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

May 2013

The Issue

The estimated number of international migrants has increased dramatically over the past fifty years, from 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. For example, 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.

There are multiple, complex, interrelated factors that stimulate consideration and act as either facilitators or barriers to both the initiation 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. Australia, in comparison to other key target countries for migration, is a unique case due to its geographical proximity to Asia and geographical isolation from other major developed (and destination migration) countries.

Seeking EoIs

The HC Coombs Policy Forum, in partnership with DIAC, is interested to hear from researchers, both from Australia and internationally, with an interest in carrying out 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 making 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. We would be particularly interested in hearing from researchers and institutions:

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with significant expertise on, and long-standing research capabilities in, irregular migration;
working on existing or ongoing projects which could link effectively to this area of research;
interested in working collaboratively to exploit complementary expertise and data; and/or
with experience of undertaking research on specific citizenship groups pertinent to
Australia’s irregular migration flows (e.g. Afghans, Sri Lankans, Iranians).

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 with a brief document (up to 3 pages, excluding annexes) outlining the following by May 31, 2013:

- the proposed research topic and its relevance to our research program on irregular migrants seeking asylum;
- the investigators/researchers involved and their relevant capabilities and expertise;
- proposed methodology and data sources;
- an expected timeframe for research output; and
- a short breakdown of expected costs.

Please bear in mind that this is an early stage in the process of assessing the suitability of this topic for inclusion in a new program of international policy research. We would be interested in both short and long term projects. We will be requesting formal research proposals from the most promising EoI submissions following discussions with researchers linked to all initial submissions. Funding will ultimately 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.

About this Research Program

The HC Coombs Policy Forum, in partnership with the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship, is commissioning international policy-relevant research on the movement of people in relation to specific migration pathways. In Australia, the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers has drawn 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. We are seeking a better understanding of the (often complex) decision-making processes made by potential asylum seekers and others who may wish to enter Australia and other countries in an irregular manner.

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About the HC Coombs Policy Forum

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.