



**Summary Report of the Roundtable Discussion:
What Pull Factors Draw Migrants to Use Illegal Routes to
the UK (at significant risk to their lives) and What Can Be
Done to Stop It?**

3-4 November 2025

In-person workshop. Cranfield University

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Home Office (nor do they represent Government policy)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI – Artificial Intelligence

BSC – Border Security Command

Eurodac – European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database

ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights

EU – European Union

FCDO – Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

HMG – His Majesty's Government

HMRC – His Majesty's Revenue and Customs

IOM – International Organization for Migration

NCA – National Crime Agency

NSEC – Network for Security Excellence and Collaboration

OCGs – Organised Crime Groups

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SALIENT – Building a Secure and Resilient World: Research and Coordination Hub

UNHCR – United Nations Human Rights Council

PREFACE

In this latest report, NSEC has continued its track record of grappling with – and throwing light upon – big, wicked problems that pose significant security challenges to the UK.

We should not underestimate the scale of this challenge – around migrants' use of illegal routes across the English Channel – because it intersects with two instincts deeply tied to our human nature.

The urge to migrate – in flight from threat or in search of opportunity – is a distinguishing feature of animal life on this planet. We marvel at the distances covered by redshank, elver, salmon and monarch butterfly; and our human existence owes much to those pulses of migration that drove Early Man to move through the Rift Valley and out across the globe between 300,000 and 60,000 years ago.

We can only imagine the challenges experienced as *Homo Sapiens* spread around the world in the distant past. But migration in recent millennia has regularly engendered culture-clash and conflict: we see this in the so-called “Migration Period” (4th - 8th Centuries CE), as tribes moved into the remnants of the Roman Empire; in the expansion of Europe – 1,000 years' later - into Africa, Asia and the Americas; and in the global flow of refugees, asylum-seekers and economic migrants in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

Humankind has an extraordinary capacity for complex cooperation around a shared identity. But there is a price to pay for the gift of social collaboration: there is almost no limit to our need to draw distinctions between “us” and “them”; and when we divide people based on their differences, we risk fuelling hatred and social unrest.

One of the ways that the modern state manages the risk is through immigration control. This can be dated back, in the UK, to the 1905 Aliens Act and Immigration Boards (although the Egyptians Act of 1530, and the Jewish Naturalisation Act of 1753, show early use of the law to exclude or include one specific group of migrants).

Today, there is a public perception that our established controls are failing, with attention given to the Organised Crime networks bringing migrants across the English Channel in small boats. This has been linked to a rising tide of ethno-nationalism in the UK: on 29 December 2025, *The Guardian* reported on a poll

carried out by the Institute for Public Policy Research that showed the number of people who believe “Britishness” is something you are born with has almost doubled in two years: a majority of the public still believe that being British is rooted in shared values, but 36% thought a person must be born British to be truly British - up from 19% in 2023.

In wrestling with these issues, our roundtable focused on one facet – the pull factors that lead migrants to put themselves and their families in danger by paying Organised Crime Groups to transport them across the English Channel. “Small Boats” only represent a portion of migrant flows and asylum claims: abuse of the visa regime system (where a legal entry is followed by asylum claim) is, together with systemic loopholes, a longer-term challenge. But these questions about pull factors have a read-across and relevance to other forms of migration to the UK. And the “small boats” carry resonance for the British public, affecting confidence in Government and engendering divisive sentiments that could fall prey to other pressures (such as disinformation campaigns by hostile actors).

I am most grateful to the diverse group of high-calibre researchers (including lawyers, historians and political & social scientists) and to hard-pressed policy-makers and practitioners (including from Home Office, Border Security Command and National Crime Agency) who came together to consider the issues and make recommendations.

I learnt a lot by listening to the debate – especially about the historical and geographical context that has shaped (and inevitably constrained) the British approach. There are a set of clear, pragmatic recommendations here that could make a difference, with the bonus of suggested actions for repairing social cohesion.

Dr. Tristram Riley-Smith

Network for Security Excellence and Collaboration

2 January 2026.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2025 the Network for Security Excellence and Collaboration (NSEC), with sponsorship from Leonardo UK, organised a two-day roundtable on pull factors for unauthorised migration to the UK. The aim of this event was to provide a platform for collaborative dialogue and strategic insights into one of the most pressing challenges in border security. The event brought together representatives of the problem owners, policymakers, civil society and researchers to exchange knowledge and insights, to ask the ‘right’ questions and brainstorm on effective policy responses. The event agenda can be found in Appendix C.

The overall question this workshop sought to address was “*What are the pull factors drawing migrants to use illegal routes to the UK (often at significant risk to their lives) and what can be done to stop it?*” In other words, the puzzle confronting the participants was not why migrants may choose illegal routes to reach a safe destination but rather why, once in a ‘safe’ country, they may choose to continue the illegal journey to reach the UK (often at significant risk to their lives). Or, in other words: what makes the UK a preferred destination for those unauthorised migrants?

Participants were divided into five syndicate groups and spent Day 1 considering the background context of the question (see Appendix D). Discussions covered a broad spectrum of themes around the nature of the challenge confronting the UK, actors and their agendas and choices, perceptions/myths, economic/political/social factors, and policies/laws/regulations, signalling that there are no straightforward answers. On the second day of the event, participants explored actions that HMG could take that would make a difference in the relationship between pull factors and unauthorised migration to the UK.

This report provides a summary of the discussions that took place over the course of those two days.¹ Participants avoided scapegoating migrants for broader socio-economic ills affecting the UK. But it was acknowledged that the social impact of the current situation was palpable, with protests in various parts of the country against government housing plans for asylum-seekers as a visible reminder of a growing sense of social disorder and a weakening of trust in the system. The

¹ During the drafting phase of this report, the Cranfield M365 Copilot account was utilised to conduct a preliminary thematic categorisation of workshop notes.

premise underpinning many of the discussions was that, in a system based on the rule of law, we should be able to have the capacity to effectively control our borders.

The main takeaways from this two-day roundtable were: (1) unauthorised migration to the UK responds to a complex interaction of push and pull factors that cannot be easily disentangled; (2) some state actions and responses, and systematic vulnerabilities, may have had the unintended consequence of becoming pull factors for irregular migration to the UK; and, (3) effective solutions require integrated strategies that go beyond deterrence, focusing on systemic reform, targeted interventions, and cross-sector collaboration.

FINDINGS

The main findings from the discussions that took place within syndicate groups and in plenary sessions are presented here, organised into key themes:

1. Nature and Scale of the Problem

- Irregular migration is a global challenge. It is not just a UK or European situation but rather a phenomenon that affects nations around the world. UNHCR figures show that: 71% of the global refugee population (and others in need of international protection) are hosted in low- and middle-income countries; 66% of those populations reside in countries neighbouring their country of origin; and over a third of these are in five countries (Colombia, Germany, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Uganda).²
- The debate in the UK is currently dominated by the arrival of unauthorised migrants in small boats.
 - Small boats are a highly visible development and, arguably, increasingly viewed by the public as a symptom of a system in crisis. Public expectations for state interventions in response to this new development risk reductionist solutions that overlook the complexity of the phenomenon of unauthorised migration to the UK.
- There are information and knowledge gaps resulting from siloed conversations that hinder the capacity of the UK to respond effectively:
 - Post-Brexit, the UK is no longer part of the Dublin Convention and has lost access to key EU mechanisms that enabled data-sharing (e.g. Eurodac³) and facilitated the return of asylum applicants who travelled to the UK from an EU Member State.⁴ However, we recognise the Government is working to rebuild and strengthen cooperation with EU Partners.

² UNHCR (2025) *UNHCR's Refugee Population Statistics Database*, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics> (accessed on 8 December 2025).

³ Eurodac is the EU's centralised biometric database that assists Member States with the management of asylum applications as well as having an important role in the detection, investigation and prevention of terrorism and serious crime. For more information please go to: <https://www.eulisa.europa.eu/activities/large-scale-it-systems/eurodac> (accessed on 8 December 2025).

⁴ European Union Agency for Asylum (2021), *EASO Asylum Report*, Malta, section 2.3.6. This report is available at: <https://www.euaa.europa.eu/easo-asylum-report-2021/236-uk-withdrawal-eu-and-its-implications-asylum> (accessed on 8 December 2025).

- The integrity of the data collected from unauthorised migrants arriving in the UK can be questioned. Unauthorised migrants often provide agenda-driven responses to maximise asylum chances, and these responses can vary across asylum-related interviews.
- There is little research on unauthorised migrants' decision-making processes after asylum has been granted.
- Academia, government, and the private sector need to become better at talking to each other, facilitating the development of integrated solutions and maximising the capacity to ask the 'right' questions.

2. Drivers of Unauthorised Migration

- We can identify various push and pull factors when discussing why people migrate and where they decide to go:
 - Push factors include poverty, instability, conflict and other forms of violence. Families can also encourage migration for remittances.
 - Pull factors include language, family and friends already living in the destination country as well as the wider diaspora network, colonial ties, and the 'imagined destination' syndrome. In the UK, the role of English language, colonial history and the perception – among migrants – of the country having a more tolerant society (compared to other European countries) all contribute to this discussion.
 - A concrete example is how unauthorised migrants deciding to cross the Channel may be influenced by the perception that the UK is considered 'softer' than France in terms of their treatment of migrants arriving illegally in the country.
- However, there are limitations to this push vs pull factor distinction:
 - Migrants' choices are not linear and therefore, we cannot assume that their decision-making processes are always based on rational choice assumptions. Push and pull factors can and do overlap and shift dynamically based on the unauthorised migrants' personal experiences in their home country and/or during transit, as well as personal and collective perceptions of the UK and the information they receive from sources and actors they trust.

- Even when considering the same destination (in this case the UK), the weight of pull factors would vary from nationality to nationality.
- Migrants do not always have agency to decide. Patterns of manipulation, coercion, control, and influence by Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) and/or families and communities back home and/or diaspora networks cannot be discarded.
- In some instances, unauthorised migrants may be coming to the UK as a last resort because their asylum claims have failed elsewhere (in the EU), especially since the UK's departure from the Dublin Convention following Brexit. It is difficult to quantify the proportion of unauthorised migrants who specifically want to reside in the UK from those who end up in the country.
- Push and pull factors do not necessarily tell us why individuals may decide to migrate illegally rather than legally.
- Unauthorised migrants' actions could act as a pull factor, amplified by social media when they share widely positive stories and suppress negative experiences about their life in the UK. This can reinforce myths that encourage others to follow the same illegal path. They may do so to avoid shame and/or disappointment for families and communities back home (especially if they have helped finance the migrant's journey). They could also be responding to threats of retaliation from smugglers.

3. Governance, Policy and Institutional Challenges

- Geography and history have led the UK to follow a border-first approach compared to the data-first approach of Continental Europe,⁵ prioritising control of physical borders and a 'pursue-based' deterrence policy, at the expense of more active control measures (such as ID cards).
- The UK's border-first model carries implications for unauthorised migrants including the lack of ID cards, the easiness to change name, access to services with fewer checks on residence, and heavy reliance of the UK economy on cash-in-hand or gig employment.
- There are indications that these factors do act as pull factors, however, a note of warning was issued when establishing a direct causal relationship. For

⁵ On this comparison see the work of Prof Christina Boswell, University of Edinburgh.

example, similar allegations of unauthorised migrants working for food delivery companies have been found in the UK and France, when these two countries have very different stances towards ID cards.

- The UK asylum system is widely cited as slow, adversarial and complex, with asylum seekers waiting for prolonged periods for an outcome on their claim. This ‘buys them time’, making removal harder. Moreover, those granted permission to remain are provided with a range of legal rights and welfare entitlements. Combined, the various aspects of the asylum system in the UK could be having the unintended consequence of becoming a pull factor encouraging more unauthorised migration to the UK.
 - It was suggested that the chances of having asylum granted in the UK are higher because in other states there is no possibility of submitting additional asylum claims once the original claim has been rejected (the UK appeals process).
 - The UK Government are implementing reforms.⁶
- The UK’s long-established refugee family reunion policy, where adults granted refugee status or humanitarian protection can have visas granted to close relatives, with the same rights and benefits as the sponsoring adult.
 - According to Home Office figures, whereas around 5,500 such visas were issued annually between 2015-2022, in 2024 alone 19,258 people arrived with a refugee family reunion visa. This increase is in part expected due to an increase in the number of individuals granted asylum.
 - Moreover, in pre-pandemic times applications for the family reunion visas were being made one or two years after the UK-based sponsor was granted asylum, but post-pandemic the period has shortened substantially, on average applications being made within a month.⁷
- The UK sets a high bar for ‘detention’ with authorities having to demonstrate ‘imminent chance of removal’; if this can’t be proven the unauthorised migrant

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-and-returns-policy-statement>

⁷ Gower, M. (2025), *Refugee Family Reunion: Government Proposals for Change*, Research Briefing, House of Commons Library, p.3. This report is available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10399/> (accessed on 8 December 2025).

must be let free, making it hard and resource-intensive to apprehend them again.

- Unauthorised migrants are often identified at ‘life-event nodes’ (birth registrations, school enrolment, healthcare needs) but subsequent interventions to remove them can be ethically and legally contentious.
- Many unauthorised migrants claiming asylum cannot be returned to the countries they originate from. Moreover, since Brexit the UK has lost the ability to return asylum applicants who travelled to the UK from an EU Member State.
- Challenges associated with the high turnover of caseworkers have contributed to the Home Office’s backlog on asylum claims. Caseworkers are often not paid nor trained adequately. Normally it takes around 1.5 years to become proficient with the exigencies of the system; the average caseworker leaves before that.
- If political will (and public support) is present, the system can be made to work, as illustrated by HMG’s response to the influx of refugees from Ukraine: 250,000 visas were issued in one year, produced usually within 48 hours, with members of local communities paid to host Ukrainian nationals in their homes.
 - Any plan of action requires a cohesive effort across several dimensions to minimise the impact on other domains.
- Economists have constructed indices that seek to measure the stringency of rules and regulations faced by asylum-seekers across different countries, to evaluate if greater or less stringency affects the total number of asylum applications.⁸ The two main findings across studies are that (i) the stringency of rules and regulations is increasing and continues to increase across most OECD countries, and (ii) applications in a country tend to go down when access policies or processing policies get more stringent; but they change very little when rights and benefit policies change; (see Appendix B)

⁸ Studies consider three broad buckets of policies: rules and policies related to border access and the ease of filing an application (**access rules**), policies related to the standards and procedures of the asylum application review (**processing rules**), and policies related to the rights and benefits of applicants and refugees (**rights and benefit rules**). See: Hatton, T. J. (2016). “Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Policy in OECD Countries” in *American Economic Review* 106(5), 441–45; - Hatton, T. J. (2017) “Refugees and Asylum Seekers, The Crisis in Europe and the Future of Policy” *Economic Policy* 32(91), 447–496; and Brekke, J.-P., M. Røed, and P. Schøne (2017). “Reduction or Deflection? The Effect of Asylum Policy on Interconnected Asylum Flows” *Migration Studies* 5(1), 65–96.

- this suggests, counterintuitively, that changing HMG rules to allow asylum-seekers to work would not act as a pull factor; but it makes fiscal sense (especially if done in conjunction with a tightening in illegal market access, e.g. by increasing Law Enforcement action) and it could address concerns from the British public about asylum-related benefits.

4. Organised Crime Groups (OCGs)

- State interventions have increased the uncertainty for OCGs, but the result has been an improvement in the agility, resilience and adaptability of these groups that outpaces states interventions.
- OCGs have professionalised their operations, away from freelancers, leveraging social media, flexible pricing, and trust networks to sustain demand through unregulated commercial practices:
 - they lower prices to increase demand: price variations depend on nationality, offering money-back guarantees for services not delivered, allowing for payment in stages, shortening journeys by removing stops in transit countries, making some journeys free in exchange for debt bondage as an alternative means of payment. *Channel crossing may be becoming more affordable for unauthorised migrants because of this pricing flexibility.*
 - they prefer to use boats compared to other illegal routes, such as lorries: boats are easier to evade detection by the state (with investment in technologies to monitor illegal lorry transits) and larger boats can carry more people than lorries, allowing smuggler groups to maintain profit margins. Airports are highly monitored environments, and the state has a strong record of detecting inadequately documented arrivals with all international passengers undergoing security checks.
 - OCGs have become adept at using social media platforms for disinformation, creating demand by 'selling' success stories of the journeys taken by other unauthorised migrants, reinforcing 'imagined' realities.
- The standing of these OCGs among communities in countries of origin can play an important role. Smugglers are sometimes seen as heroes in home communities, performing a charitable action by smuggling individuals. This allows these groups to build trust and work on referrals. However, dynamics between

smugglers and communities in countries of origin could arguably also depend on the balance between push and pull factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings, roundtable participants deliberated on a number of recommendations to guide policy and practice.

Option 1: Do Nothing

One option was to change nothing in the existing state responses and continue as normal, on the basis that conditions might look different in a few years. Source countries for irregular migration could shift, reshaping impacts on the UK's asylum and returns regime. Or alternative destinations may become more attractive for unauthorised migration flows, reducing the pressure on the UK. The risk with this approach is that the timeline to change is indeterminate, if change ever occurs, and the potential political implications of following such an approach could be significant. There is also a large risk of secondary migration, given tightening conditions in Europe.

Option 2: Do Something

The second option was to do something. As this roundtable sought to better understand how migrants could be prevented from crossing the Channel to reach the UK illegally (at risk to their own lives), it identified two related objectives:

- Undermine the impact of OCGs;
- Restore confidence and trust of the British population in the system.

The solutions and actions discussed in the roundtable can be grouped into: (1) actions within the UK; and (2) actions abroad and at the UK border. Our discussions also highlighted (3) the need to restore social cohesion within and among communities in UK society, in order to help address the tensions created by the current migration crisis. This may be peripheral to the primary focus of the roundtable, but these recommendations are also included as a contribution to national wellbeing.

2.1 Actions Within the UK

- R1. Address the asylum backlog:
 - Use AI to speed the data management and data analysis process.
 - Create lists of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ countries, and a points-based system to help speedier processing of claims, with a priority on the main “source” countries.
 - Resource the system adequately to reduce the high turnover of caseworkers; *consider involving other actors such as British embassies & diplomatic missions as well as the Ministry of Justice, (with judges encouraged to rule earlier in the chain).*
 - Limit family reunion rights.⁹
 - Introduce a consolidated identification framework that would integrate all forms of identification held by legally residing individuals (NHS number, National Insurance number, etc.), to better understand who is in the UK. *Caveat: there would be concerns over the protection of the civil liberties, and the long-term impact on state-society relations in a move from a focus on resource usage to a focus on who accesses those resources.*
- R2. Bring the ‘fight’ to the OCGs [*with involvement from the Home Office, BSC, HMRC, NCA, FCDO, local communities*]
 - Unify cross-government communication to challenge disinformation from OCGs, with a focus on social media.
 - ‘Follow the money’ through more concerted efforts to fight the profitability of unauthorised migration for smuggler groups.
 - Disrupt criminal activity of these smuggler groups in UK high streets, with assistance from local communities to gather intelligence on suspicious businesses.
 - Scale up prosecutions.

⁹ The family reunion policy was temporarily suspended by the government in September 2025 pending the introduction of reforms to the asylum system. In the words of Yvette Cooper, “the changes will bring an end to the unfair system that sees those crossing the Channel in a small boat having greater rights to settlement and family reunion than those who arrive through proper legal routes and even British citizens”. Prime Minister’s Office (2025), *UK to reform asylum offer to reduce the pull factor for small boat crossings*, Press Release, 1 October, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-reform-asylum-offer-to-reduce-the-pull-factor-for-small-boat-crossings> (accessed on 8 December 2025) . See also, Gower, M. (2025), *Refugee Family Reunion: Government Proposals for Change*, Research Briefing, House of Commons Library, available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10399/> (accessed on 8 December 2025).

- R3. Expand the knowledge base of state actors and enhance the capacity for data-driven and analysis-driven policy processes *[in collaboration with researchers]*
 - There is a need to continue to expand state actors' understanding of migratory movements/routes/systems, data collection and analysis skills, and monitoring and evaluation techniques to ensure collective efforts are leading to change with the intended effect in what is a fast-evolving reality at national, regional and international levels.
 - There is a need to find case studies of relevance to the contemporary challenges in the relationship between pull factors and unauthorised migration flows. The case of Albanian migrants in the UK was mentioned but it was deemed not applicable because: (1) these migrants were by and large economic in nature; (2) most asylum-seekers arriving illegally in the UK come from countries to which they cannot be returned.
 - It was noted that this two-day roundtable was a good example of the kind of activities needed.

2.2 Actions Abroad and at the UK border

- R4. Undo the effects of Brexit on migration/asylum cooperation with the EU, prioritising:
 - Access to Eurodac and other EU databases as well as operational coordination to improve identification of unauthorised migrants arriving in the UK.
 - Work with EU Member States on return agreements.
 - HMG participants highlighted that the UK does not directly intervene at sea; (SOLAS obligations). Stopping small boats depends heavily on French cooperation and biometrics are taken once on UK soil.
- R5. Work with partners on updating regional and international obligations to better reflect contemporary migratory dynamics:
 - To convince the EU to agree to a reform of the ECHR and other international commitments will be difficult and it could impact on the UK's capacity to share intelligence with EU Member States.
- R6. Explore agreements with transit countries to process asylum claims abroad:

- There was discussion of the contribution an ‘extension to jurisdiction’ model in France could make, building on the Eurostar precedent, to process asylum claims upstream. This measure could reduce illegal crossings of the Channel (and loss of life) but potentially result in an increase in host-country (France) sensitivities due to the greater number of unauthorised migrants remaining in its territory.
 - The discussion on overseas processing also touched on other transit countries, such as Oman for asylum seekers from Sudan and Somalia, which links well with the recommendation to increase efforts to bring externalisation measures closer to the region of origin of individuals in need of international protection.
- R7. Work on externalisation measures closer to the countries of origin of people in need of international protection *[with the FCDO and BSC on the lead, and leveraging the expertise of actors such as UNHCR/IOM, Europol/Interpol]:*
 - Explore safe and legal routes as close to countries of origin as possible.
 - Create information hubs along migratory routes to provide people with credible options as early as possible that could help counter disinformation from OCGs, in addition to public relations campaigns in partner countries and, if feasible, in countries of origin. *These measures could be applied to specific nationalities or particularly dangerous routes.*
 - Support the regions where refugees and asylum seekers originate from so that the latter can remain near home. *This support could be in the shape of measures to boost local economies and other key services in those neighbouring countries. The appropriateness of humanitarian aid vs development aid was part of the conversation to avoid harmful dependencies, and to maximise buy-in from those countries.*

2.3 Actions to Restore Social Cohesion

- R8. Rebuild trust with societal stakeholders:
 - Communicate clearly with local communities and actively involve local-level governance structures in information sharing, transparency and cohesion building & implementation; *examples include where / how asylum-seekers will be housed; community sponsorships; and information campaigns.*

- Counter hate speech and shift the narrative to societal benefits of lawful migration [*collaboration with the media is required*].
- Consider the wider applicability of existing initiatives, such as those by the Welsh government around community cohesion.

- R9. Review the integration assistance offered to individuals granted asylum or awaiting an outcome on their application [*in collaboration with local communities, diaspora groups and NGOs*]
 - Grant (or expand) the right to work/employment for individuals awaiting an outcome on their asylum claim.
 - Deliver day-to-day cultural orientation on how to integrate at the local level.

APPENDIX A – READING LIST

Richard Black et al, "Migration drivers and migration choice: interrogating responses to migration and development interventions in West Africa" 10:10 *Comparative Migration Studies* (2022)

Paolo Campana and Lorraine Gelsthorpe, "Choosing a Smuggler: Decision-making Amongst Migrants Smuggled to Europe", 27 *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* (2020), pp 5-21

Jørgen Carling and Francis Collins, "Aspiration, desire and drivers of migration", 44:6 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2018), pp. 909-926

Jørgen Carling and Cathrine Talleraas, "Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation", Peace Research Institute Oslo 2016.

Jørgen Carling, "Why Do People Migrate? Fresh Takes on the Foundational Question of Migration Studies", 58:4 *International Migration Review* (2024)

Francesco Castelli , "Drivers of migration: why do people move?", *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 25:1 (2018)

Heaven Crawley, "Chance or choice? Understanding why asylum seekers come to the UK", Refugee Council (2010).

Mathias Czaika, Jakub Bijak, and Toby Prike, "Migration Decision-Making and Its Key Dimensions", 697:1 *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2021)

Heather Dickey and Maire Carroline Magante, "Exploring the drivers of internal labour migration for the regions of Great Britain", 58:7 *Regional Studies* (2022), pp.1390-1409

DW, "Why do migrants choose smugglers to cross the Mediterranean?", DW, 30 June 2023.

European Union, "Drivers of migration – Dimensions and indicators – A policy-oriented literature review", Office of the European Union, 2024.

Thibaut Girault, "The role of smuggling in shaping migrants' journeys, finances and risks in the Central Sahel", *Mixed Migration Centre*, March 2025

Hein de Haas, "Migration transitions: a theoretical and empirical inquiry into the developmental drivers of international migration", *International Migration Institute*, 2010

Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Gemma Hennessey, Caterina Mazzilli, "Subjective and intangible factors in migration decision-making: A review of side-lined literature", 11: 2 *Migration Studies* (June 2023), pp. 349–359,

Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy et al., "Asylum seeker decision-making in journeys to the United Kingdom", Report for the Home Office, 22 May 2025.

The Migration Observatory, "Who migrates to the UK and why?", *The Migration Observatory*, 15 August 2025

Anicée Van Engeland and Liesbeth Schockaert, "UNHCR, Study, All born on 01/01: A "Snapshot" Assessment of Afghan Asylum Seekers in Belgian collective Reception Centres", *UNHCR*, April 2015

Nicholas Van Hear, Oliver Bakewell and Katy Long, "Push-pull plus: reconsidering the drivers of migration", 44:6, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*

Xiaoye Yang, Deliang Chen, Ibrahim Wahab & Anders Burman, "Evidence of climate and economic drivers affecting migration in an unequal and warming world", 6:782, *Nature* (2025)

APPENDIX B – IMPLICATIONS OF RIGHT TO WORK/EMPLOYMENT BANS FROM THE ECONOMICS LITERATURE

Research in Economics shows that employment bans for asylum-seekers (i.e., the absence of a right to work for asylum-seekers) not only have negative effects on their long-term (economic) integration but are also harmful from a fiscal perspective (Ahrens et al., 2023; Brell et al., 2020; Fasani et al., 2021; Slotwinski et al., 2019; Marbach et al., 2018). The largest pan-European analysis (which does include the UK) finds that exposure to an employment ban at arrival reduces employment probability 2–4 years after arrival by 24 percentage points, and 8–10 years after arrival by, on average, 8 percentage points. These sizeable long-term effects could originate in a drastically lower acquisition of host-country-specific human capital among those affected, in particular those with initially lower human capital. Fasani et al. (2021) estimate a EUR 37.6 billion output loss for the European economies studied from the bans imposed on asylum-seekers who arrived during the 2015 refugee crisis. In a similar vein, research in Germany (Marbach et al., 2018) finds that employment bans for Yugoslavian refugees in the late 1990s slowed down their economic integration, costing the German taxpayer around EUR 40 million per year on average in terms of welfare expenditures and foregone tax revenues.

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- Ahrens, A., A. Beerli, D. Hangartner, S. Kurer, and M. Siegenthaler (2023). The Labor Market Effects of Restricting Refugees' Employment Opportunities. Discussion Paper 15901, IZA.
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There is no evidence that the right to work is a pull factor for refugees. The best available research comes from studies in which economists construct indices that seek to measure the stringency of the rules and regulations faced by asylum-seekers across different countries. The idea is to evaluate if changes in such stringency indices track changes in the total number of asylum applications. Studies consider three broad buckets of policies:

- Rules and policies related to border access and the ease of filing an application (access rules)
- Policies related to the standards and procedures of the asylum application review (processing rules), and
- Policies related to the rights and benefits of applicants and refugees (rights and benefit rules).

The right to work is part of the last bucket. The two main findings across studies are that (i) the stringency of rules and regulations is increasing and continues to increase across most OECD countries, and (ii) applications in a country tend to go down when access policies or processing policies get more stringent, while they change very little when rights and benefit policies change (Hatton, 2017, 2016; Brekke et al., 2017).

References:

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APPENDIX C – ROUNDTABLE AGENDA

Monday 03 November

12:00 Registration

12:30 Lunch

13:45 Plenary: Opening Remarks

- Launch: **Tristram Riley-Smith**
- Intro to NSEC: **Dr Richard Kirkham**, *NSEC & SALIENT*
- Intro to the Leonardo Challenge Programme: **Simon Harwood**, *Leonardo*
- Welcome to Cranfield: **Anicée Van-Engeland & Nick Lindley**, *Cranfield University*
- Open Forum: Problem-Owners invited to surface key concerns.

14:30 Breakout Groups*: **Understanding the Issues**

16:00 Tea Break

16:15 Plenary: Feedback from Breakout Groups inc. Q&A

17:30 Plenary: Off-Site Lightning Talk + Q&A, **Joe Whittle**, *Liverpool John Moores University*

18:00 Close: delegates to rooms etc

18:30 Drinks Reception

19:15 Working Dinner

Tuesday 04 November

09:00 Plenary: Off-Site Lightning Talk + Q&A, **Prof Christina Boswell**, *University of Edinburgh*

09:30 Breakout Groups* - **Addressing the Issues & recommended actions**

11:00 Coffee Break

11:15 Plenary: Feedback from Breakout Groups

12:45 Wash-Up/Close-Down

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Delegates depart

APPENDIX D – LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR BREAKOUT GROUPS

What are the pull factors drawing migrants to use illegal routes to the UK (often at significant risk to their lives) and what can be done to stop it?

Day 1 – UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

Group 1. GENERIC / CAPPING QUESTIONS

Which factors and which nationalities?

- Are the pull factors different per nationality?

Who migrates? What is the composition of migrant groups across countries: what do they have in common and what are the differences?

- Is the UK attracting more people who never wish to return to the country they left rather than some who hope things improve so are willing to stay in a different European country (believing theirs is a temporary situation)?

Can we trust any data on immigration from any sources? E.g. do we know how many Eritreans are really in a given European country?

- What can we learn from EuroDac data? *Is it working; is it helpful?*

Group 2. THE MIGRANT'S CHOICE

When migrants leave their country, do they have a specific destination in mind?

- If to Europe (in general) or another country, when is the decision taken to travel on to the UK and why?
- How often is it less about Pull factors and more last resort in response to Push factors?

Is there any distinction in pull factor prioritisation?

- How much is the chosen destination based on immutable factors (e.g. language) vs those under our control (e.g. settlement).
- Is there a difference between those motivated by genuine fear of return vs those who are more readily able to travel?
- To what extent are migrants put off by levels of border security (e.g. visa security, border patrols etc.)?
- How much are people attracted to the UK because of regularisation or illegal working opportunities? Does one clearly outweigh the other?

There is evidence of secondary movement (from EU countries to the UK): can we say why?

- what makes the UK more attractive than the first country of choice?
- how long do people stay in Europe before heading on to UK?

- Do they always try to regularise stay in Europe before coming on to UK?
- Is the UK the end of the line in Europe?

Are migrants coming to the UK drawn here by a greater understanding of (and/or empathy for) UK culture than other European cultures. Does the UK feel less “unknown”?

How much is it about language? Is it existing family ties? Or is it something more complex?

Group 3. PERCEPTIONS/MYTHS

What is the balance between perceived and real factors?

- Do the perceptions of those arriving in the UK via small boats reflect the reality (e.g. in relation to “the offer”)?

What channels of communication - with what messages - inform decisions?

- Is there a feedback loop from migrants who made the journey (and what impact does this have)?
- Is there evidence that OCG (or other) “marketing campaigns” shape / influence judgments?
- What about other media coverage?
- How much mis- / disinformation is there?
- Are migrants aware of settlement offers in potential countries of origin?

Group 4. LAWS/POLICIES/REGULATIONS/ECONOMIC FACTORS

Are tougher laws regarding migration in European countries pushing irregular migration to the UK?

- Is there widespread knowledge of the Dublin Regulation?
- Is the absence of Dublin powers in UK an issue?
- Does the UK return fewer failed asylum seekers than European counterparts?

Is the UK asylum offer more generous than those of other nations?

Are regulations easier (e.g. for taking up work)?

To what extent is it true UK's black market for jobs/pay attracts irregular migrants?

Group 5. ORGANISED CRIME GROUPS

Why do OCGs offer onward transition to UK rather than to other countries ... even those easier to get to?

To what extent are OCGs put off by levels of border security (e.g. visa security, border patrols etc.)?

To what extent do OCGs “upsell” the UK (as opposed to meeting existing demand)?

Day 2 – ADDRESSING THE ISSUES & RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

All Groups. WHAT CAN HMG CHANGE?

Which pull factors can HMG change that would make a difference, and how?

APPENDIX E – LIST OF ATTENDEES

Ms Miriam Usiskin	University of Hertfordshire
Dr Gemma Collantes Celador	Cranfield University
Dr Krish Kandiah	Sanctuary Foundation
Mr Tristram Riley-Smith	Network for Security Excellence & Collaboration (NSEC)
Mr Nick Lindley	Cranfield University
Mr James Hill	Cranfield University
Dr Simon Harwood	Leonardo
Dr Duncan Hodges	Leonardo
Dr Joe Whittle	Liverpool John Moores
Assistant Commissioner Pippa Mills	National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC)
Dr Peter Walsh	Migration Observatory, University of Oxford
Ms Susi Bessant	Border Security Command
Dr Anicee Van Engeland	Cranfield University
Professor Elisabeth Kirtsoglou	Durham University
Dr Richard Kirkham	SALIENT/ NSEC/ The University of Manchester
Ms Vicky Turner	SALIENT/ NSEC/ The University of Manchester
Professor Christina Boswell	University of Edinburgh
Miss Laura McEvoy	Home Office- Border Security Command
Mrs Wendy Gunney	National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) Refugee Law Initiative, School of Advanced Study, University of London
Professor David Cantor	University of London
Dr Sherine McCarthy	University of Westminster
Professor Vicki Squire	University of Warwick
Ms Maria Leon	Home Office
Prof Catherine Barnard	University of Cambridge
Dr Fiona Costello	University of Birmingham
Representative	Cabinet Office
Dr Robin Hill	University of Edinburgh
Dr Hamoon Khelghat-Doost	University of Lincoln
Mrs Fiona Shepherd	Home Office
Moritz Marbach	University College of London
Ms Kat Henn	Home Office- Border Security Command
Dr Heather Johnson	Queen's University Belfast
Mr Ryan Bruce	Home Office
Mr Innes Moore	National Crime Agency
Miss Victoria Dalton	Home Office
Mr Tim Pearson	Home Office
Prof. Cristina Tealdi	Heriot-Watt University
Miss Katie Tickle	National Crime Agency
Dr Tim Forsyth	Cranfield University
Mr Richard Alcock	Home Office
Mr Andrew Bailie	National Crime Agency

