Research Programme

Occasional Paper Series
No. 20|2016

The dynamic nature of migration aspirations: Findings from a longitudinal study of households in Sri Lanka

Dr Dinuk Jayasuriya
Adjunct Fellow, The Australian National University
Director, Red Elephant Research

Marie McAuliffe
Sir Roland Wilson PhD Scholar
The Australian National University*

Mohiburrahman Iqbal
Researcher, Red Elephant Research

March 2016
This Occasional Paper is one of a series produced as part of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection’s (DIBP) Research Programme.

The Research Programme is intended to strengthen the evidence base on migration, trade, border management, compliance, law enforcement and national security to inform policy and operational deliberations. Research is framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan. A particular focus of the Research Programme is placing Australia’s experience in the broader global context.

More information about the Research Programme can be found at:

This Occasional Paper has been produced from research which was commissioned under the DIBP-Australian National University (ANU) Collaborative Research Programme – a component of the Department’s broader Research Programme.

The opinions, comments and analyses expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department.

*Marie McAuliffe is on long-term leave from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

For more information, contact:
Policy Research & Statistics Branch
Department of Immigration and Border Protection
PO Box 25
Belconnen
ACT 2616
Email: Irregular.Migration.Research@border.gov.au

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the funding provided by the Department and the support of the DIBP-ANU Collaborative Research Programme.
Executive Summary

1. To gain a deeper understanding of why some people migrate, and others do not, it is useful to interview both migrants and those who have not migrated. Such an approach allows us to understand better the factors that make migration a good and reasonable investment in time and money and outweigh the propensity to stay at home. However, to date, few studies have undertaken longitudinal surveys of people in source countries, and none to our knowledge have focused on such analysis in a post-conflict country.

2. We aim to present the results of a longitudinal study in Sri Lanka, principally in the form of summary statistics.\(^1\) Between February and April 2014, we undertook a random survey of 20,632 individuals in separate households throughout Sri Lanka. In February and March 2015, we re-surveyed 2,064 individuals from 'migration-aspiration' households, defined as those in which at least one household member indicated in 2014 that they wanted to migrate sometime during the next two years. We were able to contact and (re-)survey (via telephone) 355 people who had migrated and were living outside of Sri Lanka. We also re-surveyed 3,072 people in 'non-migration' households, defined as those in which no household member indicated in 2014 that they wanted to migrate.

3. This research focused on investigating: (i) the extent of migration among the potential migrants previously interviewed; and (ii) the reasons why some people chose to migrate, while others who previously wanted to migrate, appeared to have changed their minds.

4. A key finding was that the decline in migration aspirations (among those who initially wanted to migrate), was not uniform, with a greater decline among potential/actual asylum seekers than potential/actual labour migrants. For example, survey results found that 69 per cent of the households interested in migration for work in 2014 have actually migrated or still intend to do so. In comparison, only 9 per cent of households interested in asylum had actually sought asylum or still want to seek asylum. Furthermore, of the 259 households that had indicated in 2014 that they had one member who would like to seek asylum, just two households expressed the same view one year on.\(^2\) The remainder indicated that they now no longer intend to seek asylum.

5. Economic factors (earning more money overseas, sending money back to Sri Lanka and having good job opportunities) were clearly the most important reasons for migrating among over 79 per cent of all respondents.

6. Security factors (safety and law and order) were more important for respondents in ethnic minority groups (which comprised Tamils, Moors and Burghers) at 47 per cent and 37 per cent respectively, relative to the ethnic majority (the Sinhalese)\(^3\), at 26 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, among people actually migrating for work. This is likely to reflect one of the legacies of the civil war, where those in the ethnic minority, particularly Tamils and Moors in conflict areas, suffered from a security perspective.

7. Better schooling and employment opportunities for children were viewed as important reasons for migrating by 27 per cent and 24 per cent respectively by those in the ethnic minority, which is slightly higher than the 16 per cent and 19 per cent respectively by those in the ethnic majority.

---

\(^1\) Given the size of the datasets and the complexity of the topic, this paper presents summary statistics and further papers are being developed which will report the results of multivariate analysis of specific issues.

\(^2\) This does not include the 9 households from which a member did actually migrate to seek asylum.

\(^3\) Throughout this document, ethnic minority refers to Tamils, Moors and Burghers while ethnic majority refers to the Sinhalese.
8. Eighteen per cent of ethnic minority respondents indicated they were migrating because they believed their ethnicity was going to be less of an issue in another country – a noticeable difference to 4 per cent of ethnic majority respondents.

9. The key reason that former potential labour migrants and potential asylum seekers no longer want to migrate was “because the financial costs were too high” (at 79 per cent and 71 per cent respectively).

10. For those seeking asylum, the second most prominent reason for no longer wanting to migrate related to increased anti-people smuggling activity, particularly in Sri Lanka. Fifty-six per cent of respondents who previously wanted to seek asylum stated that authorities were making it more difficult to leave Sri Lanka and this was a key reason for them changing their minds.

11. The change of government in Sri Lanka (to one deemed more acceptable by minority groups) was the third most important reason why former potential labour migrants no longer wanted to seek to migrate for work, although it wasn’t a prominent reason among former potential asylum seekers.

12. Overall, the main reasons for the decline in migration aspirations relate mainly to origin country circumstances rather than destination country issues. The costs involved in migration were cited as a key reason why people no longer wanted to migrate, however, other reasons differed depending on whether they had been wanting to seek asylum or embark on migration for work.

13. The differences were pronounced between the characteristics of the 3,047 individuals from non-migration households in 2014 that did not migrate by 2015, and the 364 ‘migration-aspiration’ households where at least one person migrated by 2015. Results show that having family overseas appeared to represent a key enabler of migration. Respondents who had family overseas were more frequent among those who actually migrated (75 per cent) versus those who never migrated (35 per cent).

14. Another important enabler of migration was employment opportunities. Employment was greater among those who migrated (75 per cent) versus those who did not migrate (46 per cent).

15. Among those who actually migrated, the minority ethnic groups were highly represented (86 per cent). This was in contrast to the group that never wanted to migrate (of which only 56 per cent were from the group encompassing the minority ethnicities). After 2014, the political landscape changed. The presidential and council elections appear to have created conditions in which minority concerns are more likely to be addressed. It would be interesting to investigate if the proportion of the ethnic group who have migrated relative to those who remain is greater in 2016, after the new president has been in power for one year.

16. Being male was also more associated with those who migrated (78 per cent) versus those who never wanted to migrate (44 per cent) as was a younger average age (32 versus 46). Conversely, being married was less associated with those who migrated (66 per cent) relative to those who never wanted to migrate (91 per cent).

17. Being involved in social activities was lower among those who actually migrated (21 per cent) than those who did not migrate (53 per cent). It seems reasonable that people with strong community links were more likely to remain in Sri Lanka, and retain those links, as opposed to migrating to a country overseas.
18. The utility of a study that re-surveys the same households over time about migration is its demonstration that decision-making is dynamic and decisions can change decisively for a range of reasons – for example, some people who previously wanted to migrate now do not and vice versa. Importantly, we can show the characteristics of those who have never had an intention of migrating and those who actually migrated, and the relative weight of such factors. Moreover, in the case of Sri Lankan migration, while it is obvious that having family overseas and employment opportunities influence migration decisions, our results show that, for the average respondent who migrated, having family overseas is a stronger factor than employment. The study is also useful in highlighting why Sri Lankans who previously wanted to migrate now have no intention to migrate.

19. From a policy perspective, it may be understandable that policymakers tend to interpret changes in migrants’ behaviour as a direct result of policy changes, particularly in destination countries. The results of this study, however, highlight that caution in assuming causality on this fairly narrow aspect would be highly prudent. The study highlights that people’s circumstances, the lives they live as well as the lives they can see for themselves in the future seem most important to them. Changes in migration destination countries appear to be more abstract in nature and so are less important in assessing and re-assessing whether and how to make a life overseas.

1. Background

In 2012 the Department established an Irregular Migration Research Programme (Research Programme) to identify and address the knowledge gaps in irregular migration research, with a particular focus on placing Australia’s experience in a broader global and migration context. An underlying principle of the Research Programme is that the research should be framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan.

In “Establishing an Evidence-Base for Future Policy Development on Irregular Migration to Australia,” the first in the Research Programme’s Occasional Paper Series, Khalid Koser and Marie McAuliffe identified four main areas that require greater attention if an adequate evidence base on the drivers and possible determinants of irregular migration is to be established: decision-making on leaving origin countries; whether and how irregular migrants select their destination; the transit phase of irregular migration and sustainable returns. Koser and McAuliffe also argued that the gathering of evidence needs to account better for a range of variables, including citizenship, ethnicity and country of origin.

This occasional paper builds on the evidence base on irregular migration from Sri Lanka developed under the Department of Immigration and Border Protection’s Research Programme since 2013, and as published in several occasional papers (Jayasuriya & McAuliffe 2013; Hugo & Dissanayake 2014; Jayasuriya 2014). The research project that informed this paper drew directly on an earlier survey of 20,632 households in Sri Lanka\(^4\) by re-surveying 5,136 of those households a year later. Two main groups were re-surveyed:

- households that had at least one household member who had indicated in the earlier survey that they would like to undertake international migration of some kind (2,064 ‘migration-aspiration’ households); and
- households that did not have any members who indicated that they would like to migrate internationally (3,072 ‘non-migration’ households).

\(^4\) The sampling approached is discussed in detailed in Jayasuriya et al. 2016.
By returning to households previously surveyed, we sought to ascertain the migration outcomes of potential migrants and, in particular, whether people’s intentions on international migration had been realised. Of additional interest was to establish, of those who had migrated, where and how they had migrated and under what circumstances. In all cases, prior consent to re-survey households had been sought and received.

As with previous occasional papers, and in recognition of the audience, the paper’s contribution is empirical rather than theoretical. Similar to previous research on Sri Lankan potential and actual migrants as well as those from other countries, both protection and non-protection-related reasons for migration (and non-migration) were explored. In addition, the full range of possible reasons were asked of respondents regardless of how they intended to migrate – through an asylum route or as a labour migrant. One of the key findings from the 2014 survey of almost 21,000 households was that both protection and non-protection reasons underpin the different types of migration so that those intending or planning to migrate for work may cite protection-related reasons for doing so (Jayasuriya 2014).

2. Introduction

Academic researchers and analysts have been investigating the reasons why people migrate since Ravenstein’s laws of migration in the late nineteenth century (Ravenstein 1885). Answering this question has often been undertaken within various academic disciplines, such as geography, economics, demography, sociology, anthropology, international relations and law. As such, researchers have developed a multitude of explanations of international migration that incorporate economic factors (Hatton 2009), protection/security factors (Bohra-Mishra and Massey 2011), social networks (Davenport et al. 2003), social/cultural factors (Melander and Oberg 2007) and political factors (Barthel and Neumayer 2015), to name but a few.

Yet much of the empirical research is destination-country biased (De Haas 2011) and largely involves interviewing migrants about the reasons they migrated after their actual migration. While undoubtedly useful for providing insights into decision-making and factors which underpin migration, it is also important to understand why some people with migration aspirations, and who have similar experiences in their home countries (including limited economic opportunities and protection issues), end up migrating while the others do not. It may be that aspirations and capabilities do not always align – some people who want to migrate do not have the ability to act on that wish or intention (De Haas 2011). It may also be that the migration aspirations of people in emigration countries where a ‘culture of migration’ exists (Hugo & Dissanayake 2014) evaluate and re-evaluate their situation, depending on their economic, political, security, social, cultural circumstances at the time. Furthermore, the particularities of, and changes in, circumstances may be more important when international migration is the norm (or may even be an expectation); such is the case in societies that have developed a culture of migration.

To gain a deeper understanding of why some people migrate, and others do not, it is useful to interview both migrants and those who have not migrated. This allows us to better understand the factors that make migration a good and reasonable investment in time and money and are sufficient to outweigh the propensity to stay at home. It also provides an avenue to consider the relative weight of factors that influence migration aspirations as well as those who have no such aspirations – an aspect that is necessarily absent when conducting research limited to people in destination countries who have migrated (Carling 2002; De Haas 2011).

Large scale quantitative surveys, informed by qualitative analysis, in origin countries represent an important approach to accurately account for the dynamic nature of individual decision-making factors, ensure statistical significance and capture the views of migrants and non-migrants from origin countries. However, there are clear feasibility issues with such an approach; for example, the resources required to
conduct large-scale surveys able to gather data from a representative group of migrants and non-migrants is considerable.

We attempt to address these issues by undertaking a longitudinal study in Sri Lanka involving:

- ‘migration-aspiration’ households, defined as those in which at least one household member indicated in 2014 that they wanted to migrate sometime during the next two years, and
- ‘non-migration’ households, defined as those in which no household member indicated in 2014 that they wanted to migrate.

Between February and April 2014, we undertook a nationally representative random survey of 20,632 individuals, using probability to proportion techniques, in separate households throughout Sri Lanka.

Between February and March 2015, we re-surveyed 2,064 individuals from ‘migration-aspiration’ households, of whom we were able to contact, and re-surveyed (via telephone) 355 people who had migrated and were living outside of Sri Lanka. We also re-surveyed 3,072 people in ‘non-migration’ households.

By returning to households previously surveyed (including those that subsequently incorporated people living overseas following a migration event), we sought to ascertain the migration outcomes of potential migrants, and in particular, whether people’s intentions to migrate internationally had been realised. Furthermore, while most literature investigates reasons for migration, this study also allows the analysis of reasons for not seeking migration, including from a temporal perspective. In other words, had people’s intentions changed? Moreover, we sought to ascertain whether and why people who previously wanted to migrate changed their intentions and were intending to remain in Sri Lanka. Of additional interest was how the characteristics of those who had migrated differed from those who had previously indicated an intention to migrate but did not do so during the intervening 12-month period.

This paper includes six key sections. First, we provide a brief overview of the context in which the surveys were conducted. Second, we outline of the research methods. Third, we discuss the findings focusing on those with migration aspirations. Fourth, the differences between those who migrated and those who did not migrate are discussed. Fifth, we present findings about the choice of destination country among those who have migrated. The sixth section contains our conclusions.

3. Research context—an overview of key developments

Sri Lanka has a long history of international migration, which has increased significantly in volume during the last few decades. Departures for foreign employment, for example, increased from just over 50,000 people per annum in 2009 to over 250,000 per annum in 2011 (Jayasuriya & McAuliffe 2013). This is reflected in the six-fold increase in remittances during that same period. Migration for study purposes has also increased, with numbers almost doubling from 2004 to 2009 alone (Jayasuriya & McAuliffe 2013). Currently there is a large diaspora of Sri Lankans overseas, with an estimated 700,000 in OECD countries alone (Jayasuriya and McAuliffe 2013).

Graeme Hugo and Lakshman Dissanayake have described Sri Lanka as displaying a ‘culture of migration’, in that emigration as a livelihood strategy is deeply embedded in society, including through institutional and governmental policies, structures and processes (Hugo & Dissanayake 2014). In October 1949 and shortly after independence, for example, Sri Lanka established a department of immigration and emigration to regulate the exit and secure the rights of its citizens involved in labour migration (DIE 2015). The Bureau of Foreign Employment was established in 1985 and its main tasks included
protecting and promoting the interests of Sri Lankan workers overseas, developing skills through education and training conducive to foreign worker placement and actively promoting Sri Lankan labour in overseas labour markets (section 15, *Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act 1985*). Both the Department and the Bureau continue to operate and have grown substantially since their establishments. Background on Sri Lanka’s migration history is outlined in earlier occasional papers, including *Placing recent Sri Lankan maritime arrivals in a broader migration context* (Jayasuriya & McAuliffe 2013) and *The Process of Sri Lankan Migration to Australia Focussing on Irregular Migrants Seeking Asylum* (Hugo & Dissanayake 2014).

Just as it is important to place this study within a historical migration context, it is imperative that the key changes that have occurred during the period between the two large-scale surveys are acknowledged. Recent events signal the potential for both changes in people’s circumstances as well as their outlooks for the future, and therefore can assist in interpreting the results. In addition, changes in circumstances in destination countries are likely to be relevant, and so a brief discussion is provided on key developments.

Perhaps the most significant changes that occurred in Sri Lanka between February 2014 and February 2015 are those relating to the political terrain. During this period key elections were held, most notably those for the Northern Provincial Council (September 2014) and the national election resulting in a change in the executive President (January 2015). The Council elections were significant because it was the first time they had been held in decades and also because the Tamil National Alliance (as the main party representing the interests of the ethnic minority Tamil population) won 30 of the council’s 38 seats (Freedom House 2015). Notwithstanding allegations of intimidation in the lead-up to the council elections, and violent incidents following the announcement of the results, there is general agreement that overall the process and outcome were positive developments.

The national election heralded more significant changes, with the defeat of the former President Mahinda Rajapaksa by the more moderate Maithripala Sirisena. Observers argued that Rajapaksa’s centralized, authoritarian style had led to a lack of transparent, inclusive policy formulation and that the dominance of the Rajapaksa family in government positions had dynastic overtones (Freedom House 2015; Welikala 2015). Tamils had largely opposed Rajapaksa’s Sinhala nationalist rule, and had supported Sirisena in large numbers in the presidential election (DNA India 2015). Sirisena’s victory has sent signals to Tamils and other ethnic minorities of the possibility of improvements in civil and political society.

This optimism appears to be reflected in public perceptions of the impact the change of government has had on people’s lives. In a June 2015 survey by the SSA, ethnic minorities reported that their lives were much improved compared to June 2014, including in relation to economic conditions, the political environment, personal freedom, and the freedom of the media. While the results for the Sinhalese majority were less positive, they were more likely to be neutral rather than negative. Interestingly, SSA found that “90 per cent of the respondents agree that the government needs to do more to ensure livelihood security of war-affected individuals in the North and East of the country”, noting that this very high result was consistent across ethnicities (SSA 2015).

More recently, the August 2015 Parliamentary elections, which saw the United National Front for Good Governance* (UNFGG) coalition’s (and Sri Lankan Prime Minister) Ranil Wickremesinghe defeat the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA), spearheaded by former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, provided further optimism for Sri Lanka achieving a more cohesive society, despite the many challenges such an agenda would face. The UNFGG’s central platform—*A New Country in 60 Months: Five Point Plan*—involves “growing the economy, fighting corruption, enshrining freedom for all, investing in

---

5 The coalition partners of UNFGG include the United National Party (UNP), led by Prime Minister Wickramasinghe, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), the Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA) and the All Ceylon People’s Congress (ACPC).
infrastructure and improving the education system” and doing so by achieving good governance through including civil society in the policy implementation process (Samatha 2015).

It is also important to note the increased focus on counter people smuggling in Sri Lanka in late 2013 and 2014, as well as the bilateral cooperation between Sri Lanka and Australia, particularly from late 2013 when Australia donated two navy patrol vessels to assist the Sri Lankan navy with counter people smuggling operations (Hodge 2013).

At the same time as the political and operational terrain within Sri Lanka was changing and signs of positive developments for ethnic minorities were evident (although far from realised), the circumstances in destination countries remained fairly stable. Significant political, security or economic upheavals did not occur and the more specific policies on immigration, irregular migration and border protection remained largely stable. In the case of Australia, this involved the continuation of policy and operational responses to irregular migration focused on restricting access to territory, such as ‘turn-back’ operations, enhanced screening and removals, third-country processing of asylum seekers and resettlement of refugees, countering people smuggling operations, supporting immigration detention in transit countries, and funding capacity building in transit and origin countries.

4. Methods

In 2014, a representative sample of individuals from 20,632 households was undertaken across Sri Lanka. Of these households, 2,982 contained individuals who stated they would like to undertake migration of some kind. In 2015, we undertook a random sample of 2,500 of the households and were able to re-survey 2,064 of them in 2015. A description of the survey methodology is contained in Appendix A and in Jayasuriya et al. 2016. It also outlines the variables we investigated as potentially influencing migration intentions. A similar process was undertaken in 2015. All households re-surveyed had provided consent in the 2014 survey to be re-surveyed at a later date. Test re-tests were performed on 5 per cent of the sample.

Of the 20,632 households surveyed in February and March 2014, 17,151 did not have anyone who indicated that they wanted to undertake either regular or irregular migration within the next two years. In 2015, 3,500 of these households were randomly selected for interview (including an equal number in each district) and this sample was statistically similar to the 17,151 households from which they were drawn. Of the 3,500 households targeted, 3,072 households were reached and able to be re-surveyed.

5. Findings: Migration-aspiration households

In 2015, 2,064 ‘migration-aspiration’ households (where at least one person wanted to seek migration for work or asylum in 2014), were re-surveyed. This section illustrates whether their views relating to migration changed from 2014 and discusses why some migrated and why others decided against migration.

Overall, we found migration aspirations declined between the 2014 and 2015 surveys. Results show that 69 per cent of households interested in migration for work in 2014 have actually undertaken migration for
work in 2014-2015 or still intend migration for work. These findings corroborate research supporting Sri Lanka’s culture of migration as a livelihood strategy (Hugo and Dissanayake 2014). By comparison, only 9 per cent of households interested in asylum had actually sought asylum or still want to seek asylum.

Table 1, Columns A and B, categorises the migration-aspiration households as those in which, in 2014, at least one person indicated they:

i. Would like to migrate for work\(^\text{10}\) but not seek asylum in the next two years
ii. Would like to seek asylum but not migrate for work in the next two years
iii. Would like to seek asylum and/or migrate for work in the next two years

Columns C and D highlight what actually happened to these people between early 2014 and early 2015, and specifically, the extent to which migration events occurred within the ‘migration-aspiration’ households. We were also interested in the nature of the migration events that did occur. For each of the above (2014) categories, we ascertained if at least one person in the household:

- Actually migrated for work between the two surveys;
- Actually sought asylum between the two surveys;
- Would still/now like to migrate for work;
- Would still/now like to seek asylum; or
- Would now not like to migrate.

\(^{10}\) Technically, the question related to migration for work or migration after study to account for the range of employment/education characteristics of the population. Migration after study does not include those seeking asylum. We assume that those who migrate after study would work, although we acknowledge that this may not necessarily be the case.
Table 1: ‘Migration-aspiration’ household decisions in 2014 and 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would like to seek migration for work but not asylum in the next two years</td>
<td>1,773</td>
<td>Actually migrated for work between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actually sought asylum between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would still like to migrate for work</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now like to seek asylum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now not like to undertake migration</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to seek asylum but not migration for work in the next two years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Actually migrated for work between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actually sought asylum between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would still like to seek asylum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now not like to undertake migration</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to seek asylum or migration for work in the next two years</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>Actually migrated for work between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actually sought asylum between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would like to migrate for work</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would like to seek asylum</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now not like to undertake migration</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* It is clear that this number is a reflection of respondents who admitted their household member sought asylum, as opposed to the actual number of people who have undertaken asylum.

** Individuals contacted over the phone.

*** These households were randomly selected from those where people stated that nobody would like to seek migration in 2014. They were statistically similar to this group across factors such as sex, age, marital status, education levels, number of household members and mental distress.

Column E shows that of the 1,773 households in 2014 where at least one person stated they would like to migrate for work, 18 per cent have actually done so in the intervening 12 months. Of those that did not migrate between the two surveys, 51 per cent indicated that they still want to migrate for work, while a further 30 per cent have changed their minds and no longer want to migrate. None have sought asylum nor stated they want to seek asylum in the future.

Of the 32 households in 2014 in which at least one person indicated that they would like to seek asylum (but not to migrate for work) in the next two years, none had migrated for work nor wanted to do so in the future. Nine per cent have at least one household member who sought asylum between the two surveys although, given the sensitive nature of the question, it is possible that this is under-reported. It is perhaps more interesting that 92 per cent of households indicated that their previous aspirations to seek asylum had changed and that no one wanted to migrate in the future. Notwithstanding potential under-reporting bias, and a small sample size, this suggests that some households had changed their minds on migrating, and seeking asylum more specifically.

Of the 259 households in 2014 where at least one person indicated they would like to seek asylum and/or migrate for work in the next two years, 10 per cent have actually migrated for work, with 49 per cent still wanting to migrate for work and 38 per cent now no longer wanting to migrate for work. Only 2 per cent have at least one household member who sought asylum, and another 1 per cent want to seek asylum in the future. This result highlights that while intentions to migrate for work have declined somewhat, intentions to seek asylum have reduced significantly.

The average age of the respondent who wanted to migrate in 2014, was 32 years in 2015; 79 per cent were male, 66 per cent were married and 93 per cent were in an ethnic minority (Tamil, Moors or Burgher). Figure 1 presents the 2015 status of 2014 migration-aspiration households in greater detail.
Those who migrated were significantly more likely to have family overseas, have more difficulty finding food in Sri Lanka, be working and be male than those who did not want to migrate in 2015. Age was also a factor, with those who no longer wanted to seek migration being on average 36 years old, compared to 32 years old for those who did want to seek migration. Other differences between the groups were less than 9 percentage points.

Figure 2 illustrates the reported reasons why members of an ethnic minority (Tamils, Moors and Burghers) and ethnic majority (Sinhalese) undertook migration.\(^\text{11}\)

---

\(^\text{11}\) As 355 of the 364 people who migrated undertook labour migration, the analysis focuses on labour migration.
Economic factors (earning more money over there, sending money back to Sri Lanka and having good job opportunities) were clearly the most important reasons for migrating among over 79 per cent of all respondents.

Security factors (safety and law and order) were more important for respondents in ethnic minority groups (at 47 per cent and 37 per cent respectively) relative to the ethnic majority (at 26 per cent and 22 per cent respectively) among those actually migrating for work, noting again that this sub-sample is of those who migrated for work and did not seek asylum. This is likely to reflect one of the legacies of the civil war, where those in the ethnic minority, particularly Tamils and Moors in conflict areas, suffered from a security perspective. Following the end of the civil conflict in May 2009, the previous Sri Lankan government has been accused of ongoing human rights violations and discrimination perpetrated against ethnic minorities (Pearson 2014). This in turn may have encouraged people to seek migration for work, particularly given the restrictions placed on seeking asylum. Literature supports the notion that people may migrate for safety reasons. To illustrate, Melander and Oberg (2007) explain that a decision to migrate or stay is based on threat assessments of observable information. Such a decision could be due to past human rights abuses or because people fear they will experience similar violence to that recently inflicted on family, friends or acquaintances (Davenport et al. 2003).

Better schooling and employment opportunities for children were viewed as important reasons for migrating by 27 per cent and 24 per cent respectively by those in the ethnic minority, which is slightly
higher than the 16 per cent and 19 per cent respectively by those in the ethnic majority. This may be because ethnic minorities, particularly in post-conflict areas, were likely to have less access to good education and employment opportunities than the ethnic majority.

A noticeable difference was the 18 per cent of ethnic minority respondents who were migrating because they believed their ethnicity was going to be less of an issue in another country, compared to 4 per cent of ethnic majority respondents. This potentially points to discrimination experienced by ethnic minority groups in Sri Lanka.

The presence of family was more important to the ethnic minority (21 per cent) relative to the ethnic majority (12 per cent) in determining whether to migrate. Gaining citizenship of that country was only important for 14 per cent and 17 per cent of the ethnic minority and ethnic majority respectively as a reason for undertaking migration.

Of the migration-aspiration households who wanted to seek migration, 621 no longer want to migrate for work. Similarly, of those who had wanted to seek asylum, 254 stated they no longer want to do so. The reasons they no longer want to migrate are presented in Figure 3.

![Figure 3: Reasons why some ‘migration-aspiration’ households no longer want to migrate](image)

The main stated reason that former potential labour migrants and potential asylum seekers no longer want to migrate was financial (at 79 per cent and 71 per cent respectively), although other factors were reported (discussed below). Carling (2002) and De Haas (2011) argue that a person’s ability to migrate is dependent on their aspiration as well as their capabilities. ‘Aspirations’ are affected by a multitude of factors, including those related to education, health, economic livelihood, security, freedom/liberty and inequality. Capabilities, on the other hand, relate to the ability of people to migrate, and are constrained by structurally determined resource and information limitations. In the case of former potential migrants, a key deficiency in capability was financial, perpetuating ‘involuntary immobility’ (Carling 2002).
For those seeking asylum, another restriction on capabilities appears to relate to increased anti-people smuggling activity, particularly in Sri Lanka. Fifty-six per cent of respondents who previously wanted to seek asylum stated that a key reason for changing their mind was that authorities were making it more difficult to leave Sri Lanka. This reason was selected by 28 per cent for former potential labour migrants, potentially reflecting the stricter requirements by the previous Sri Lankan government on eligibility to travel overseas for work as a maid (Ghaffoor 2013) and the previous government discouraging migration to the Middle East, particularly for women with children (Rush 2014). While some suggest that policy has only limited influence on migration decisions, particularly related to asylum seeking (Bocker and Havinga 1998; Robinson and Segrott 2002), others have generally argued that destination country policies matter (Hatton 2009; Barthel and Neumayer 2015). That said, most focus has been on destination country policies, with less focus on the importance of source country policies on the migration process.

The change of government in Sri Lanka (to one deemed more acceptable by minority groups) was the fourth most important reason why former potential labour migrants no longer wanted to seek to migrate for work, although it was not a prominent reason among former potential asylum seekers. Perhaps there is a lag effect before judging the impacts of political change or, potentially, more respondents may use this as a reason after assessing the results of the parliamentary elections (which were held in August 2015, after the second round survey was completed). It would be interesting to undertake a survey in another year to assess the impact of the changed political environment in order to investigate if the possible effect increases over time.

Among other factors important in people deciding not to migrate (for asylum purposes or labour), it appears factors in Sri Lanka were more important than those in destination countries. For example, improved access to health services (25 per cent) and education services (26 per cent) was an important reason for not seeking asylum. Improved job opportunities (14 per cent) and improved safety (16 per cent) were reasons why people no longer desired to migrate for work. Conversely, economic conditions (approximately 5 per cent) and job prospects in destination countries (approximately 4 per cent) ranked quite low. Family and friends (in destination countries) discouraging immigration, and lack of support from family and friends in destination countries, were generally not important factors in the decision not to seek migration.

Appendix B presents the reasons for not wanting to seek migration for work and asylum characterised by ethnic group.

6. Findings: Non-migration vs migration-aspiration households

This section presents the temporal changes across non-migration households and highlights the difference in characteristics between non-migration households and migration-aspiration households.

5.1 Non-migration households

Of the 3,072 ‘non-migration’ households surveyed (where no one wanted to undertake migration) in 2014, 91 per cent still have that view in 2015 with only 25 actually migrating. Refer Table 2. The average age of the respondent who does not want to migrate was 46 years, 30 per cent were male, 91 per cent were married and 56 per cent were in an ethnic minority (Tamil, Moors or Burgher).
Table 2: ‘Non-migration’ household decisions in 2014 and 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households surveyed in 2015 where nobody, in 2014, wanted to seek migration in 2014^^^</th>
<th>Total number surveyed in 2015 (drawn from 2014 data)</th>
<th>Households where at least one person ...</th>
<th>Number surveyed in 2015 (drawn from 2014 data – percentages rounded)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where no one, in 2014, wanted to seek migration in 2014^^^</td>
<td>3072</td>
<td>Actually migrated for work between 2014 and 2015</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Actually sought asylum between 2014 and 2015*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now like to migrate for work</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would now like to seek asylum</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Would still not like to undertake migration</td>
<td>2783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* It is clear that this number is a reflection of respondents who admitted their household member sought asylum, as opposed to the actual number of people who have undertaken asylum.

^^ Individuals contacted over the phone.

^^^ These households were randomly selected from those where people stated that nobody would like to seek migration in 2014. They were statistically similar to this group across factors such as sex, age, marital status, education levels, number of household members and mental distress.

5.2 Comparing non-migration and migration-aspiration households

The differences were pronounced between the characteristics of the 3,047 non-migration households in 2014 that had not migrated by 2015, and the 36412 ‘migration-aspiration’ households where at least one person migrated by 2015. Refer Figure 4.

12 This includes the 355 who undertook labour migration and the 9 who sought asylum.
Results show that having family overseas appeared to represent a key enabler of migration. Of those who actually migrated, they were over twice as likely to have family overseas (75 per cent) compared to those who never migrated (35 per cent). Network theory suggests migrant networks can support the process of migration (Davenport et al. 2003). Intuitively this appears reasonable, with former migrants who have successfully gained residency in a destination country being able to provide assistance in many forms to future potential irregular migrants. Literature routinely emphasises the importance of migrant networks and the presence of family and friends in destination countries for migration (Havinga and Bocker 1999; Palloni et al. 2001; Massey et al. 1999; Liu 2013; Adhikari 2013).

Another important enabler of migration related to employment opportunities. Employment was greater among those who migrated (75 per cent) versus those who did not migrate (35 per cent). These people conceivably have more experience and more money, and thus could have the financial resources and more opportunities to gain employment in other countries. Furthermore, those who migrated were more likely to have lost a job in the last 12 months (39 per cent) relative to those who never wanted to migrate (22 per cent). Presumably, these migrants hoped to find better opportunities in other countries.
Importantly, although people who have lost a job and who have a job were more likely to migrate, this does not indicate migration cannot be curtailed by employment in Sri Lanka. Moreover, results showing those who have access to improved job opportunities in Sri Lanka (33 per cent) were more likely to remain relative to those who migrated (17 per cent), suggests that people may be encouraged to remain in Sri Lanka if they have access to acceptable jobs, not just any job.

Among those who actually migrated, the minority ethnic group was highly represented (86 per cent). This was in contrast to the group that never wanted to migrate (56 per cent). Most people who migrated did so in 2014, before the election of the new president who was considered more responsive to minority concerns. It would be interesting to investigate if the proportion of the ethnic group who migrated relative to those who remain is greater in 2016, after the new president has been in power for one year. It would also be interesting to investigate if there has been a high number of former migrants returning to Sri Lanka.

Being male was also more associated with those who migrated (78 per cent) versus those who never wanted to migrate (30 per cent) as was younger average age (32 versus 46). Conversely, being married was less associated with those who migrated (66 per cent) relative to those who never wanted to migrate (91 per cent).

Being involved in social activities was lower among those who actually migrated (21 per cent) than those who did not migrate (53 per cent). It seems reasonable that people with strong community links were more likely to remain in Sri Lanka, and retain those links, as opposed to migrating to a country overseas. Literature has demonstrated that there is a link between social networks and migration (Harpviken 2009; Adhikari 2013).
7. Findings: Destination country choice

Among the 355 who actually undertook migration for work and 9 who sought asylum, there was a slight difference between countries of preference (in 2014) and countries of actual migration (refer Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Country of preference (2014) and country of actual travel (2015)**

It is clear that actual migration to Middle Eastern countries (in 2015) was much higher than the preferences expressed in the 2014 survey. For example, in 2014, 20 per cent of respondents indicated a preference for Qatar while by early 2015 35 per cent of respondents had actually migrated to Qatar. The high proportion of people in the sample migrating to Middle Eastern countries is not surprising given Sri Lanka’s history of migration to this region (Hugo and Dissanayake 2014). It may also be reflective of opportunity rather than preference. Conversely, migration that had occurred to OECD countries by early 2015 was lower than the preferences expressed in the 2014 survey. For example, 4 per cent of people actually travelled to Australia and Canada, and 2 per cent to the UK (between the 2015 and 2014 surveys), compared to the 14 per cent, 8 per cent and 6 per cent of people who indicated a preference to migrate to Australia, Canada and the UK respectively (in 2014).

There are at least two possible reasons that are likely to account for the disparity between preferences and outcomes. Firstly, it may reflect the relative ease with which migration to Middle East states can be organised, particularly compared to most OECD countries. As such, some potential migration may have
taken place to countries that were not preferred. Secondly, the 2014 survey asked about migration intentions over the next two years and it may be that, after only one year, only some of those who had intended to migrate were able to make the arrangements necessary to do so. It would be interesting and useful to re-survey the sample in another year to find out if those with continuing aspirations have in fact migrated and, if they have, to which countries.

8. Conclusions

Building on the empirical evidence developed under the Research Programme over the last two years on irregular migration flows from Sri Lanka to Australia, this research focused on investigating:

i. the extent of migration among the potential migrants previously interviewed; and
ii. the reasons why some people chose to migrate, while other people appeared to have changed their minds and do now not want to migrate for work or protection reasons.

As a longitudinal study, and in order to answer the key research questions, it involved re-surveying respondents – comprising potential migrants as well as actual migrants – one year apart.

A key finding from the study was that the decline in actual migration and migration intentions (between the 2014 and 2015 surveys) was not uniform, with a greater decline amongst potential/actual asylum seekers than potential/actual labour migrants. For example, survey results found that 69 per cent of households interested in migration for work in 2014 have actually migrated or still intend to do so. In comparison, only 9 per cent of households interested in asylum have actually sought asylum or still want to seek asylum. Further, of the 259 households that had indicated in 2014 that they had one member who would like to seek asylum, just two households expressed the same view one year on. The remainder indicated that they now no longer intend to seek asylum. The greater proportion of those who actually undertook labour migration, as opposed to seeking asylum, is possibly more reflective of the greater opportunities available for labour migration, relative to seeking asylum.

The main reasons for the decline in migration aspirations relate to circumstances in the country of origin rather than issues in the destination country. The costs involved were cited as a key reason why people no longer wanted to migrate, however, other reasons differed depending on whether they had been wanting to seek asylum or migrate for work. Potential asylum seekers indicated that a key factor was the Sri Lankan authorities making it too difficult to leave (56 per cent compared to 28 per cent of potential labour migrants). Positive changes in security, access to health and education services were also significant. The change in government was also a reason for deciding to stay in Sri Lanka.

While it is clear that the change in government in early 2014 has had some impact on migration-related decision-making, it is less clear whether this might be a case of seeing results from our second round conducted during the ‘honeymoon period’ of a new government or be a result of changes in people’s circumstances in the lead-up to the election (such as improved access to services), or even both.

The utility of the study, therefore, is that it has demonstrated, through returning to re-survey households about migration, that decision-making is dynamic and decisions can change decisively for a range of reasons – a small number of people, for example, who had expressed no intention to migrate actually did migrate in the intervening period. The study is also useful to highlight that people’s circumstances, the lives they live as well as the lives they can see for themselves in the future seem most important to them. Changes in migration destination countries appear to be more abstract in nature and so are less important in assessing and re-assessing whether and how to make a life overseas.

---

13 This does not include the 9 households from which a member did actually migrate to seek asylum.
This paper presents findings on Sri Lanka. A key limitation of this study is the focus on research only two years apart; surveys over further years would produce insights into trends over time, particularly whether the changed political situation influences migration decisions, and return migration. Future research could also usefully involve micro studies in other countries to investigate if the drivers of migration and factors affecting migration are similar.
References


Appendix A – Data collection methods, 2014 survey

Supervisor training (pilot survey)

A local firm was subcontracted to undertake the survey. This firm has previously undertaken surveys on behalf of the first author of this paper. The survey training for supervisors began on 2 January 2014 and was completed by 5 January 2014. This team of supervisors has worked on surveys previously. They only needed to be appraised of the content of the survey, not trained in how to undertake surveys. The pilot survey commenced on 6 January 2014.

Data collection, pilot survey

Five districts (out of 25) were randomly selected for the pilot study, located in four provinces (out of a possible nine). The districts were Puttalam, Colombo, Kilinochchi, Mullativu and Batticaloa. Ten Grama Niladhari (GN) areas (the smallest administrative units in Sri Lanka) were selected using a population proportional to size method in each district, with 20 people randomly surveyed in each GN. A total of 1,000 people were surveyed, with one person randomly selected for interview per household.

Development of items to be considered in the main survey

The pilot survey was completed within 12 days, by 14 January. The survey team debriefed the survey manager and an author of this paper and relevant changes were made to the survey.

In our pilot survey, we included a large number of questions relating to protection issues and ongoing adversities based on our local knowledge. From our pool of pilot survey respondents, we selected four focus groups, each with six respondents, based on their reporting of protection issues and adversities. The first and second focus groups were of mixed gender and consisted of ethnic minorities (Tamils and Moors) and ethnic majority (Sinhalese) respectively. The third and fourth focus groups consisted of six females and six males respectively. The sample was drawn from across the five districts surveyed for the pilot. Interviewers who conducted the focus groups belonged to the same ethnic groups as the respondents and, for the third and fourth focus group, to the same gender as the respondents. Given the sensitivity of topics covered and the need to ensure confidentiality only notes were kept.

Content analysis was carried out by two researchers who independently identified protection issues and adversity items from the focus group data. The researchers then arrived at a consensus relating to the items that were most relevant. Back translation was undertaken by a tri-lingual expert while a specialist review was subsequently undertaken by another tri-lingual expert.

Cognitive interviews were then undertaken with a separate group of six males and six females, who experienced protection issues and adversity and three males and three females, who did not experience protection issues and adversity across the three main ethnic groups and sourced from the pilot survey. The tests were conducted with each individual separately to ensure that the questions were relevant, understood and appropriately interpreted, and that they were able to retrieve the relevant memory (where applicable) and were able to respond.

This list of possible influences for migration, determined through the focus group interviews, were identified as follows (not in any particular order):

- Not having enough food to eat
- Difficulty in getting a job
- Lost a job
- Improved job opportunities in your area
- Random violence experienced
- Positive assistance from the authorities (related to administrative duties, complaints, etc.)
- Good access to education
- Good access to health services in your community
- Professional service from the police in your community
- Robberies in your household or in the community
- Improved safety for yourself and family
- No permanent home to live
- Physical violence from a family member
- Physical violence from members of the police, military or government
- Physical violence by people in your own village
- Arrest by the authorities for no reason
- Blackmail by authorities
- Yourself paying a bribe to authorities
- Yourself being abducted
- Yourself receiving serious threats from the police, military or government

**Enumerator training (main survey)**

The enumerator training began on 23 January and was completed on 31 January. Given the large number of team members (83 in total), training was undertaken for the Sinhala cohort and Tamil cohort separately. Enumerators then undertook mock interviews with each other and with potential respondents. They were again debriefed, and the questionnaire finalised (largely involving changes to the flow logic in the survey program used on the tablet).

**Data collection, main survey**

The data were collected using a multi-stage sampling design. First, we selected nine districts purposefully (conflict-affected areas and the capital city of Colombo) and the other nine from the remaining 16 using simple random sampling, yielding a total of 121 primary sampling units (PSUs). In the second step, we selected sampling units second lowest administrative level (DS) based on those comprising PSUs (all in the district) using probability proportion to size (PPS) techniques weighted according to 2012 national census data. In the third step, we selected units of the lowest administrative level (GN) included at the DS level using PPS. Finally, we randomly selected households at the GN level. Our sample was stratified by district. Inverse probability weights were created taking into consideration variations in population across districts; varying response rates at village level; over/under sampling across households; sex and ethic representation (weighted according to the national census). Conflict-affected districts (nine of the 16 surveyed) were given higher weights relative to the remaining districts in the analysis. These elements were specified in all our analyses using the complex survey design command (SVY) in STATA. Given our substantial sample size and number of observations per strata, we did not calculate replicate weights. We applied probability weights and stratification using the Taylor series linearisation method to calculate standard errors. Figure 6 highlights our sampling approach.
9 districts purposely selected.  
9 districts (from the remaining 16 districts selected using simple random sampling).  
1120 Households were targeted in each district.

Higher weightings were given to the randomly selected districts.

120 DSs selected (probability proportional to size).  
8 DSs in 12 large districts.  
4 DSs in 6 small districts.

720 GNs selected (probability proportional to size).  
5 GNs in each DS (for large districts).  
10 GNs in each DS (for small districts).

28 Households randomly selected in each GN.

Slightly less than 28 household were surveyed in 47 GNs and slightly more than 28 households were surveyed in 57 GNs. Reweighting was undertaken as appropriate.

1 individual randomly interviewed in each household.  
20,160 individuals were targeted.  
20,632 individuals were surveyed.

---

14 DS stands for Divisional Secretariat while GN stands for Grama Niladhari. Small districts did not have more than 4 DSs.
iPad usage and data reliability

iPad devices were used to collect content data. A survey program, Survey Analytics, was downloaded onto the principal investigator's computer and an application, Survey Pocket, was downloaded onto all iPads used to collect data. The questionnaire was uploaded onto the survey program and each iPad application was synchronised, resulting in the questionnaire being downloaded onto the tablet.

The use of iPad devices provides multiple benefits. For example, data that was entered into the iPad in Sri Lanka would be 'synchronised' on a daily basis and hence available to the principal investigator immediately. This process reduces data entry errors that are common when transferring paper-based data onto a computer based program.

Furthermore, given that data is available in real-time at the end of each day, the principal investigator reviewed data collected for any anomalies. The use of iPad technology also allows for rapid reliability test-retests. Specifically, enumerators independent of the survey team randomly contacted approximately 5 per cent of the sample (over 1000 people) by phone two days after they had been surveyed, asking them selected questions.
Appendix B – Reasons for not wanting to seek migration by ethnicity

Figure 7 presents the reasons for not wanting to seek migration for work by ethnic majority (Sinhalese) and ethnic minority (Tamils, Moors and Burghers).

Figure 7: Reasons why people in the migration-aspiration group no longer want to seek migration for work by ethnicity

- **The financial costs are too high**: 83% (Majority), 53% (Minority)
- **It is more costly to travel to that country**: 38% (Majority), 33% (Minority)
- **The authorities have made it too difficult to leave Sri Lanka**: 28% (Majority), 20% (Minority)
- **Change of government**: 22% (Majority), 6% (Minority)
- **Improved safety for yourself and family**: 33% (Majority), 14% (Minority)
- **Good access to health services in your community**: 12% (Majority), 10% (Minority)
- **Good access to education**: 12% (Majority), 7% (Minority)
- **The friends and family in that country are no longer able to support the person who sought migration**: 11% (Majority), 16% (Minority)
- **Improved job opportunities in your area**: 33% (Majority), 11% (Minority)
- **Professional service from the police in your community**: 9% (Majority), 3% (Minority)
- **Friends and family in that country have discouraged migration there**: 22% (Majority), 5% (Minority)
- **Positive assistance from the authorities (related to administrative duties, complaints, etc.)**: 4% (Majority), 1% (Minority)
- **The economic conditions of that country have deteriorated**: 13% (Majority), 4% (Minority)
- **The job prospects in that country have deteriorated**: 6% (Majority), 2% (Minority)

n(ethnic minority)=525, margin of error ±4.22%; n(ethnic majority)=86, margin of error ±10.54%

Clearly, financial reasons ("The financial costs are too high" and "It is more costly to travel to that country") were the most prominent reasons why migration was not undertaken. This is particularly the case for the minority ethnic communities of at 83 per cent, compared with 53 per cent of the ethnic majority. This is unsurprising given that the average household in the ethnic majority is richer than the average household in the ethnic minority.

That ‘The authorities have made it too difficult to leave Sri Lanka’ was considered a reason not to seek migration, for 28 per cent and 31 per cent for ethnic minority and majority respondents respectively, is surprising. It may reflect the stricter requirements by the previous Sri Lankan government on eligibility to
travel overseas for work as a maid (Ghaffoor 2013) and the previous government discouraging migration to the Middle East, particularly for women with children (Rush 2014).

Another important reason for no longer wanting to migrate for ethnic minority groups was a change of government at 22 per cent. This contrasts with the 6 per cent in the ethnic majority who presented this as a reason. This result is not surprising given that, in January 2015, Sri Lanka’s former President had been replaced by a president considered more amenable to minority concerns.

Improved safety was a key reason why the ethnic majority no longer wanted to migrate (33 per cent), while this was less important for the ethnic minority (14 per cent). This result, where safety was a stronger reason for not undertaking migration for work for the ethnic majority relative to the ethnic minority, was similar to the result for those no longer wanting to seek asylum.

Good access to services (such as education, health, police, assistance from the authorities) were also reasons for not migrating, but were only noted as such by less than 13 per cent of the population.

Improved job opportunities was a reason why 33 per cent of ethnic majority of respondents stated they no longer wanted to seek migration, compared with 11 per cent of ethnic minority respondents. This could perhaps reflect discrimination, with more opportunities flowing to ethnic majority groups relative to ethnic minority groups.

Family and friends played a role in dissuading members of the ethnic majority to migrate (22 per cent), while this was less important among ethnic minority respondents (5 per cent). Presumably this reflects the strong, enduring role of the Tamil diaspora community in encouraging emigration.

Destination country factors were less important in discouraging migration, with less than 13 per cent of respondents noting that deteriorating economic factors in that country, and deteriorating job prospects in that country, were reasons for no longer wanting to migrate.
The key reasons why people in 2014 no longer wanted to seek asylum in 2015 by ethnicity, are illustrated in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Reason why people in the migration-aspiration group no longer want to seek asylum by ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Ethnic Minority</th>
<th>Ethnic Majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The financial costs are too high</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The authorities have made it too difficult to leave Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to education</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved access to health services in your community</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is more costly to travel to that country</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to that country has become more dangerous</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seeker policies have become harsher</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of government</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People I know who have attempted asylum have now been turned back</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends and family in that country are no longer able to support me</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional service from the police in your community</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because people who arrive in the destination country are being deported back to Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job prospects in that country have deteriorated</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved safety for yourself and family</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved job opportunities in your area</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The economic conditions of that country have deteriorated</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agents are not as active as they used to be</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends and family in that country have discouraged me from going there</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive assistance from the authorities (related to administrative duties, complaints, etc.)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n(2015)=611, margin of error ±3.90%.

The key reason not to seek asylum any longer appears to be related to the high costs involved in seeking asylum for both the ethnic minority (73 per cent) and, to a lesser extent, the ethnic majority (58 per cent). This highlights that aspirations (wanting to travel) were an insufficient condition for travel and that capabilities (i.e. sufficient financial resources) are also required (de Haas 2011).

“The authorities have made it too difficult to leave Sri Lanka” was considered by 54 per cent and 60 per cent of ethnic minority and ethnic majority respondents respectively as a reason not to seek asylum. Similarly, “Agents not being as active as they used to be” was presented as a reason for not undertaking
asylum by 2 per cent and 21 per cent of ethnic minority and ethnic majority respondents respectively. This potentially reflects the Sri Lankan government clampdown on asylum seekers leaving Sri Lanka by boat and its anti-people smuggling activities.

Improved access to services (health and education) was listed as a reason for no longer wanting to seek asylum by approximately 30 per cent of those in the ethnic minority, but only by 5 per cent of those in the ethnic majority. Hence improved access to services appears to reduce the propensity for respondents in the ethnic minority to seek asylum to a greater degree than those in the ethnic majority. These results do not suggest that the ethnic majority had better access to services, but that the there was an improvement in such services to the minority from a different (and possibly lower) base.

Improved safety was a stronger reason the ethnic majority decided not to seek asylum (28 per cent), relative to the ethnic minority (5 per cent). There is evidence to suggest that, in the past, lack of safety was due to alcohol-related violence, elephant attacks, robberies, abductions and sexual violence (Jayasuriya and Gibson 2013). It is conceivable that safety across these factors, for the ethnic majority at least, improved during 2014.

Economic factors were less important to the ethnic minority who did not seek asylum, relative to the ethnic majority. To illustrate, 4 per cent of ethnic minority respondents stated that improved job opportunities were a reason not to seek asylum, compared with 16 per cent of ethnic majority respondents. Similarly, 3 per cent of ethnic majority respondents stated that deteriorating economic conditions in the destination country were the reason for not seeking asylum, compared with 12 per cent of ethnic majority respondents.

Destination country employment factors did not seem to have had much effect in dissuading potential asylum seekers. For example, only approximately 6 per cent of respondents stated that deteriorating job prospects in a destination country was the reason for not seeking asylum. Similarly, the lack of assistance from family members in destination countries, and family members discouraging potential asylum seekers from travelling, were low on the list of reasons, at approximately 9 per cent and 5 per cent respectively across all respondents. Finally, the reason, ‘because people who are arriving in the destination country are being deported’, was presented by approximately 5 per cent of respondents as a reason for no longer wanting to seek asylum.

Hence the key reasons for not seeking asylum appear largely due to factors in Sri Lanka (i.e. the cost of travel and anti-people smuggling activity) and not those in destination countries.