migration regimes can intervene in further attracting migrants to specific locations. Destination countries' migration policies may have a significant influence on the size and composition of immigration flows, as evidenced in some of the literature here considered. Hatton and Williamson (2005) identified restrictive migration policies, proxied by immigration quotas and migrant selectivity, as an important intervening factor in conditioning net immigration rate into certain countries, acting as 'a filter between the desire to migrate' and actual migration (p. 23). Czaika and de Haas (2014) demonstrate that visa restrictions affect not only migration inflows into certain countries, but also outflows of the same migrant groups: restrictions are found to encourage permanent immigration and reduce circulation, as well as alter the impact of economic fluctuations on migration dynamics.

Specifically within the asylum migration literature, Hatton (2004) suggested that restrictive policies were effective in reducing the number of asylum claims in Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, though their effect was offset by the influence of established migrant and smuggling networks. Neumayer (2004) identified a significant impact of migration policies in determining the destination country choice of asylum seekers in western Europe, citing evidence of the negative impact of visa restrictions in combination with carrier sanctions on asylum-related migration flows into certain countries (Neumayer, 2004). The implementation of stricter asylum policies in recipient countries may also affect the number of asylum applications in countries that are geographically close, as found in Barthel and Neumeyer (2015), which importantly shows that destination country choice may be also influenced by immigration policies in neighbouring countries.

However, Thielemann (2006) argues that the effectiveness of national and multilateral measures to regulate forced migration is inherently limited. The reason why migration policies could not be as effective in regulating forced migration is that factors prompting people to leave their countries are more relevant than policy variables, and largely beyond destination countries' control (Ibid.). Structural factors related to both origin and destination, such as historical, economic and geographic factors, seem to overrun the importance of migration policies in shaping migration flows generally, particularly when there are strong 'push' factors at play. This is in line with results found by Holzer, Schneider and Widmer (2000), where economic factors at origin are found to be more relevant than political factors at destination in determining asylum applications. Schaeffer (2010) also found that restrictive policies in prospective asylum countries do not necessarily lead to a decrease in asylum applications. Similarly, in Toshkov (2014) past asylum recognition rates and government positions on immigration (as proxy for asylum policy restrictiveness) are statistically significant in predicting asylum-seeker flows to European countries, but the effects are rather small and thus of little relevance. This implies that asylum flows are likely to be heavily dependent on the specific conditions of the receiving country.

In his analysis of irregular migration flows, Koser (2010) proposes that increasingly restrictive migration regimes, combined with the presence of entrepreneurial migrant smugglers, may produce greater numbers of migrants who fall into irregularity: in the presence of limited legal migration opportunities, migrants will increasingly resort to smugglers' services. Despite the inherent difficulties of investigating irregular migration trends (e.g. data availability), migration scholars would agree on the indirect effect of migration policy restrictiveness in increasing irregular migration flows (Rosenblum and Tichenor, 2012).

## e) Economic factors in the asylum destination choice

More generally, a relative divergence in the literature on forced and irregular migration is mostly found in analyses of the determinants of asylum destination country choice. The choice is the result of a complex decisional process in which certain factors can be more or less relevant depending on country-specific as well as individual-specific conditions. Policy variables such as the **availability and generosity of welfare provisions** have been identified as significant factors in shaping asylum decisions in a study by Yoo and Koo (2014); however, the opposite is true in Neumayer's analysis of asylum destination choice in Europe (2004). In the case of the UK, Robinson and Segrott (2002) argued that expectations to receive welfare

benefits and housing did not affect destination country choices, as the asylum seekers interviewed were mostly unaware of their welfare entitlements prior to arrival in the country.

General economic attractiveness and perception of good living standards seem to have a larger weight than specific factors in the asylum destination choice, although there is some extent of disagreement on whether economic considerations are predominant relative to political factors. In Kuschminder et al. (2015), asylum seekers seem to be more heavily influenced by their perception of the economic situation in the country of destination. However, other studies suggest that for the majority of asylum seekers the priority is finding safety, and destination country choice may not be the result of deliberation, but of a series of circumstances encountered during the journey (Crawley, 2010; Robinson and Segrott, 2002). Once again, this shows the difficulties in disentangling the complexity of asylum migration decisions and the impossibility to clearly separate between economic and political motives.

## **f) Summary of convergence/divergence trends**

In summary, three main points seem to emerge quite strongly from the analysis of consensus versus divergence in the literature on migration determinants. First, economic and political factors generally seem to prevail over demographic and environmental factors in explaining international (and internal) mobility patterns and migration decisions; in most cases the effects of demographic and environmental variables seem to rather depend on broader economic and political processes at work, in line with what argued by some scholars (de Haas, 2011). Secondly, specifically in the irregular and forced migration domains, recent studies emphasise the important role played by migrant formal and informal networks in facilitating migration, highlighting the relevance of communication between migrants and members of their (formal and informal) networks in a highly interconnected world with persistent cross-country inequalities. The phenomenon is, however, hard to quantify or empirically test.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, migrants are a highly heterogeneous group, and migration decisions are never static. The importance of certain factors in shaping migration decisions varies depending on a migrant's age and stage in the lifecycle, gender, familial situation, education and skill levels, and in relation to the household and community of origin. Furthermore, the factors that shape individual migration trajectories can change over the course of movement; while in transit, different factors may become relevant in onward mobility decisions than were apparent in the initial migration decision. Any investigation of the determinants of human mobility should therefore account for such heterogeneity in order to be informative. Migration motivations are particularly dynamic and likely to change along the migration trajectory in the context of irregular migration, where long journeys may expose migrants to greater vulnerabilities.

## **IV.3 Literature gaps and future research needs**

The report provided a review of the extensive and diverse body of literature examining the determinants of migration – and of forced and irregular migration in particular – as well as the factors influencing migrants' destination choices. It also identified areas of relative agreement (disagreement) in the existing literature on the significance of certain categories of factors in explaining migration, and migration to a specific destination, with a greater focus on 'asylum migration', here defined as migration which either begins with the intended purpose of, or ultimately results in, claiming asylum in a given country. The report is based on a thorough analysis of about 150 pieces of selected academic and non-academic literature, which were identified as most relevant to the topic here addressed, and all of which are listed, summarised and categorised in the annexed database. The literature considered was both theoretical and empirical, and belonging to a range of different disciplines.

While bearing in mind the significant challenges involved in comparing and synthesising such a heterogeneous body of literature, our analysis produced some interesting findings relating to 1) the specific drivers of asylum migration and 2) the main areas of convergence and divergence on the importance of certain typologies of factors in influencing migration more broadly. As regards the former, clearly political factors which indicate the partial or total absence of human or societal security, are significant determinants of



forced and irregular migration. Particularly in the case of recent asylum migration flows to Europe, however, the difficulty in separating political motives from economic ones often strongly emerges, highlighting the co-existence and co-dependence of human/societal insecurity and economic insecurity as 'push factors'.

The literature also shows broad agreement on the relevance of migrant networks, both formal and informal, as 'intervening factors' in facilitating asylum migration movements, and often influencing migrants' destination choices. The impact of other groups of factors, such as environmental and demographic ones, existing ties between origin and destination countries, as well as migration policy regimes in destination countries, is more likely to be indirect and dependent on other variables at play. There seems to be relative agreement in the literature, though, that restrictive migration policies in destination countries, coupled with economic and political factors at origin, are likely to determine an increase in irregular migration. Lastly, factors determining choice of destination countries are largely dependent on migrant-specific and context-specific conditions, and are therefore particularly hard to analyse in an aggregate fashion.

Concerning the drivers of migration more broadly, the literature shows relative convergence on the importance of economic and political factors on the micro-, meso- and macro levels in shaping migration movements, while factors that can be generally classified under the demographic, environmental, 'proximity' and migration policy categories are not consistently identified as significant in determining migration directly. Clearly, this should not be interpreted as lack of relevance of such variables, but as a consequence of the difficulty in isolating their impact. However, it must be remembered that the determinants of migration and migrants' decisions can rarely be seen as significant in separation from others, given the complexity of migratory phenomena and their embeddedness in socio-economic and geo-political processes. Also, relevance of any given factor is highly dependent on migrant personal characteristics, and often varies during the migratory journey.

This study also highlighted a number of limitations and avenues for future research. As mentioned throughout the report, not many studies specifically addressed the reality of forced and irregular migration within their theoretical frameworks, and mostly with the aim of distinguishing political from economic migrants. Systematic empirical analyses of migration movements in which the 'forced component' is explicitly dealt with are more recent and still lack the critical mass needed to make meaningful generalisations and draw systematic conclusions on factors that are more or less significant in shaping asylum seekers' choices. As argued by Schmeidl (1997), the reason why a great deal of migration literature ignored forced migration is that this has mostly been regarded as a political phenomenon. However, in the underlying dynamics of asylum-related migration, political and economic aspects are deeply intertwined. Adopting a more comprehensive perspective, i.e. an interdisciplinary approach, would be more appropriate in the investigation of asylum migration processes and would likely yield more meaningful results.

The complex nature and dynamics of international migration, and asylum migration in particular, imply that there is a significant need to improve the evidence base 1) on the motivations underlying forced and irregular migration, specifically from and to certain countries; 2) on the dynamics of migration journeys and how these shape migrants' decisions *en route*; and 3) on the impact of policies, including, but not only limited to, migration and asylum policy, on migrants' decisions and migration flows.

Generally, some of the factors that influence asylum migration decisions may not differ widely from those that shape migration choices more broadly – for instance, communication networks, which allow individuals to compare living standards across distances, or demand for migrant labour in high-income segmented labour markets, as also argued by Koser (2010). While the drivers of migration may be similar for economic/voluntary versus political/forced movements, the relative impact of intervening factors such as migrant networks and migration policies may vary widely depending on the population group under analysis, as well as migrants' individual characteristics. For instance, in the face of similar threats to personal security in a certain area (e.g. in the case of ethnic persecutions), what distinguishes people who decide to flee crossing borders from those who flee within the borders, or those who decide not to leave at all? These differences remain largely unknown. More research is also needed to identify the differentiated impact of intervening factors such as migrant networks on certain migrant groups, or migrants with certain characteristics. In other words, future research should aim to unpack the heterogeneity of migrants as a group of reference.

The absence of large-scale samples of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers represents a vast gap in the empirical study of migration determinants. This is often related to the practical difficulties of conducting methodologically robust research, including rigorous definition of and access to relevant populations for the purposes of data collection, as mentioned above. Comparative research across different countries of destination to uncover country-specific differences in asylum seekers' destination choice is also still quite modest or relatively outdated, which is especially problematic, considering the fast changing dynamics of irregular and forced migration. The EU is a topical example of such rapid changes, having seen not only a significant increase of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in 2015 relative to the previous year, but also a major shift in routes used by migrants, with the great majority among them travelling along the eastern Mediterranean route (mainly from Turkey to Greece), as opposed to the central Mediterranean route (from North Africa to Italy) <sup>(4)</sup>.

The dynamics of migration journeys also remain largely understudied. This is again due to the practical difficulties of documenting such journeys. Qualitative research conducted with migrants and asylum seekers upon arrival is not sufficient to reveal empirical insights into migrants' experiences *en route*, and their impact on subsequent migration movements. Intervening factors during the migration journeys can either facilitate or render the migration experience more difficult and harmful, thereby shaping migrants' decisions in a variety of ways that are hard to capture via in-depth interviews with migrants once they have arrived after often long and convoluted journeys.

In particular, more research is needed on the role of different networks, both formal and informal in determining migration routes as well as the choice of the destination country. As mentioned in the report, recent research highlights the increasing sophistication of human smuggling networks, which may play a crucial role in determining routes and destinations of irregular migration journeys. However, very little is known about the strategy of information dissemination employed by human smugglers, and how, more generally, such networks actually operate (Kuschminder et al., 2015). Future research will need to fill the wide gaps in knowledge of migrants' experiences in transit countries, and of how communication networks affect migration trajectories and decisions at different stages of the journey (McCauliffe, 2013).

Further, there is a need to broaden understanding of how migration policies in origin, destination, and *transit* countries affect migration decision-making processes, and whether, particularly in the latter, these constrain or stimulate onward movements. As seen in the report, there is a certain extent of disagreement in the literature as to whether migration policies in destination countries are a significant factor in determining destination choices of asylum seekers, or whether they are actually effective in shaping and controlling migration inflows. Also, not much evidence exists on the degree to which asylum flows *influence*, in turn, destination countries' migration policies and therefore the regulatory and legal environment in which future migration will occur. To what extent are countries' migration policies determined by actual flows relative to internal social and political dynamics? Also, as suggested by Davenport, Moore and Poe (2003), how does the outflow of migrants from certain countries influence the behaviour of origin countries governments, and affect political instability or internal conflicts, and therefore their impact on movement? In sum, not only the role of push/pull/intervening factors, but even the relationship between those factors is likely to be complex. Future research will need to address these questions.

More transnational and interdisciplinary research on macro-processes of global social transformations, which may affect individual agency and cause large-scale population movements, is also needed (Castles et al., 2014). Whilst it should be noted that theorising an encompassing migration model to understand migration determinants could be idealistic, attempting to account for the complexity of both structural factors and people's decisions by moving beyond simplistic models (push-pull framework), or dichotomies (forced versus voluntary movements) would be highly beneficial.

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<sup>(4)</sup> Source: IOM. See <http://missingmigrants.iom.int/>.

## V. Annexes

### V.1 Keyword List

Thematic Area	Keywords
Decision to migrate <sup>(1)</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Causes of illegal migration</li> <li>- Root causes of migration</li> <li>- Determinants of migration flows</li> <li>- Factors shaping migration</li> <li>- Push/pull factors of migration</li> <li>- Why migrants leave</li> <li>- Why people migrate</li> <li>- Migrant selection</li> <li>- Reason for migration</li> <li>- Migration motivation</li> <li>- Migration drivers</li> <li>- Migration decision-making</li> <li>- Reasons for leaving</li> <li>- Determinants of migration</li> <li>- Mitigating factors in migration</li> <li>- Influences of migration choices/decisions</li> </ul>
Decision to seek international protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Migration legal pathway</li> <li>- Factors shaping asylum choice</li> <li>- Reason to seek asylum</li> <li>- Determinant of asylum</li> <li>- Asylum seeker mobility</li> <li>- Khalid Koser</li> <li>- Refugee motivation</li> <li>- Refugee mobility</li> <li>- Asylum-seekers decision-making</li> <li>- Refugee decision-making</li> <li>- Why refugees leave</li> </ul>
Destination Country Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Host country choice</li> <li>- Migrant destination (host country) choice</li> <li>- Migrant destination (host country) determinant</li> <li>- Migrant destination (host country) preference</li> <li>- Migrant destination (host country) selection</li> <li>- Smuggler destination (host country) choice</li> <li>- Why migrants come</li> <li>- Asylum country</li> <li>- Refugee destination/host country</li> </ul>

<sup>(1)</sup> Other terms, such as *mobility*, *movement*, *immigration* and *emigration* were also used in combination with the specific search terms to capture different ways of identifying and describing migration.

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Key: (\*) Article Sourced from snowball sampling of references of annotated bibliography articles; (^) Article Sourced from Secondary Literature Database;  
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