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Working Paper

Asylum migration and implications for countries of origin

WIDER Discussion Paper, No. 2003/20

Provided in Cooperation with:

United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

Suggested Citation: Koser, Khalid; Van Hear, Nicholas (2003) : Asylum migration and implications for countries of origin, WIDER Discussion Paper, No. 2003/20, ISBN 9291904236, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki

This Version is available at:

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World Institute for Development Economics Research

Discussion Paper No. 2003/20

Asylum Migration and Implications for Countries of Origin

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March 2003

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize what is known about the influence of asylum migration on countries of origin. It combines an analysis of data, a review of the literature and empirical examples from our own research. In the first section we consider the effects of the absence of refugees on countries of origin, focusing on the scale of movements, the characteristics of refugees, where they go and their length of time in exile. In the second section, we review the evidence about the influence of asylum-seekers and refugees on their country of origin from exile. Third, we consider the implications for countries of origin of the return of asylum-seekers and refugees. The conclusion acknowledges the limited state of current knowledge and draws out some policy implications.

Keywords: forced migration, remittances, post-conflict reconstruction, development

JEL classification: F22, O15

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This study was prepared for the UNU/WIDER project on Refugees, International Migration and Poverty which is co-directed by George Borjas, Harvard University and Jeff Crisp, UNHCR. It was presented at the UNU/WIDER development conference on 'Poverty, International Migration and Asylum' held on 27-28 September 2002 in Helsinki, Finland.

UNU/WIDER gratefully acknowledges the financial contributions to its 2002-2003 research programme by the governments of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

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Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

Camera-ready typescript prepared by Janis Vehmaan-Kreula at UNU/WIDER
Printed at UNU/WIDER, Helsinki

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s). Publication does not imply endorsement by the Institute or the United Nations University, nor by the programme/project sponsors, of any of the views expressed.

ISSN 1609-5774
ISBN 92-9190-422-8 (printed publication)
ISBN 92-9190-423-6 (internet publication)

1 Introduction

There is a substantial literature on the implications for countries of origin of voluntary migration. In broad terms there are three main approaches. One considers the effects of the absence of migrants, with a particular focus on the concept of ‘brain drain’, whereby the educated and skilled dominate out-migration (for example, Adepoju 1991). Another considers the ways that migrants continue to interact with their country of origin from abroad, with a focus on economic remittances (for example, Lim 1992). The third approach considers the potential benefits of return migration for countries of origin (for example, Diatta and Mbow 1999).

In contrast, there has been little serious thought about the implications for countries of origin of involuntary migration. There are several reasons for this. One reason is lack of data: for example there is no systematic information on the skills and educational background of refugees, so it is impossible to assess to what extent the educated or skilled are disproportionately represented. A further reason is bias. Research and policy have overwhelmingly focused on the impacts of refugees on their country of asylum, with little consideration, for example, of the impacts of the absence of sometimes significant proportions of population on countries of origin. More broadly, research and policy have tended to frame refugees as ‘problems’ rather than considering their potential. For example, it is only very recently that research, some of which is reviewed in this paper, has shown how refugees can and do remit substantial amounts of money to their countries of origin.

There is growing consensus among scholars that the distinctions between voluntary and involuntary migrants are not always as sharp as has often been assumed (for example, Koser 1997; Van Hear 1998), and this lends conceptual validity to a paper that asks to what extent and how refugees should be incorporated in a field of study that has traditionally been the domain of economic migrants. There are also policy reasons for asking to what extent asylum-seekers and refugees can make contributions to their countries of origin. First, their numbers appear to be increasing relative to other kinds of migrant. Second, as ‘durable solutions’ become increasingly elusive, many are staying outside their countries of origin for increasing lengths of time, and even after the end of conflict in the homeland. In these circumstances, it is important to consider to what extent and how involuntary migrants can contribute to post-conflict reconstruction and, in the longer term, development of the homeland.

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize what is known about the influence of asylum migration on countries of origin. It combines an analysis of data, a review of the literature and empirical examples from our own research. In structure the paper follows the logic of the ‘refugee cycle’. We consider the effects of the absence of refugees on countries of origin, focusing on the scale of movements, the characteristics of refugees, where they go and their length of time in exile. We review the evidence about the influence of asylum-seekers and refugees on their country of origin from exile, then we consider the implications for countries of origin of the return of asylum-seekers and refugees. The conclusion acknowledges the limited state of current knowledge and draws out some policy implications.

2 The effects of exodus

Properly to understand the effect of the absence of refugees on their countries of origin would require detailed analysis of the scale of refugee flows, the characteristics of the refugees and how long they stay away. Data inadequacies greatly limit the extent to which such analysis is possible.

Table 1 shows the ratio of refugees to the total population in their countries of origin for the ten largest refugee populations in 2001-02. It is clear from this Table that refugee flows can deprive countries of a significant proportion of their population. Thus an estimated one in seven Afghans, one in ten Bosnians, one in eleven Eritreans and one in thirteen Burundians lived outside their country as refugees in 2001-02.

The implications of such significant proportions really depend on the demographic, economic and social characteristics of the refugees, and how their profile compares with that of the population remaining at home. In other words, are refugee flows depopulating particular sections of the society or undermining particular sections of the economy? Appropriate data to assess this simply do not exist on a systematic level. For example, UNHCR collates basic demographic data, but by country of asylum rather than by country of origin. Where a country of asylum predominantly hosts refugees from a single country of origin, these data can be extrapolated to provide a basic profile of refugees from that origin country.

Table 1
Ratio of refugees to populations of their country of origin for the 10 largest refugee populations

Country of origin	Refugee population	Total population (millions)	Ratio of refugees : total population
Afghanistan	3,809,600	25.29	1:7
Burundi	554,000	6.97	1:13
Iraq	530,100	23.11	1:44
Sudan	489,500	29.82	1:61
Angola	470,600	12.78	1:27
Somalia	439,900	11.53	1:26
Bosnia-Herzegovina	426,000	4.34	1:10
DRC	392,100	51.75	1:132
Viet Nam	353,200	80.55	1:228
Eritrea	333,100	3.81	1:11

Sources: UNHCR (2002), Turner (2001).

Of the countries listed in Table 1, Afghanistan is one for which country of asylum data can be extrapolated in this way. This is because the vast majority of refugees in Pakistan and Iran are from Afghanistan, and at the same time the vast majority of refugees from Afghanistan are located in those two countries. But even then, without comparable data on the population that remains in Afghanistan, it is hard to assess the impact of the absence of certain population cohorts. Afghanistan's refugees, for example, appear to be fairly evenly balanced between the sexes – 39 per cent of the refugees in Iran are female and 53 per cent in Pakistan (UNHCR 2002). But a lack of data on the sex ratio within Afghanistan means that the extent to which refugee flows have disrupted the demographic profile in Afghanistan cannot be assessed.

Similarly, a significant proportion of Afghan refugees – 58 per cent in Iran and 37 per cent in Pakistan – are of an economically active age (in conventional terms, between 18 and 59) (UNHCR 2002). Arguably their absence is depriving Afghanistan of a significant proportion of the labour force. On the other hand, since Afghanistan has a high unemployment (or underemployment) rate, it might be argued that refugee flows have reduced competition for scarce jobs and resources.

Afghanistan is exceptional in that the location of its main refugee populations allows some analysis of this kind. It is far harder to perform a similar exercise say for Sudanese refugees, many of whom live in countries such as Uganda and Kenya which host refugees from other countries too. Thus, we know that 45 per cent of refugees in Kenya are female (UNHCR 2002), but we do not know what proportion of Sudanese refugees in Kenya are female.

It is not just conditions in the country of origin that can influence the effect of the absence of refugees, but also circumstances in exile. As is often the case among refugee populations, children (meaning those under 17) comprise an important proportion of Afghan refugees – 39 per cent in Iran and 59 per cent in Pakistan (UNHCR 2002). Leaving aside arguments about the importance of children to the social fabric of a country, the economic impact of the absence of these children will depend on factors such as how long they are in exile and the extent to which they receive an education or training there. In other words, it may not be flight that necessarily deprives a country of origin of its potential, but continued absence as the refugee acquires new skills. This raises the significance of the return of asylum-seekers and refugees, which is considered later in this paper.

A related factor is where refugees go. It is broadly true that the majority of refugees seek safety within their regions, and that the majority of refugees are therefore located in the poorer countries of the world. We might describe these refugees as living in the 'near diaspora'. An increasing proportion, however, appear to be moving longer distances to more developed countries, and live in what we may term the 'wider diaspora' (Van Hear 2002b). It is these refugees in the 'wider diaspora' who are likely to be the particularly skilled or educated or better-off, simply by virtue of the entrepreneurial spirit and more mundanely the money required to make journeys, especially as they appear to have become dominated by human smugglers (Koser 2001). Similarly, it seems likely that it is these refugees who will have greater opportunity to enhance their skills or education. Finally, they may also be the refugees least likely to return home even after conflict. Even though they may be numerically insignificant, refugees of this sort may well represent both the greatest immediate loss and the greatest potential for countries of origin.

3 Influence from exile

It has been increasingly recognized in recent years that asylum migrants enter other kinds of migration stream, joining those who move in search of employment, education, professional advancement, marriage or for other purposes. Given such 'mixed migration', asylum-seekers form part of mixed communities of migrant origin in a given country of destination (Crisp 1999). Moreover, a substantial proportion of asylum applications are by people already resident as students, visitors, tourists, or illegal immigrants (ibid.). Further, asylum-seekers are often part of family or ethnically-based networks that comprise disparate migrant categories. In these circumstances, it can be difficult to distinguish the influence of asylum migrants from other kinds of migrants on their countries of origin.

Given these considerable limitations, this part of the paper reviews what the evidence shows about the influence of asylum-seekers and refugees on their countries of origin. It starts by looking at data available on economic remittances and other transfers to migrants' countries of origin, and the part asylum-seekers may play in these transfers. Next it looks at the deployment of remittances in conflict-torn countries. We then review recent evidence that suggests that asylum-seekers and refugees can make contributions to their country of origin that extend beyond economic remittances. Finally in this section, we consider the obstacles and incentives for refugees and asylum-seekers to contribute to the reconstruction or development of their countries of origin.

3.1 The scale of refugee remittances

The macro level evidence for the contribution of asylum-seekers to countries of origin is scanty. One important contribution for which there is some evidence is remittances, but for several reasons the conclusions that can be drawn are very limited. First, the data on remittances generally are very patchy, and that for countries in conflict and which produce asylum-seekers are even more so since data collection in such countries is generally much more difficult. Second, such data that exists do not allow the contribution of asylum-seekers to be disaggregated from that of other migrants. Third, asylum-seekers in richer countries may remit both to the homeland and to neighbouring countries of first asylum to support their relatives, making their contribution more diffuse than that of other migrants. Nevertheless it is possible to draw some conclusions from the limited data available.

There is increasing evidence that remittances from abroad are crucial to the survival of communities in many developing countries, including many which produce asylum-seekers and refugees. Estimated to total US\$100 billion in 2000 (Martin 2001), migrants' remittances represent a large proportion of world financial flows and amount to substantially more than global official development assistance or aid. To underline their importance for the developing world, 60 per cent of global remittances were thought to go to developing countries in 2000.

Most of these remittances are sent by economic migrants rather than by asylum-seekers and refugees. Moreover, countries in conflict and producing refugees are not among the main territories that receive remittances. Of the ten countries receiving most officially recorded remittances, two are low-income (India and Pakistan); six are lower middle-

income (Philippines, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, Thailand and Jordan); and two are upper middle-income (Mexico and Brazil) (Gammeltoft 2002). Although there are conflicts within some of these countries – in Pakistan, India and the Philippines, for example – they are not the world’s most conflict-torn, nor are they the main producers of the world’s refugees.

On the other hand, since remittance figures are missing for many countries in conflict and that have produced refugees, such countries may be more important recipients of remittances than the officially recorded figures suggest. Even on the basis only of available data on officially recorded transfers, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Sudan – all countries that have experienced conflict and produced refugees in recent years – each received annual remittances totalling more than US\$10 million in the later 1990s (Gammeltoft 2002). In the case of Myanmar these receipts were more than US\$100 million, in the case of Colombia more than US\$650 million, and in the case of Sri Lanka close to US\$1 billion (ibid.). While these remittances may largely originate from migrants who are not asylum-seekers – labour migrants in the case of Sri Lanka, for example – at least some of the money transferred will have come from refugees. Moreover, since countries in conflict tend to receive less by way of other financial inflows, such as foreign direct investment and development assistance, the inflow of remittances, like humanitarian aid, tends to assume greater proportionate significance.

When considering these transfers, the distinction introduced above between asylum-seekers in the ‘near diaspora’ and ‘wider diaspora’ needs to be reinforced. With some exceptions, refugees in the ‘near diaspora’ seldom generate sufficient income to send money to their kin who have remained at home. They are more likely to be the conduits for resources transferred from refugees and asylum-seekers in more affluent countries, particularly when formal means of money transfer, such as banks or remittance agencies, are unreliable or non-existent. This appears to have been the case with Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the 1990s: because of the lack of a functioning banking system in Afghanistan, transfers from refugees and others in the wider diaspora were routed through this near diaspora, and became an increasingly important source of income as aid dried up (Van Hear 2002b; Jazayeri 2002). This pattern of the near diaspora in neighbouring countries being the conduit for remittances from the wider diaspora may well be replicated elsewhere.

Scrutiny of particular countries from which asylum-seekers originate appears to bear out some of these general observations. Two such countries are now examined, Sri Lanka and Somalia. Both have suffered from protracted conflict over the last two decades, and both have generated substantial diasporas which include many asylum-seekers and refugees, but also other kinds of migrant.

3.1.1 The Sri Lankan diaspora

Sri Lanka has experienced complex forms of migration within and outside the country over the last two decades or more (McDowell 1996; Fuglerud 1999; Rotberg 1999; Van Hear 2002a). At first this was largely economic migration, mainly to the Middle East; by the 1990s about 200,000 Sri Lankans went each year to work in the Middle East, as well as in South East and East Asia. Out-migration has also included a brain-drain of professionals and of people seeking educational advancement abroad. Since the civil war between the Sri Lankan armed forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

(LTTE) took off in 1983, a large outflow of asylum-seekers, mainly Tamils, has taken place. While much of this movement was initially to Tamil Nadu in southern India, many Sri Lankan Tamils have sought asylum further afield, so that a far-flung diaspora has reinvigorated the prior dispersal of Sri Lankan migrants who left for the purposes of education or to take up professional positions abroad. By the 1990s, there were some 100,000 Sri Lankan refugees in southern India, and 200,000-300,000 in Europe and North America who joined earlier professional migrants.

The reach of the wider diaspora is substantial. Statistics are not always consistent, but the most important destinations for Sri Lankan asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe and North America appear to be the UK, Canada, France, Germany and Switzerland. These countries are therefore significant bases from which mainly Tamil asylum-seekers can influence Sri Lanka economically and politically.

It is impossible to disaggregate remittances sent by refugees and asylum-seekers from those sent by other Sri Lankan migrants, but an impression can be gleaned of the contribution of asylum-seekers to total remittances. With the exception of the mid 1980s, remittances to Sri Lanka grew throughout the period of the war, from around US\$150 million in 1980 to about US\$1 billion in 2000; there were significant upward shifts in the early and mid 1990s – both times of intensified conflict (SLBFE 1998). Remittances have eclipsed official development assistance, which declined from US\$780 million in 1990 to US\$490 million in 1998, and humanitarian aid (Sriskandarajah 2002). Most of the remittances recorded are sent by labour migrants in the Middle East. However, the share of remittances has shifted geographically, hinting at a greater contribution from refugees. Remittances from the Middle East fell from a peak of 85 per cent of total remittance inflows in the mid 1980s to just under 60 per cent in 1999. This proportionate decrease is partly due to the diversification of destinations for labour migrants – to south-east Asia, for example. But it is probably also due to increases in remittances sent by refugees in Europe and North America. Moreover the Tamil diaspora's contribution is almost certainly underestimated in these estimates, because much money is remitted through informal channels known as the *hundiya* system (similar to the Somali *hawilad* system considered below). Furthermore, important outlays made by diaspora members on behalf of people at home, such as payment for overseas education or for migration abroad, are not technically recorded as remittances since they are not actually transferred to Sri Lanka. Like remittances proper, these may have significant impacts on the people left at home.

3.1.2 *The Somali diaspora*

Sri Lankan migration has many affinities with that of migrants from Somalia,¹ another country that has suffered protracted conflict. In the last 30 years there have been two main forms of movement out of Somalia, resulting in the formation of a large and influential diaspora which includes many asylum-seekers. From the early 1970s, many Somalis went as migrant labourers to work in the Gulf states during the oil boom of that time; by the end of the 1980s up to 350,000 Somalis were working in the Middle East.

¹ The term 'Somalia' is used here to refer to the territory still recognized internationally as such. In 1991, the northern part of Somalia was declared the independent Republic of Somaliland and a functioning administration was established there. However it is recognized by only a handful of countries. Some data nevertheless differentiates the two entities, and this is reflected in the text.

The outbreak of civil war in 1988 and the inter-clan fighting after the fall of Siyad Barre in 1991 displaced hundreds of thousands of Somalis within the country and drove many others to leave to seek refuge in Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen and other neighbouring countries, as well as to seek asylum further afield in the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Canada, the US and other Western states. By 2000 there were thought to be some 400,000 refugees in eastern Africa and in Yemen, and more than 70,000 refugees in Western countries, out of a total diaspora in Western countries of perhaps 200,000 (UNHCR 2000; USCR 2000; Gundel 2002).

Somalis are one of the most widely dispersed refugee populations in the world: in the late 1990s, asylum applications by Somalis were recorded in more than 60 countries. By then Somalis living in EU states were thought to number 120,000. The UK and Italy have the largest communities, based on historical and colonial ties: these long-established communities have been supplemented by more recent inflows of asylum-seekers. In 2000, the UK received nearly half the asylum applications by Somalis in European countries, nearly 4,800 out of 10,900. The Netherlands and Scandinavian countries were the next most popular destinations for asylum-seekers. These countries, together with Germany, to which asylum applications in recent years have been minimal, have substantial Somali populations, mainly based on asylum migration. North America also has substantial Somali populations: some 19,000 Somalis applied for asylum in Canada and 8,000 in the US in 1990-98 (USCR 2001; ECRE 2000).

As the forms and destinations of Somali migration have diversified, so too have the sources of remittances. While figures are only rough estimates, from the late 1970s between US\$300 million and US\$400 million were remitted annually by Somalis abroad. Currently about US\$500 million may be remitted to Somalia annually and perhaps the same amount to Somaliland (Ahmed 2000; EIU 2001). In the 1990s, the wider diaspora, partly formed by refugee outflows, accounted for a greater proportion of remittances (Ahmed 2000).

Remittances from both economic migrants and refugees have become essential components of the economies of Somalia and Somaliland. For 2000, it has been estimated that aid totalled US\$115 million and livestock exports US\$125 million; both were eclipsed by remittance inflows. While they can only be guesstimates, statistics for earlier years show that remittances have almost always exceeded other financial inflows since the 1980s (Gundel 2002).

3.2 The deployment of remittances in conflict-torn societies

Remittances from asylum-seekers, refugees and other migrants abroad can help individuals and families to survive during conflict and to sustain communities in crisis. They do so both in countries of origin and in countries of first asylum. The limited evidence available suggests that these transfers are used in ways similar to those sent by economic migrants to people at home in more stable societies – for daily subsistence needs, health care, housing and sometimes education (Van Hear 2002a). Paying off debt may also be prominent, especially when there have been substantial outlays to send asylum migrants abroad, or when assets have been destroyed, sold off or lost during conflict or internal displacement. Asylum-seekers and refugees may also fund the flight abroad of other vulnerable family members; this may not necessarily involve transfers

of money home, but rather payments for tickets, to migration agents, for documents, for accommodation and to meet other costs incurred during and after travel.

There has long been debate about the impact of remittances by economic migrants (Massey *et al.* 1998; Taylor 1999). The pessimistic view is that they are ‘wasted’ on consumption, on luxuries, on social activities, or on housing, rather than being ‘usefully’ invested in productive enterprises. A more optimistic perspective is that investment of remittances in housing, health, education and social activities contributes to and in fact constitutes ‘development’. Moreover, satisfying ‘non-productive’ demands may free up other surpluses for investment in more directly productive enterprises. ‘Non-productive’ use of remittances may also help to build the social capital on which productive activities are based. In conflict-torn societies and regions, the scope for investment in directly ‘productive’ enterprises may be very limited in conditions of great insecurity. Spending remittances on subsistence, housing, health, education and reducing debt take higher priority. But as in more stable societies, investment of remittances in social activities may be seen as the reconstruction of the social fabric, in which ‘productive’ activities are embedded. By facilitating the accumulation or repair of social capital, such investment may lay the foundation for later reconstruction and development (Goodhand *et al.* 2000; Van Hear 2002a).

Other aspects of remittance transfers attenuate their beneficial influence on the countries from which asylum migrants come. First, the distribution of remittances is uneven: not all households receive them. Though not exclusively, remittances from economic migrants tend to go to the better-off households within the better-off communities in the better-off countries of the developing world, since these households, communities and countries tend to be the source of migrants. In the case of remittances from asylum migrants, the benefits are also selective, because asylum migrants also tend to come from the better-off households among those displaced. Furthermore, the distribution is likely to have become still more skewed in recent years because of the rising costs associated with asylum migration: long distance mobility is increasingly the preserve of those who can afford to pay migration agents’ inflated fees. A second tendency attenuating the benefits of remittances in the country of origin is that instead of contributing the local economy, the beneficiaries of remittances may well be absentee landlords and traders who siphon off a portion of them, and invest the proceeds elsewhere. Other leakages – notably payments to migration agents – also mean that a substantial part of remittances filter out elsewhere. Such leakages are magnified in the case of societies in conflict.

But perhaps the most serious charge is that remittances and other transfers from asylum-seekers, refugees and others in the diaspora, may help perpetuate conflict by providing support for warring parties. This negative view of diasporas, and by implication asylum-seekers and refugees within them, has been advanced by several writers on the ‘new wars’ that have blighted many parts of the developing world in the 1990s. For Collier (2000), an influential voice in the research department of the World Bank, the existence of a large diaspora is a powerful risk factor predisposing a country to civil war, or to its resumption. Three other influential writers on the political economy of war, Anderson (1999), Kaldor (2001) and Duffield (2001), hold similar views.

Kaldor and Duffield suggest several mechanisms by which diasporas contribute to warring parties. Diaspora assistance takes direct and indirect forms, suggests Kaldor. Direct forms include arms, money and other material assistance provided by the

diaspora. Indirect forms include the appropriation by warring parties of remittances sent to individual families, converting a part of such remittances to military resources. This may be accomplished by various forms of taxation or extortion. The 'new wars' offer ample opportunities for such appropriation, not least through the checkpoints and blockades that are common features of these kinds of conflict, and which may be controlled by government forces, insurgents, warlords or freelancers (Kaldor 2001). Some diaspora members may also be conduits for the laundering of the proceeds of illicit trade and businesses controlled by warring parties (Duffield 2001).

Again, scrutiny of particular cases bears out some of these general observations about the ambivalent impact of remittances in societies in conflict. In Sri Lanka, many households in the conflict areas have been sustained by remittances from those abroad, and could not have survived without them. On the other hand, resources from the diaspora have been extracted by the LTTE, through various forms of taxation and extortion (Davis 1996; McDowell 1996; Gunaratna 1999). Furthermore, investment of transfers from abroad in productive activities in the conflict-affected areas has been minimal, given the destruction of much of the infrastructure during nearly two decades of conflict. Remittances in these areas have been mostly used to meet living costs, sometimes to fund education, and sometimes to finance migration for family members (Van Hear 2002a). This may change if the ceasefire signed early in 2002 between the government and the LTTE holds and consolidates into lasting peace. There is anecdotal evidence that since the ceasefire, Tamils abroad have been investigating the possibilities of reviving or investing in businesses in Jaffna and elsewhere. These 'green shoots' will need to be nurtured if peace, reconstruction and recovery are to be achieved.

Similar ambivalence is observable for Somali remittances. As elsewhere, the benefits of remittances in Somalia and Somaliland are uneven. Substantial sums of money are received by a relatively small proportion of households, largely because migrant workers and refugees generally come from better off families who can afford to invest in sending someone abroad: in the late 1990s it cost about US\$3,000 for an employment visa and ticket to the Gulf, and about US\$5,000 for travel documents and a ticket to Europe or North America. Furthermore, the recipients of remittances are concentrated in urban areas (Ahmed 2000). Even so, such transfers remain important flows at both the household and the aggregate level, and any threat to these flows could have dire consequences for family survival and for wider social stability, already fragile. Just such a threat arose late in 2001 in the wake of 11 September and the subsequent 'war against terrorism' when the main means by which Somalis transfer money home were seriously disrupted. The worldwide clampdown instigated by the US on the Al Barakat *hawilad* or money transfer network in November 2001 underlined the wariness with which remittances to unstable regions are now perceived. Some of the implications for Somalis of the forced closure are now explored.

3.2.1 *The Somali hawilad system*

In the absence of a reliable formal banking system, Somalis have developed novel means of transferring money. The *hawilad* system makes use of the expansion and reduced costs of telecommunications since the 1990s. The system works very simply. If a Somali refugee or asylum-seeker in East London or Minneapolis needs to send money to a relative in Somalia or in a refugee camp in Kenya, s/he takes the money in pounds or dollars to the *hawilad* broker in the country of asylum, who then contacts the *hawilad*

office in Somalia or Kenya by fax, telephone or email. Once identities have been checked and verified, the local currency equivalent is handed over to the recipient relative by the *hawilad* office in Somalia or Kenya. The system works on trust, and with commissions of around 5 per cent it is much cheaper and quicker than other forms of money transfer (Horst and Van Hear 2002).

The two largest *hawilad* companies are known as Al Barakat and Dahabshil. Both were set up following the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 and the collapse of the formal banking sector. In November 2001, Al Barakat found itself on the list of organizations suspected of links with Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. Al Barakat offices around the world were forcibly shut down, their assets confiscated and telecommunication lines cut as part of the 'global war against terrorism'. US officials justified these measures by claiming that tens of millions of dollars a year were moved by Al Barakat to Al Qaeda, but produced little evidence to support this allegation. Prior to the closure Al Barakat had the largest foreign branch network, operating in 40 countries, and an extensive distribution network in Somalia (EIU 2001). Terrorist networks may well have used the *hawilad* system, as have Somali warlords buying weapons and sponsoring war, but, as UN agencies and others in Somalia have attested, the system is mainly used by ordinary Somalis, including refugees, with no such connections (Horst and Van Hear 2002).

Although Somalis have been able to use other remittance companies, many of these companies relied on the infrastructure established by Al Barakat, and none of them have the worldwide reach of Al Barakat. The costs of transfer have increased and the ease of transfer has declined. The resulting curtailment of remittances led to real hardship. The UNDP attributed a worsening food crisis severely affecting 300,000 people and potentially a further 450,000 to a decline in remittances, as well as to drought and the continuing Saudi ban on imports of Somali livestock (EIU 2001).

3.3 Other forms of contribution by asylum-seekers and refugees

Recent research by Al-Ali *et al.* (2001), focusing on the participation of Bosnian and Eritrean refugees in post-conflict reconstruction in their countries of origin, suggests that their contributions extend beyond economic remittances alone.

Table 2 identifies the main activities found amongst the study communities. It distinguishes between those activities that are focused on the home country and those focused on the host country. Probably the most obvious activities that can contribute towards reconstruction in Bosnia or Eritrea are those with a direct impact in either country – for example investments by refugees in land or businesses. At the same time, activities that sustain or support the society and culture of the home country within the exile community were considered by both communities to be equally important in shaping the future of the home country. For example, amongst many Bosnian and Eritrean refugees there is a strong conviction that children born in host countries should learn their mother tongue, and share a national consciousness.

Table 2
Categorization of individual and community activities by type and geographical focus

	Economic	Political	Social	Cultural
Home country focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial remittances • Other remittances (for example, medicine, clothes) • Investments • Charitable donations • Taxes • Purchase of government bonds • Purchase of entry to government programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in elections • Membership of political parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to friends and family • Social contacts • 'Social remittances' • Contributions to newspapers circulated in home country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural events including visiting performers from the home country
Host country focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charitable donations • Donations to community organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political rallies • Political demonstrations • Mobilization of political contacts in host country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of social clubs • Attendance at social gatherings • Links with other organizations (for example, religious and other refugee organizations) • Contributions to newspapers • Participation in discussion groups (e.g. internet bulletin boards) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events to promote culture (e.g. concerts, theatre, exhibitions) • Education

Source: Al-Ali *et al.* (2001).

Table 2 also distinguishes between and provides examples of economic, political, social and cultural activities. The significance of economic remittances has already been considered in the preceding section: the findings from these and other case studies largely confirm the conclusions of that section. In addition, it was found that refugees make significant political contributions in their country of origin. This was particularly the case among Eritreans, who were found to have participated in the political process in three main ways. First, it is estimated that over 90 per cent of all eligible voters in the Eritrean diaspora participated in the 1993 Referendum for Independence. Second, Eritreans in the diaspora were involved in the drafting and ratification of Eritrea's Constitution. Finally, the Constitution guarantees voting rights for the diaspora in national elections, rights which exiles appear actively to exercise (Koser 2002).

It is not only people who travel between countries, but also ideas, values and cultural artefacts. These latter have been described as 'social remittances' (Levitt 1998). In the study by Al-Ali *et al.* several Bosnian intellectuals and artists stated that they aimed to produce writing and art, which could be distributed in both the host country as well as in Bosnia. Some journalists continue to work on a free-lance basis for the Bosnian media, but others have either changed their profession or tried to establish themselves in the host country. Those who continue to write for newspapers, or work for either radio or TV, stressed their aim to promote ideas of tolerance, a multi-ethnic Bosnia, democracy and freedom of speech. This was also true of artists, such as writers and painters, who are concerned with changing ideas in Bosnia as well as their host countries.

Little evidence was found of more formal channels for the transmission of 'social remittances' among either study community. In the Eritrean context, the greatest potential surrounds DEHAI, which is probably the leading website for the burgeoning 'virtual' Eritrean diaspora. DEHAI provides current news on Eritrea, links to other relevant websites, and a bulletin board for discussion. It provides one example of how the construction of a new Eritrean nation is being discussed, and at times contested, by the diaspora – in this case in a 'virtual' environment. Constraints on Internet access in Eritrea limit the extent to which discussions are impacting upon that country directly, but they may well be shaping the ideas of the diaspora, which both formally – for example through elections – and informally – through correspondence with friends and relatives in Eritrea – have a role to play in shaping the future of the country. Similar phenomena are manifested among other refugee diaspora groups. In the late 1990s, supporting to various degrees the LTTE's cause in Sri Lanka, there were reported to be 14 active Eelam websites, 16 media sites, five daily discussion groups, six human rights groups, five daily discussion groups, eight student organization home pages, 16 link pages and a Tamil electronic library (Fuglerud 1998). Jeganathan (1998) shows how visions of the Tamil aspirant homeland Eelam are constructed in various sometimes conflicting forms in 'webspace'.

3.4 Incentives and obstacles to contributing

As emphasized at the beginning of this section, it is increasingly hard to distinguish the contributions of asylum-seekers and refugees from those of other co-nationals with whom they often reside. Much of what we have said about economic and other remittances applies across the range of migrant types. Indeed, what probably distinguishes asylum-seekers in particular is that they may well face greater obstacles than most other migrants in making contributions to their countries of origin.

Table 3 is also taken from the research by Al-Ali *et al.* (2001). In investigating the capabilities of Bosnians and Eritreans to participate in relief and reconstruction in their home countries, they found an important distinction between individuals' capacities – or abilities – to participate, and their desire – or willingness – to participate. On the one hand, it is clear that where an individual is unemployed or earns only a low salary, he or she will often have little or no surplus money to contribute. In this case, unemployment, or a low salary, are factors influencing the *capacity* of the individual to participate. On the other hand, if an individual is in opposition to the government in the home country, and therefore does not want to support national reconstruction under that government, he or she may choose not to contribute despite being able to afford to. In this case, political opposition to the government in the home country is a factor influencing the *desire* of the individual to participate. The crucial implication is that the capability of any one individual to contribute to their home countries is influenced by a combination of both capacity and desire to participate.

Building upon this distinction between capacity and desire, Table 3 combines two types of information. At one level it indicates the main factors that influence both capacity and desire – distinguishing broadly between economic, political and social factors. At the same time these factors are qualified, to indicate the particular circumstances in which the capabilities of individuals to participate have found to be increased. Thus, for example, access to savings, a secure legal status in the host country and freedom of movement within the host country, have all been found to increase the capacity of individuals to participate.

One advantage of presenting the factors in this qualified way is to stress that they are dynamic. The factors listed relate to the personal circumstances of individuals, such as their contacts with friends and family in the home country, who may themselves migrate, lose contact or die. They also relate to contextual circumstances in both the host country, such as the policies of the host government towards refugees, and the country of origin, such as economic or political stability there. Changes can occur in each of these locations.

In turn, an advantage of emphasizing that the factors influencing capabilities to participate are dynamic is that this highlights the role that policy interventions can play in increasing capabilities. Many of the factors suggested to influence capacity in Table 3 are familiar from numerous other studies on the integration of refugees (e.g. Wahlbeck 1999). It is probably no surprise that better integration tends to empower refugees and increase their capacity to participate; still these findings provide yet another reason to support ongoing efforts in host countries to improve conditions for refugees. At the same time the Table implies that it is not only host governments that might usefully intervene. Obstacles to achieving many of the conditions shown to influence desire are more directly the responsibility of governments in countries of origin – including, for example, removing economic disincentives for remittances, and maintaining democracy. Finally, there are also implications for community organizations in the host countries, relating for example to factors such as social integration and gender equality within the diaspora.

Table 3
Factors increasing individual capabilities to participate in reconstruction in the home country

	Economic	Political	Social
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment • Savings • Access to welfare and pensions from home country • Access to welfare and pensions from host country • Access to information • Access to banking facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure legal status in host country • Positive attitude of host government and population towards ethnic-national diasporas • Political integration of diaspora by home government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom of movement within host country • Gender equality • Successful social integration in host country • Place of origin in home country
14 Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial stability in host country • Economic incentives (or lack of disincentives) for remittances and investments in home country • Economic stability in home country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure legal status in host country • 'Non-alienating' circumstances of flight • Positive attitude of home government towards diaspora • Political stability in home country • Lack of ethnic/religious discrimination in home country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with family and friends in home country • Links with friends and family in other host countries • Integration within the diaspora in the host country • Positive attitudes towards home country • Desire to maintain 'national consciousness'

Source: Al-Ali *et al.* (2001).

4 Return and reconstruction: the tension between repatriation and remittances

While refugees can make substantial contributions to the homeland while abroad, as the previous section showed, the return of refugees can be a substantial force for development and reconstruction of the home country, not least in terms of the financial, human and social capital they may bring home with them (Stepputat 1999). More cynically, as in the case of the protracted negotiations between UNHCR and the Eritrean Government over the return of refugees from Sudan, returning refugees can also attract significant inputs of aid (McSpadden 1999).

Governments of countries producing refugees have traditionally been suspicious of the loyalties of those who flee, for obvious reasons. However, governments of countries emerging from conflict are now increasingly coming to appreciate the potential that refugee diasporas hold, particularly in terms of the remittances they can send. This applies in particular to those in the wider diaspora. The Eritrean government was among the first to recognize this potential. After initial disappointment that Eritreans in the wider diaspora had decided not to return after Independence, the government turned its attention to mobilizing – some might say exploiting – their potential (Koser 2002). Since Independence, for example, every Eritrean in the wider diaspora has been asked by the government to pay two per cent of their income to the state, as a ‘healing tax’. During the recent conflict with Ethiopia even greater demands were made of the diaspora, and there can be little doubt that their contributions paid for the lion’s share of the conflict’s costs.

More recently, the Afghan government has made similar overtures to the Afghan diaspora. Opening a seminar on trade and investment in July 2002, President Hamid Karzai appealed to ‘all Afghans who are currently investing in other countries to come and invest inside the country, which is of national and personal benefit’ (Fox 2002). More than 1.8 million refugees have returned under assisted repatriation programmes (BAAG 2002), and others under their own steam since the fall of the Taliban late in 2001, but it is unclear how many have gone back from the wider diaspora beyond Pakistan and Iran, and still less clear how many are prepared to invest in a country still beset by insecurity. Late in 2002, the Afghanistan government was considering holding conferences in Dubai and Chicago in an effort to woo expatriate Afghan businessmen back home (BBC News 2002).

Moreover, mass return presents the dilemma that the flow of remittances to the home country will reduce. If the resolution of conflict or crisis is accompanied by large scale repatriation, the source of remittances will obviously diminish, raising potential perhaps for instability and further conflict. There may even be an argument against repatriation on these grounds. Such was the thrust of a series of appeals in the 1990s by the government of El Salvador for the US authorities to refrain from repatriating Salvadorans whose temporary protection in the US was imminently expiring (Mahler 2001).

Remittances to El Salvador grew from US\$11 million in 1980 to US\$1.34 billion in 1998. This huge increase was largely a consequence of El Salvador’s civil war from 1979-92, which displaced hundreds of thousands of people within the country and drove one million people abroad, mostly to the US. Many of those in the US sent money to

support those left at home, so that by the end of the 1990s remittances were thought to sustain at least 15 per cent of Salvadoran households. Successive Salvadoran governments have pursued a number of strategies to maintain this important flow of income – from the very people its past actions have forced to flee. Perhaps the most bizarre of these interventions was the provision by the El Salvador authorities of legal assistance in the US for Salvadorans to pursue or prolong asylum claims (Mahler 2001).

The El Salvador and other similar cases highlight potentially damaging consequences for countries of origin if asylum migrants and refugees are repatriated *en masse*. The consequences include the possibility that a diminution of remittances may lead to hardship, instability, socio-economic or political upheaval, and even the resumption or provocation of conflict – and then quite likely renewed out-migration. Repatriation of refugees may therefore imperil the very economic and political security – in broader terms the human security – that the international community claims to want to foster. It follows that policies that purport to be oriented to migrants' countries of origin cannot afford to leave those abroad, especially those asylum-seekers and refugees hosted by relatively affluent countries, out of consideration.

5 Conclusions

Following the logic of the 'refugee cycle', this paper has reviewed what we know about the influence of asylum migration on countries of origin. Our conclusions focus on policy implications rather than those of a more conceptual kind.

Initially, we need both to acknowledge the limitations of the evidence presented and to guard against generalizations. There are at least three reasons why care is needed in interpreting our evidence. First, we have emphasized that the entire exercise has been hampered by insufficient data. We do not have the systematic data required properly to assess the impact of the absence of refugees from their country of origin; neither do we have complete data either on remittances sent by asylum migrants or on remittances to countries in conflict. A second, more conceptual problem has been trying to disentangle the influence of asylum-seekers and refugees from that of other migrants and co-nationals overseas. What each of these observations reinforces, finally, is that there is simply not enough empirical research in this area. We have relied on a few, limited case studies, particularly among asylum-seekers and refugees in the wider diaspora. We do not know to what extent findings here extend to others in the wider diaspora. And we know very little about the extent to which those in the near diaspora can influence their countries of origin.

Further research is important because the limited evidence available points to some potentially important implications for refugee policy. First, it indicates that exiled communities are not necessarily isolated communities. At least some asylum-seekers and refugees are keen to maintain links with their countries of origin and try to engender change there, and at least some have considerable potential to effect change. The implication is that recent initiatives in both host countries and countries of origin to mobilize diasporas in the development process might be extended to refugees (see Sørensen and Van Hear 2002). In industrialized countries, for example, there is renewed emphasis on the links between migration and development, one element of which is to include settled migrant communities in the process of development in their home

countries. Similarly, a growing number of less-developed countries are actively reaching out to diasporas to mobilize their resources and skills.

A second policy implication is that physical return is not the only way to integrate refugees in post-conflict reconstruction. This has been an assumption underpinning UNHCR's repatriation policy for many years – witness for example the insistence that in order to be eligible to vote in national elections refugees had to return to Cambodia, Mozambique and Namibia. In contrast, the evidence presented here suggests that refugees can contribute to democratization, reconciliation and reconstruction from a distance. It is a truism of the modern world that money, goods, ideas and votes can cross international borders more easily than people. This observation is only reinforced by the growing recognition that for many refugees return is not the preferred solution.

There is a final policy implication, upon which the preceding two rest. That is the need to empower rather than to marginalize asylum-seekers and refugees. For asylum-seekers and refugees to contribute to their countries of origin, the authorities of those countries should not view refugees as disloyal, and should accept that some refugees do not want to return. Equally as important, countries of asylum could help to enhance the potential of refugees. Secure legal status and measures to overcome political, social and economic exclusion are among the initiatives that could help mobilize the potential of refugees to make a real difference. More broadly, the international community could galvanize refugees and asylum-seekers in the wider diaspora: refugee participation in international fora, such as in donors' conferences and reconciliation and peace-building efforts, could be encouraged. This would allow resources from donors and from diasporas to be more coherently planned and coordinated for both reconstruction and development purposes. This is one area in which migration and development policies could be made more congruent and coherent, without subordinating the objectives of 'development' and conflict reduction to the imperatives of migration control.

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