Informal expressions of interest
Improving the evidence-base on migration processes and pathways of irregular migrants seeking asylum

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The HC Coombs Policy Forum at the Crawford School of Public Policy is a strategic collaboration between the Australian Government and the Australian National University. The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIISRTE) manages the administrative relationship on behalf of the government as a whole. We build partnerships between academia and the public service that enhance public policy formulation by making it easier to bring together the complementary understanding and expertise in each sector. We place a particular emphasis on work that is experimental and inter-disciplinary. We also seek to make significant contributions to public discourse on matters of policy interest to the general community, notably via our co-production relationship with ABC News24.

The HC Coombs Policy Forum is currently investigating the potential to extend this partnership model internationally. This involves:

> identifying a set of topics of policy relevance to a number of nations and then
> determining the subset of these topics for which strengthened partnership-working between government and academia, carried out at an international level, has the greatest likelihood of generating useful information, ideas and insights.

One topic of substantial importance to many governments, especially those of advanced industrial economies, is the international movement of people.

The estimated number of international migrants has increased dramatically over the past fifty years, from estimates of around 77 million in 1960 to around 214 million in 2012. During that time the pace of movement has increased as more and more international travel links have emerged. There has been an expansion in migration pathways as access to air travel has increased resulting in much greater diversity among international travellers.

As a result, international migration remains high on the agenda of many governments and at the forefront of their populations’ consciousness, especially in advanced economies where economic opportunities and the existence of strong democratic institutions can act as major attractors for potential irregular migrants.

Given the policy importance of this issue, and its inherently international nature, we are therefore assessing the potential for conducting international policy-relevant research on the movement of people in relation to specific migration pathways.

One recognised challenge is to gain a better understanding of the (often complex) decision-making processes made by potential asylum seekers and others who may wish to enter other countries in an irregular manner. There are multiple, complex, interrelated factors that stimulate consideration and act as either facilitators or barriers to both the initiation of and perpetuation of mobility, both at the level of individual actors and at the wider, societal level. However, public policy responses must, necessarily, make assumptions about these decision-making processes in order to attempt to manage this difficult situation. This raises the possibility that better evidence on how these decisions are actually made in practice, especially in regard to different contexts (cultures, levels of threat currently experienced, perceptions of different target countries, etc) might lead to more effective policy responses.

For example, in Australia the *Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers* drew attention to the incompleteness of the current evidence base on why people decide to leave their home countries and travel to particular destinations (including via specific countries of transit), and the irregular and regular migration pathways used by asylum seekers. In light of this, the Expert Panel recommended a research program to bridge the gaps in knowledge on these issues (see Recommendation 22, *Report of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, August 2012*, available online at [http://expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/report](http://expertpanelonasylumseekers.dpmc.gov.au/report)).

In recognition of this important challenge for policy-relevant research of significance in both the Australian and international contexts, the HC Coombs Policy Forum is interested to hear from researchers, both from Australia and internationally, with an interest in carrying out quantitative empirical research on the drivers and determinants of irregular migration - with a particular emphasis on specific aspects of decision-making processes. At this stage we are interested in establishing informal contact with interested researchers in order to gauge the nature and extent of expertise and the degree of interest in conducting research on this difficult issue.

If this is an area of work of potential interest to you, please contact Mr Jonathan Cheng of the HC Coombs Policy Forum at jonathan.cheng@anu.edu.au. Please bear in mind that this is an early stage in the process of assessing the suitability of this topic for inclusion in our new program of international policy research. Funding for such work will be determined on the basis of the level of interest in this topic and the extent to which any commissioned work is likely to generate evidence useful to the policy community. We would be particularly interested in hearing from researchers with significant expertise on, and long-standing research capabilities in, irregular migration. We would also look favorably upon submissions from research consortia interested in working collaboratively to exploit complementary expertise and data.

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