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# Placing recent Sri Lankan maritime arrivals in a broader migration context

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\* Please note that the views expressed in this paper are those of the co-author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department.

This paper is one of a series of occasional papers produced as part of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's Irregular Migration Research Program (Research Program).

The Research Program is intended to strengthen the evidence base on irregular migration, and is built on research framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan. More information about the Research Program can be found at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/research/irregular-migration-research>

The Occasional Paper Series aims to provide information on, and analysis of, specific irregular migration issues of relevance to Australia, within a broader migration and/or global context.

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

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In August 2012, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (the Department) established an Irregular Migration Research Program (Research Program) 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. This is the second in a series of occasional papers published by the Program to support its work.
2. Against the backdrop of rising numbers of Irregular Maritime Arrivals (IMAs), which bear significant human, political, economic, and social costs, Australia is confronted with the challenge of balancing its international obligations to protect refugees and the imperative to manage its borders in an orderly manner. The public debate in relation to these issues is, not surprisingly, contested.
3. This paper seeks to place the recent significant increase in Sri Lankan IMAs to Australia, and the subsequent decrease, in a broader migration context including by contextualising it within Sri Lanka's migration history as well as the broader asylum seeker flows from Sri Lanka to key destination countries in the world. The paper also draws on the views of potential irregular migrants in Sri Lanka, sought via two large-scale surveys in early 2013, as a means of examining some of the motivations behind the large scale movements in 2012. It is important to note that in seeking the views of potential irregular migrants to Australia, the surveys were designed to reflect Sri Lankan IMA flows, and so took into account geographic and ethnic factors.
4. Globally, asylum seekers represent a small percentage of total migrants from Sri Lanka. In 2011, for example, Sri Lankan migrant worker departures were in excess of 250 000 while asylum seekers in 2012 were approximately 14 000.
5. In Australia, Sri Lankan IMAs between 2008 and 2011 averaged under 500 annually. Yet in 2012 the number of IMAs jumped from under 100 arrivals in the first quarter of 2012 to around 2600 in the third quarter of 2012. This increase was very sudden; it was also unusual in the global context where Sri Lankan asylum seeker numbers and asylum applications held steady.
6. A survey of potential irregular migrants in Sri Lanka found that those with a desire to travel by boat to Australia were overwhelmingly motivated by multiple, inter-related factors, including factors related to protection, visa access, employment, people smuggling, geography and family/community links. The most prominent factors related primarily to economic prosperity. This is unsurprising given that economic factors were also the primary reason for people desiring to travel to countries other than Australia. It is also unsurprising given that Sri Lanka is a country that relies heavily on its mobile, international workforce, including as it relates to remittances.
7. Among potential irregular migrants motivated by economic factors, results show at least 58 per cent of people who expressed a desire (Intenders), and at least 36 per cent of people with plans in place (Active Intenders), to travel to Australia by boat did so for reasons that were unrelated to protection.<sup>1</sup>
8. The paper has sought to place the recent significant Sri Lankan IMA flows to Australia in a broader context by presenting a range of evidence, including empirical evidence of the views of potential irregular migrants themselves. The evidence in this paper highlights the need for further research.

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<sup>1</sup> A key limitation of this research is that results from Active Intenders are subject to large margins of error.

## 1. BACKGROUND

In August 2012, the Department established an Irregular Migration Research Program (Research Program) 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 Program is that the research be framed in an open, inquiring manner that is objective and non-partisan.

The Research Program has been established as a multi-layered and integrated program including in-house research and analysis, commissioned research, a small grants program, a multi-year research partnership arrangement with the Australian National University and a series of occasional papers.

In *Establishing an Evidence-Base for Future Policy Development on Irregular Migration to Australia*,<sup>2</sup> the first in the Research Program's Occasional Paper Series, the paper's authors identified four main areas that require greater attention if an adequate evidence base on the drivers and possible deterrents 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 (2013) also argued that the gathering of evidence needs to better account for a range of variables, including citizenship and country of origin.

This occasional paper has been prepared in acknowledgement that the significant increase in Sri Lankan IMAs was unique. Importantly, the objective of this paper is to provide factual evidence of Sri Lankan maritime arrivals in a broader migration context and provide limited interpretations of some findings. Differences between ethnicities were considered only when sufficient data was available.

Two forthcoming occasional papers, *Seeking the views of irregular migrants: Survey background, rationale and methodology* and *Seeking the views of irregular migrants: Decision making, drivers and migration journeys* provide information on a large-scale quantitative survey of IMAs granted protection in Australia in 2011 and 2012.<sup>3</sup> The first paper outlines the survey rationale as well as the methodology adopted. The second paper analyses key survey results, including by citizenship. Some Sri Lankan results supplement the survey data presented in this paper.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Our examination of irregular maritime arrival flows to Australia within a broader migration context places greater emphasis on both origin country and global migration dynamics. This approach recognises broader migration movement that a more asylum/refugee-specific focussed approach has the potential to either under-emphasise or miss entirely. It also has the potential to allow for a greater appreciation for Australia's comparative position in a global context, which is perhaps useful given the, at times, 'Australia-centric' view of irregular maritime arrival flows.

We also seek to show that while potential irregular migrants travel for reasons such as wanting a better future and economic prosperity, which are conceivably similar to those of regular migrants, these are not the only reasons. Rather, consistent with recent literature,<sup>4</sup> our paper paints

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<sup>2</sup> Koser and McAuliffe (2013)

<sup>3</sup> McAuliffe (2013a); McAuliffe (2013b)

<sup>4</sup> Monsutti (2005)

a multidimensional picture showing that some potential irregular migrants from Sri Lanka wanted to travel for economic reasons *and* due to allegations of torture and persecution.<sup>5</sup>

This paper is an attempt to place a significant increase in Sri Lankan IMAs to Australia in a broader migration context as a means of better understanding the Sri Lankan migration dynamics, at both the macro level and at the micro (i.e. potential migrant) level. It does not delve into all aspects of Sri Lankan migration—such as the irregular migration of migrant workers for example—which, while potentially relevant, are beyond the scope of an occasional paper of this size.

The provision of information and evidence on Sri Lanka's place in a global migration context (including historically) as well as how some Sri Lankans view irregular migration is intended to inform discussion of this topic. It hopefully provides some illustration of why a greater appreciation of time and place in migration dynamics is important in improving our understanding of migration patterns and processes. This paper does not attempt to cover all aspects related to Sri Lankan IMA flows in recent times. It does, however, draw on a range of data and information relevant to the development of an enhanced appreciation of Sri Lankan migration to Australia and elsewhere.

### 3. SRI LANKA COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sri Lanka is an island country with land mass of 65,610 square kilometres positioned in the Indian Ocean, southwest of the Bay of Bengal and separated from the Indian subcontinent by the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait. It has a population of approximately 20 million people that are comprised of the majority Sinhalese (75 per cent), and minority Sri Lankan Tamils (11 per cent), Indian Tamils (four per cent), Moors (nine per cent), and Kaffirs, Burghers and Malays (less than one per cent).<sup>6</sup> The Sinhalese are largely located in the southern, western and to a lesser extent eastern parts of Sri Lanka while the Tamils dominate northern and eastern Sri Lanka. An exception appears to be the capital district Colombo which is located in western Sri Lanka and houses the third largest number of Tamils among the 19 districts of Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup> A map of Sri Lanka is attached at Appendix A.

Sri Lanka is a middle income country with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of approximately \$60 billion (about four per cent the size of Australia's) and per capita GDP of \$2,900.<sup>8</sup> Remittances from Sri Lanka's international diaspora of approximately two million people account for approximately seven per cent of its gross domestic product.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, Sri Lanka established itself as one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with a GDP per capita growth rate of 9.2 per cent.<sup>10</sup> This growth is driven in part by large-scale reconstruction and development projects, improved agricultural productivity and greater tourism. Currently, Sri Lanka rates 'high' on the Human Development Index (HDI) with 0.715 compared to the regional average of 0.558.<sup>11</sup> Internationally, Sri Lanka ranks 92 out of 187 countries. Australia ranks very high on this measure, with a 2012 score of 0.938, second only to Norway.

Formerly known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka obtained independence from the British in 1948. A republic and a unitary state, Sri Lanka maintained the Westminster system of political governance until 1978, when it created a semi-presidential system.

<sup>5</sup> These allegations are not necessarily of state-sponsored torture and persecution.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka (2012)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2013a) Current USD prices are quoted.

<sup>9</sup> Calculations adapted from World Bank (2013a) and Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012)

<sup>10</sup> The World Bank (2013a)

<sup>11</sup> HDI is a summary measure of wellbeing produced by the United Nations. The HDI is a composite measure of three dimensions of human development—health, education and income.

Following independence, the minority Tamils (who were perceived by the Sinhalese to be given relatively more power under British rule)<sup>12</sup> came under the administration of successive Sinhalese-dominated governments. Some Tamils claimed discrimination, and in the late 1970s became more militant. A key flashpoint, known as Black July, occurred in 1983 when a group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), ambushed and killed a military patrol. This was a catalyst for war, with riots throughout Sri Lanka sparking an exodus of skilled Sri Lankans and refugees.

Since 1983, there was almost continuous conflict until a peace accord, facilitated by Norway, Japan, the European Union and the United States, was signed in 2001 between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. By that time, the LTTE had assassinated a Prime Minister of India and President of Sri Lanka, and was considered a terrorist organisation by multiple countries around the world. Others considered the LTTE freedom fighters. War resumed in 2006 and concluded in 2009 when the LTTE was militarily defeated by the Sri Lankan government.

Following the end of the conflict, the international community stressed the need for reconciliation between all ethnic groups. In May 2010, the Sri Lankan government established the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC)<sup>13</sup> to examine events relating to the war. In December 2011, the LLRC handed down its report, saying that the root cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka was due to Sinhalese politicians failing to offer a solution acceptable to the Tamil community and the Tamil politicians fanning militant separatism. The commission found that the military did not purposefully target civilians although were responsible for accidental civilian deaths. The LTTE were accused of having no respect for human life.

A competing report<sup>14</sup> published in 2011 by a UN Secretary General appointed expert panel argued, in contrast, that there were credible allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE. The Sri Lankan government declined to allow members of the panel into the country and rejected the panel's findings as being "fundamentally flawed in many respects".<sup>15</sup>

In March 2012, the United States sponsored a UN Human Rights Council resolution 'promoting reconciliation and accountability' in Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup> The resolution sought to encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to implement the constructive recommendations of the LLRC and take the necessary measures to address accountability. Australia was a co-sponsor of the resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council.

In March 2013, a subsequent Human Rights Council resolution expressed concern at reports of abductions, extra-judicial killings, torture, religious discrimination, threats to judicial independence and fear among journalists while acknowledging developments relating to infrastructure development and resettlement.<sup>17</sup> Sri Lanka argued the resolution was 'unacceptable' and highlighted 'inherent flaws'.<sup>18</sup> Australia also co-sponsored this resolution.<sup>19</sup>

Sri Lanka's human rights environment has been claimed by some as a cause of irregular migration while others have suggested these irregular migrants leave for economic reasons. In the past, Sri Lanka also contributed a large number of regular migrants.

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<sup>12</sup> Sriskandarajah (2005)

<sup>13</sup> LLRC (2011)

<sup>14</sup> Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka (2011)

<sup>15</sup> Haviland (2011)

<sup>16</sup> OHCHR (2012)

<sup>17</sup> OHCHR (2013)

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of External Affairs (2013)

<sup>19</sup> Forster (2013)

## 4. SRI LANKA AND MIGRATION

Migration flows of Sri Lankan citizens to other countries can be broadly grouped into the following categories:

- temporary work (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers);
- settlement (mostly skilled migrants);
- education (mainly for tertiary studies);
- political reasons (asylum seekers); and
- tourism, including pilgrimages to India and Nepal.<sup>20</sup>

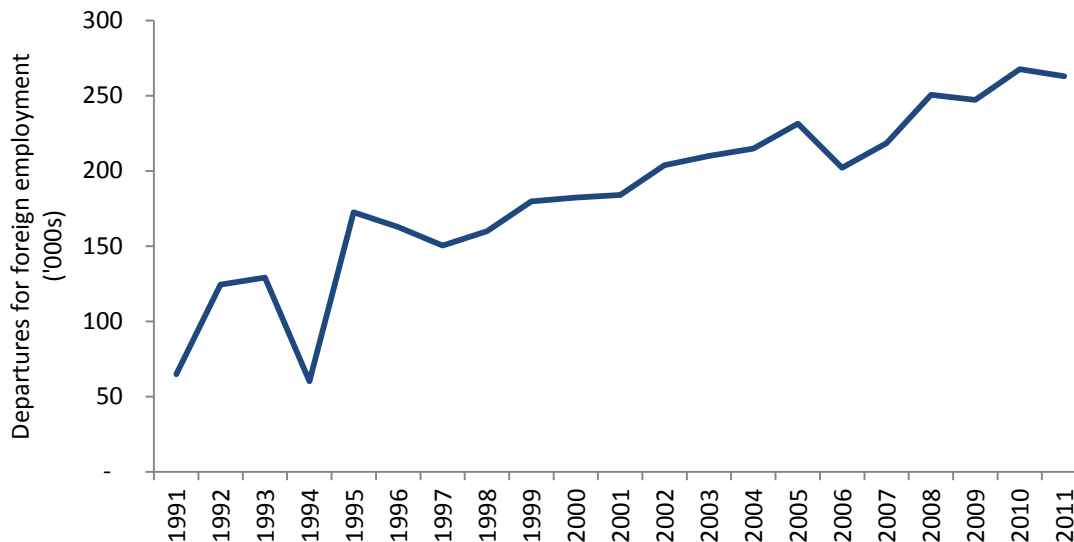
Sri Lankan nationals who exit Sri Lanka are required to complete an embarkation card, and foreigners an arrival card for surrender to immigration officials. There are only a small number of entry/exit points for managing passenger movements in Sri Lanka, including one major and one minor international airport located in Colombo and a recently constructed international airport in the country's south. There are seven major sea ports around the country.<sup>21</sup>

In 2011, Sri Lanka recorded 1,206,135 arrivals<sup>22</sup> of Sri Lankan citizens and 1,235,228 departures.<sup>23</sup> Of those Sri Lankans departing, 262,960 (21 per cent) were for foreign employment.<sup>24</sup>

### 4.1 Sri Lankan temporary and permanent emigration for employment

In 2011, 262,960 Sri Lankans departed for work abroad with an almost linear increase between 1990 and 2011 (refer Figure 1). This growth exceeds population growth; departures for employment increased 305 per cent between 1991 and 2011, compared with a 20 per cent growth in Sri Lanka's population over the same period.<sup>25</sup> In 1991, 0.38 per cent of the population travelled overseas for work, increasing to 1.26 per cent of the population in 2011.<sup>26</sup> Sri Lankans departing for employment outside Sri Lanka are required to register with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment.

**Figure 1: Departures for foreign employment**



Source: adapted from Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012)

<sup>20</sup> IOM & IPS (2008) pg. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Immigration and Emigration (2013)

<sup>22</sup> Department of Immigration and Emigration (2011)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012)

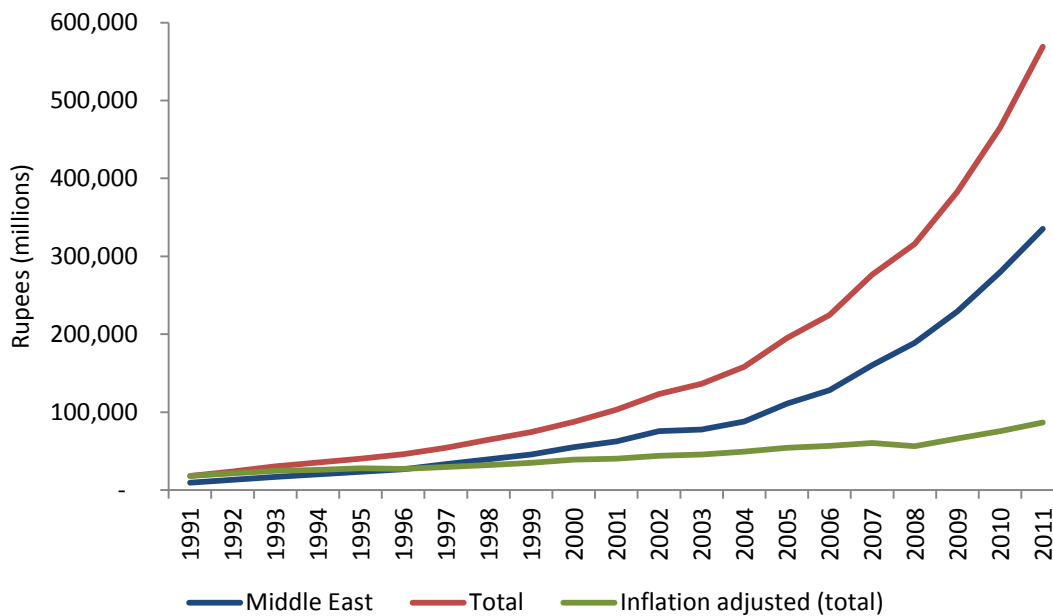
<sup>25</sup> Ibid and World Bank (2013a)

<sup>26</sup> Calculations based on foreign employment records from the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012) data and population figures from World Bank (2013a)

In 2010, almost 90 per cent of Sri Lankan men and almost 94 per cent of Sri Lankan women who sought temporary or permanent emigration for employment did so in the Middle Eastern countries of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of these destination countries as sources of income is reflected in the increase in remittances from the Middle East since 1990. In 2011, remittances from the Middle East accounted for 60 per cent of total remittances to Sri Lanka (as shown in Figure 2).

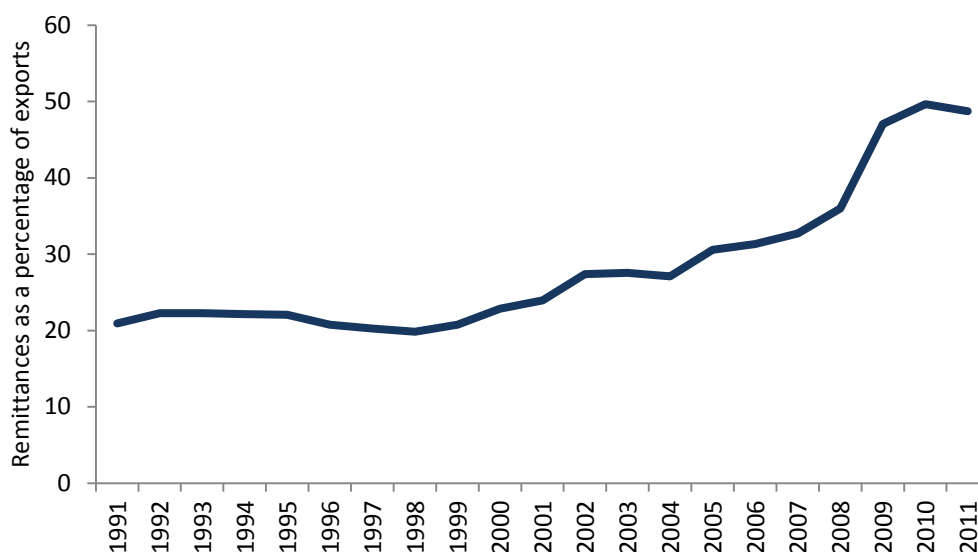
Figure 2: Remittances globally and from the Middle East



Source: adapted from Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012) and World Bank (2013a)

As shown in Figure 3, the increase in remittances has had a flow-on effect to the national economy, accounting for almost 50 per cent of export earnings in 2011<sup>28</sup> and being approximately five times greater the value of Foreign Direct Investments into Sri Lanka.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 3: Remittances as a percentage of exports



Source: adapted from Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012)

<sup>27</sup> Department of Immigration and Emigration (2010)

<sup>28</sup> Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (2012)

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from World Bank (2013a) and World Bank (2012)

## 4.2 Sri Lankan emigration for study

Education is very important for Sri Lankans<sup>30</sup> as demonstrated by the numerous newspaper, radio and billboard advertisements in Sri Lanka promoting potential places of study, both in Sri Lanka and overseas. A degree from a university outside of Sri Lanka is highly valued with over 60 organisations, or 'education agents', providing advice on overseas study options.<sup>31</sup> Yet the absolute number of students travelling overseas for study to OECD countries is relatively low; Table 1 shows a steady increase from 2004 until 2009 with Australia being the number one destination. Sri Lankans travelling overseas for study are not required to register with any government authority.

**Table 1: International students from Sri Lanka in OECD countries**

Destination	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Australia	2,117	2,082	2,499	3,550	4,073	4,296
United Kingdom	2,267	2,419	2,765	3,005	3,141	3,553
United States	1,964	2,081	2,234	2,425	2,594	2,927
Japan	615	765	867	1,155	1,197	1,098
Canada	161	..	252	186	271	309
Total	7,603	7,855	9,125	10,915	12,049	13,065

Source: adapted from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012)

## 4.3 Sri Lankan diaspora communities

In 2010, there were nearly two million people in the Sri Lankan diaspora, with approximately 54 per cent of them living in the Middle East and approximately 34 per cent living in industrialised countries.<sup>32</sup> There are two distinct groups within this population. Sri Lankan Tamils constitute the overwhelming majority of diaspora communities found in industrialised countries, while migrant workers (such as those to the Middle East) are largely Sinhalese.<sup>33</sup>

The Sri Lankan diaspora has been increasing steadily over the last decade. To illustrate, in OECD countries alone the diaspora has increased from an estimated 300,000 people in 2000 to almost 700,000 in 2010 (refer Figure 4).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Sri Lanka, where education is free, has a population with higher than average levels of education relative to most other Asian countries (The World Bank 2013a)

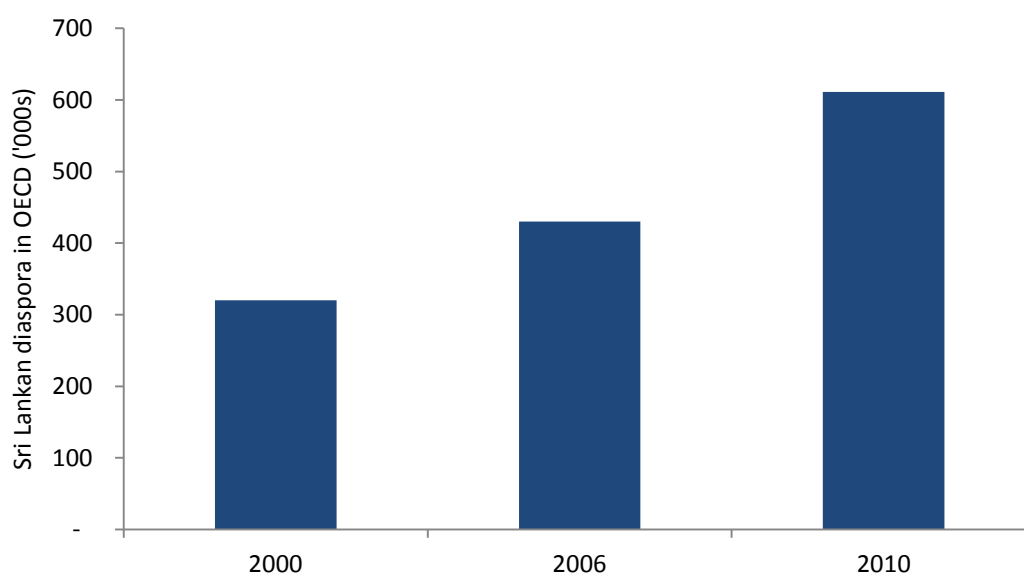
<sup>31</sup> Australian Council for Private Education and Training website.

<sup>32</sup> Adapted from World Bank (2010). Note, World Bank and UN data only refer to Sri Lankan born people and not people of Sri Lankan ancestry.

<sup>33</sup> ICG (2010)

<sup>34</sup> OECD (2012) and adapted from World Bank (2010)

Figure 4: Sri Lankan diaspora in all OECD countries; 2000, 2006 and 2010



Source: OECD (2012) and adapted from World Bank (2010)

The countries with the largest diaspora in 2010 were Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy and Australia (refer Table 2).

Table 2: Top 10 industrialised countries for the Sri Lankan diaspora in 2010

Rank	Country	Diaspora in 2010
1	Canada	123,012
2	United Kingdom	113,448
3	Italy	79,400
4	Australia	78,098
5	Germany	47,813
6	France	43,712
7	United States	34,572
8	Switzerland	25,186
9	Norway	11,561
10	Netherlands	9,727

Source: World Bank (2010)

In 2010 Australia was ranked number four on the list with an estimated 78,098 people in the Sri Lankan diaspora while in 2011 this was estimated to be 110,000 by DFAT<sup>35</sup> and 86,413 by the Australian Census of Population and Housing.<sup>36</sup> In 2011, this made the Sri Lankan community the thirteenth largest migrant group in Australia, which is equivalent to 1.6 per cent of Australia’s overseas-born population and 0.4 per cent of Australia’s total population.<sup>37</sup> According to census data, around 50,151 Australians were Tamil speaking.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> DFAT (2012)

<sup>36</sup> DIAC (2011)

<sup>37</sup> DIAC (2012)

<sup>38</sup> SBS (2013)

#### 4.3.1 Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

Prior to Sri Lankan Independence in 1948, there were some Sri Lankan Tamils living in Malaysia and Singapore, primarily as migrant workers in British Malaya.<sup>39</sup> It was only after the 1983 riots that Tamils migrated en masse, largely as refugees to industrialised countries. Currently, there are estimated to be approximately one million Sri Lankan Tamils residing outside Sri Lanka<sup>40</sup>, which is substantial when considering the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Sri Lanka is 2.3 million people.<sup>41</sup> Countries with significant Sri Lankan Tamil (estimated) populations include:

- Canada: 200,000-300,000
- United Kingdom: 180,000
- Germany: 60,000
- Switzerland: 47,000
- Australia: 40,000
- France: 40,000-50,000
- United States: 25,000
- the Netherlands: 20,000
- Malaysia: 20,000.<sup>42</sup>

A smaller number of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora live in the Middle East, South Africa and the Gulf States.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Diaspora and remittances

Remittances from industrialised countries with a large Sri Lankan diaspora have increased rapidly in the recent past, from USD 1,429 million in 2010, to USD 1,776 million in 2011 and USD 2,161 million in 2012 (refer Figure 5).<sup>44</sup> In 2012 remittances from the Sri Lankan diaspora in industrialised countries represented 34 per cent of all remittances globally.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> ICG (2010)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka (2012)

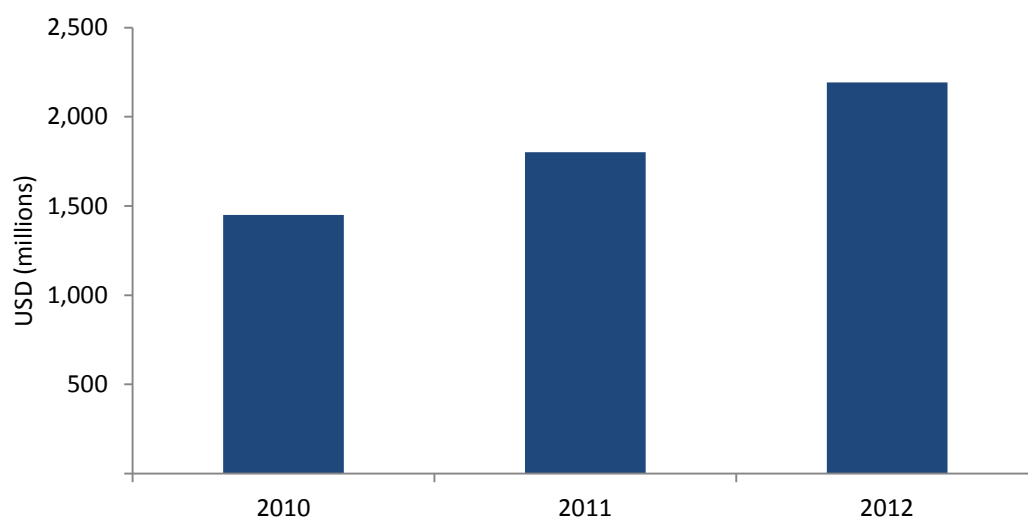
<sup>42</sup> ICG (2010) Please note that the ICC report draws on several other sources from between 2004 and 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Adapted from World Bank (2010) Note, a declaration was made in the 2004 G8 summit to improve the quality of remittances data available to researchers (World Bank 2013c)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

Figure 5: Remittances from OECD countries in 2010, 2011 and 2012



Source: adapted from World Bank (2011, 2012, 2013b).

As to be expected, the top 10 industrialised countries for the Sri Lankan diaspora (for 2010) feature in the top 10 sources of remittances from industrialised countries (for 2012), almost in the same order (refer Tables 2 and 3).<sup>46</sup> What is surprising is that the average remittance per person from OECD countries in 2010 was USD 2,281, which was only slightly lower than the average remittance per person of USD 2,329 from Middle Eastern countries.<sup>47</sup>

Table 3: Top ten sources of remittances to Sri Lanka in 2012 (industrialised countries only)

Rank	Country	Remittances (millions USD)
1	Canada	444
2	United Kingdom	399
3	Australia	279
4	Italy	272
5	Germany	173
6	France	154
7	United States	132
8	Switzerland	99
9	Norway	48
10	Netherlands	36

Source: World Bank (2013b)

Prior to the defeat of the LTTE, the diaspora contributed an estimated USD 200 million a year to the LTTE.<sup>48</sup> For the past 25 years the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has contributed to shaping the Sri Lankan political landscape through its financial and ideological support of the armed struggle for an independent Tamil state. Many in the diaspora supported the LTTE,<sup>49</sup> however, others were allegedly

<sup>46</sup> Statistics adapted from World Bank (2013b) and World Bank (2010).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> ICG (2010)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

subject to extortion, intimidation and physical violence in order to silence criticism and secure financing.<sup>50</sup>

## 5. SRI LANKA AND ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES: SOURCE, TRANSIT AND DESTINATION

Given its recent past, Sri Lanka has primarily been a 'source' country of asylum seekers and refugees. That said, the labelling of 'source', 'host', 'transit' and 'destination' countries can be multi-dimensional, with countries fulfilling several of these broad categories at the one time. In addition, countries can quickly move from one category to another depending on prevailing security and political circumstances. Syria, for example, was until relatively recently a major 'host' country, primarily of Iraqi refugees; whereas it is now a major 'source' country due to the severity of its civil conflict.

### 5.1 Asylum seekers and refugees in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, nor does it have specific legislation or administrative mechanisms governing asylum and refugee affairs.

The Sri Lankan Government relies on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to register and assess asylum seekers. The UNHCR has been involved in Sri Lanka since 1987 when the organisation was invited by the Sri Lankan Government to facilitate large-scale repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees from India. The UNHCR, under an agreement with the government, undertakes refugee status determination processes in Sri Lanka.

According to UNHCR data, there are (at any one time) only a small number of asylum seekers and refugees in Sri Lanka. At the end of 2012 there were 110 refugees and 263 asylum seekers registered in Sri Lanka.<sup>51</sup>

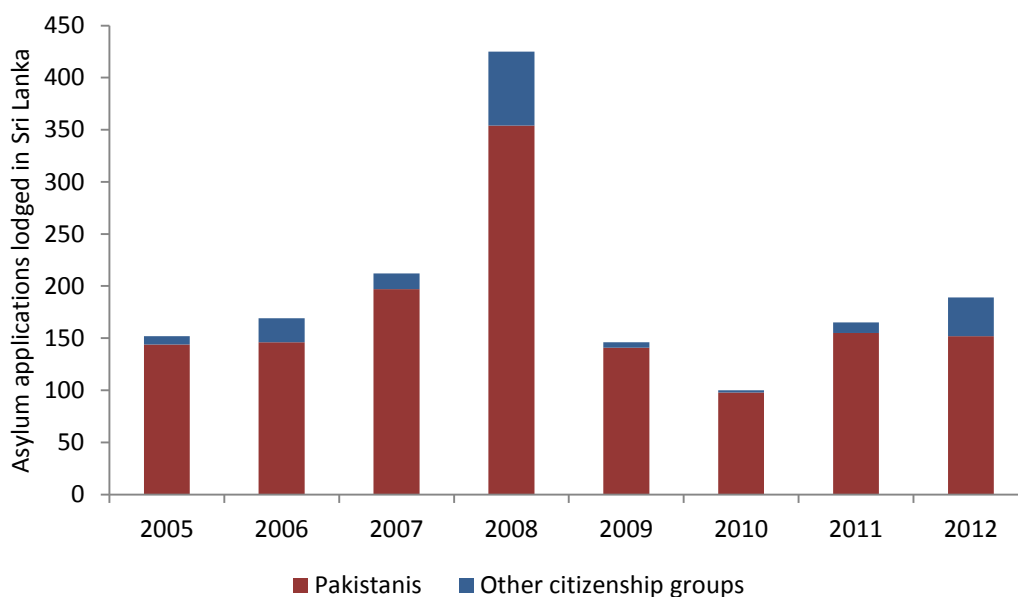
UNHCR data on asylum applications submitted in Sri Lanka between 2005 and 2012 show that the vast majority of asylum seekers were Pakistani. Data also reveals that there has been a slight increase in asylum applications over the last two years (as shown in Figure 6) from non-Pakistani applicants.

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<sup>50</sup> HRW (2006)

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database (extracted 3 July 2013)

Figure 6: Asylum applications submitted in Sri Lanka: 2005 to 2012



Source: UNHCR population database (extracted 15 July 2013).

Refugees are not permitted to reside or work in Sri Lanka, and very few refugees choose to repatriate back to their country of origin.<sup>52</sup> Resettlement, therefore, remains the main durable solution for them. In 2012, 178 refugees in Sri Lanka were resettled to the United States and Canada.<sup>53</sup>

According to some in the Sri Lankan government, Sri Lanka is increasingly becoming a transit and destination country for irregular migrants and asylum seekers, as reflected in recent public comments by Sri Lankan Ministers on the 'deportation' of asylum seekers in Sri Lanka.<sup>54</sup> According to the Sri Lankan Department of Immigration and Emigration, Sri Lanka has become a transit country for asylum seekers from Pakistan and Afghanistan trying to reach Australia.<sup>55</sup>

## 5.2 Internally Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka has gradually reduced since the end of the civil conflict in 2009. UNHCR has estimated that by the end of September 2012, some 468,000 people had returned to their places of origin.<sup>56</sup> The closure in September 2012 of the government's 700-hectare IDP site 'Menik Farm' in northern Vavuniya district (the largest operational camp) highlighted the post-conflict transition that has occurred over time as people have gradually been resettled. At its peak, 'Menik Farm' housed 225,000 people.<sup>57</sup> As at December 2012, 9,800 remained in IDP camps throughout Sri Lanka.<sup>58</sup>

Estimates of the number of IDPs in Sri Lanka have varied. The main sources of internal displacement statistics are government and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). As at January 2011, the OCHA estimated that around 273,772 Sri Lankans continued to be displaced.<sup>59</sup> Some months on, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that (as

<sup>52</sup> UNHCR (March 2013)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Powell, L. (2013)

<sup>55</sup> IRIN (2012b)

<sup>56</sup> UNHCR (2013) 2013 UNHCR regional operations profile - South Asia.

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR (27 September 2012)

<sup>58</sup> IDMC (2013)

<sup>59</sup> Association of Tamils of Sri Lanka in the USA (2012)

at 31 December 2011), around 95,000 people were still displaced in Sri Lanka.<sup>60</sup> IDMC noted that the Sri Lankan Government has kept some IDPs' areas of origin closed because of national security and/or danger to the public, including because of incomplete landmine clearance activity. A more recent figure, as at the end of 2012, was 93,447 IDPs, including people living inside and outside of camps.<sup>61</sup> Given the substantial numbers of people that have been internally resettled, the UNHCR has indicated in its South Asia operations profile that during 2013 it will continue to promote the reintegration of refugee and IDP returnees while winding down its direct engagement in the IDP situation.<sup>62</sup>

### 5.3 Sri Lankan asylum seekers and refugees around the world

Sri Lanka's history of civil conflict is reflected in its status as a significant source country of asylum seekers and refugees. Given the nature of the civil conflict, Sri Lankan asylum flows have mainly comprised Tamils. India has historically been, and continues to be, the main host country of Sri Lankan refugees. At the end of 2012, it hosted some 67,165 Sri Lankan (predominantly Tamil) refugees.<sup>63</sup> The majority of India's UNHCR-registered Sri Lankan refugees lived in around 100 camps in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. However, estimates of the number of Sri Lankans with pending asylum claims in Tamil Nadu vary considerably between organisations, from around 100,000 to 200,000.<sup>64</sup>

Outside of the thousands of Sri Lankan refugees hosted in India, Sri Lankan asylum seekers historically have travelled to specific destination countries. As shown in Table 4, the main asylum destination countries in 2012 were, in order, Australia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Switzerland, Canada and Germany. These destination countries all have significant Sri Lankan diaspora – as outlined in section 4.3.

Table 4: Sri Lankan global asylum applications in 2012: selected countries

Destination	Asylum applications in 2012
Australia	2 309
Malaysia	1 910
United Kingdom	1 840
France	1 738
Switzerland	1 610
Canada	1 189
Germany	994
Japan	476
Indonesia	404
Korea	232
Nauru	216
Netherlands	140
United States	94

Source: UNHCR population database (extracted 5 July 2013).

<sup>60</sup> IDMC, Number of IDPs in Sri Lanka (retrieved 27 March 2012)

<sup>61</sup> UNHCR (March 2012)

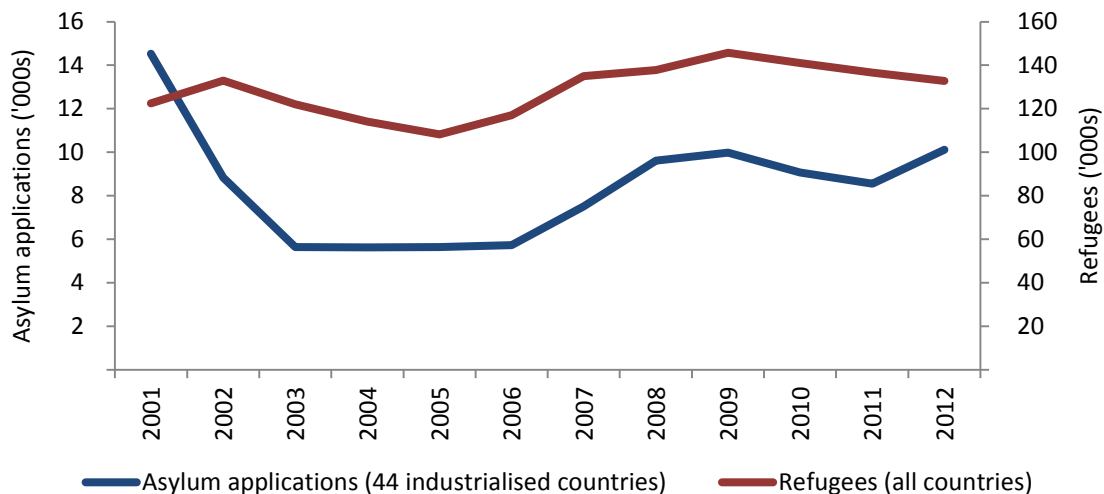
<sup>62</sup> UNHCR (2013) 2013 UNHCR regional operations profile - South Asia

<sup>63</sup> UNHCR, Statistical Online Population Database

<sup>64</sup> ICG (2010) and IRIN (2012a)

Sri Lankan asylum claims in industrialised countries dropped from a high of about 14,500 applications in 2001, to around 5,500 per year between 2003 and 2006 (when there was cease fire between Sri Lanka and the LTTE). The United Kingdom, Canada and France collectively received 71 per cent of Sri Lankan asylum claims in 2001 (more than 10,000 of the 14,500 applications). In the lead up to the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lankan asylum claims grew, as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Sri Lankan asylum seekers and refugees: 2001-2012



Sources: UNHCR (2013) *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries 2012*; UNHCR population database (extracted 5 July 2013).

According to UNHCR, as at December 2012, there were 132,749 Sri Lankan refugees and 13,975 asylum seekers worldwide.<sup>65</sup> This placed Sri Lanka in the top 18 ‘source’ countries of the world’s asylum seekers and refugees.

## 6. REGULAR AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION OF SRI LANKANS TO AUSTRALIA

As is the case with most other citizenship groups, the vast majority of Sri Lankan arrivals enter Australia on temporary visas.<sup>66</sup> In 2012-13, 22,503 temporary entry visas were granted to Sri Lankan nationals, with visitors accounting for 73 per cent of visas granted. Of these visas:

- a total of 2,899 Sri Lankan citizens were granted a student visa in 2012–13 (compared to 260,303 for all countries), about equal to the number granted the previous year, but down by 23 per cent on 2008-09 (consistent with overall student visa decline since the high of 2008-09).
- the number of subclass 457 visas granted to Sri Lankans rose by 10 per cent, from 924 visas in 2011-12 to 1,014 visas in 2012-13. Generalist and other medical practitioners and cooks were the main occupations among the Sri Lankans sponsored under this program.
- a total of 16,421 visitor visas were granted to Sri Lankans (compared to 3.75 million for all countries), up by 12 per cent on 2011-12 and 42 per cent higher than the number granted (11,567) in 2008-09. Tourists accounted for 92 per cent of all Sri Lankan visitors.

<sup>65</sup> UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database (extracted 5 July 2013)

<sup>66</sup> For more information on temporary entry to Australia see Fact Sheet 46 on the Department’s website at: [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/46temporary\\_entry.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/46temporary_entry.htm)

## 6.1 Sri Lankan permanent migration to Australia<sup>67</sup>

Sri Lankans first started coming to Australia in large numbers in the mid-1980s as a response to protracted conflict between the LTTE and government forces. Even though hostilities have formally ceased, the number of Sri Lankans choosing to live in Australia has continued to grow with almost 5,000 Sri Lankans in 2012-13 migrating under Australia's Migration Program (comprising the Family and Skill Streams), compared with 2,000 a decade ago. Since 2007-08, Sri Lanka has consistently been one of Australia's top 10 source migrant countries.

### 6.1.1 Permanent skilled migration

Skilled migration remains the main route for Sri Lankan nationals seeking permanent residency in Australia, accounting for 8 in 10 permanent visas granted to Sri Lankan nationals under the Migration Program in the decade to 2012-13. Sri Lankans were ranked eighth out of 175 citizenship groups granted visas under the Migration Program's Skill Stream in 2012-13, with 4,078 skilled visas granted to Sri Lankans.

The majority of Sri Lankan skilled migrants arrive under the General Skilled Migration (GSM) component of the Skill Stream, which provides permanent residence to skilled migrants who do not have an employer sponsoring them. In 2012-13, 3,228 GSM visas were issued to Sri Lankans, representing 79 per cent of all permanent skilled visas for Sri Lankans in that year. The main occupations of those granted a GSM visa included information and communications technology (ICT) professionals, accountants, and engineering professionals.

### 6.1.2 Permanent family migration

Family migration to Australia facilitates the entry of close family members of Australian citizens, permanent residents and eligible New Zealand citizens. In 2012-13, 883 Sri Lankan nationals were granted permanent residency under the Migration Program's Family Stream, ranking 13<sup>th</sup> among 176 citizenship groups represented in the Family Stream in that year.

### 6.1.3 Permanent humanitarian migration

Australia's Humanitarian Program is designed to ensure Australia can respond effectively to global humanitarian situations and that support services are available to meet the specific needs of these entrants. Sri Lankans have not been a major source group for Australia's Humanitarian Program, with just over a thousand Sri Lankans resettled under this program over the last 10 years. The majority (around 75 per cent) of visas granted to Sri Lankans under the offshore Humanitarian Program over the last five years were to the immediate ('split') family of Sri Lankan IMAs under the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP).

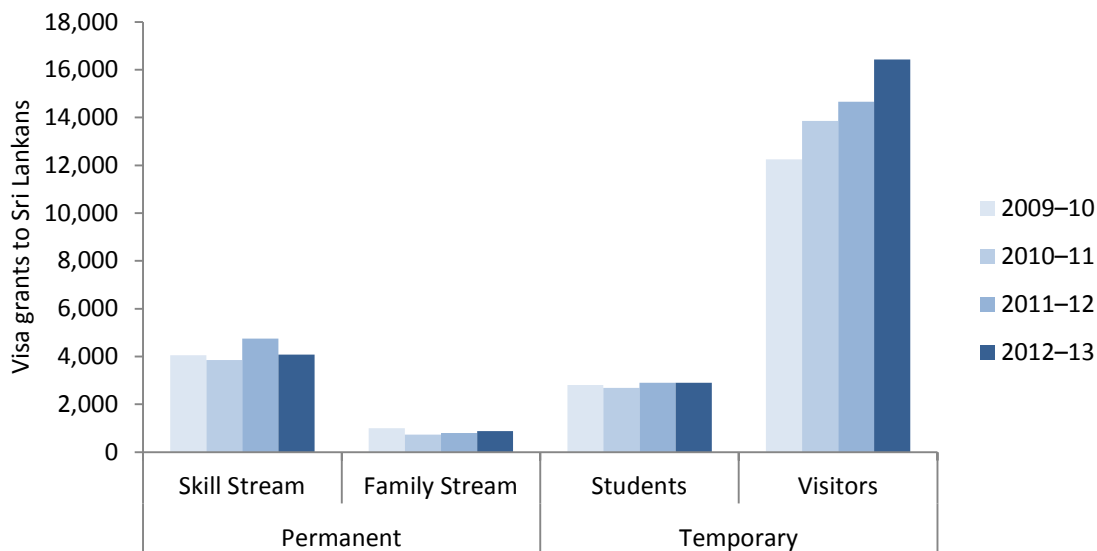
In 2012-13, 363 Sri Lankans were granted onshore protection visas (including both IMAs and non-IMAs) and 40 were granted offshore protection visas. The number of offshore resettlement grants to Sri Lankan citizens has decreased by 55 per cent from 88 in 2011-12. This accorded with previous years: 288 granted in 2010-11; 184 in 2009-10 and 215 in 2008-09, which is a reflection of the settling of hostilities since 2009. It is also a reflection of broader changes to the SHP. In addition, the number of onshore protection visas granted to Sri Lankans in 2012-13 has decreased by 14 per cent from the previous program year.

<sup>67</sup> DIAC, Statistics webpage (accessed 19 July 2013)

6.1.4 Summary of regular migration from Sri Lanka to Australia (2011-2012)

Figure 8 summarises the visas granted to Sri Lankans under the four main regular migration pathways accessed by Sri Lankans over the last four financial years.

Figure 8: Australian visas granted to Sri Lankans, 2009-10 to 2012-13



Source: DIAC (2013).

6.1.5 Non-IMA asylum

In 2012-13 there were a total of 8,308 applications for asylum in Australia by people who originally arrived by air, an increase of 18 per cent on 2011-12. The top five countries of citizenship for applications in 2012-13 were China, India, Pakistan, Egypt and Iran which accounted for 52 per cent of all lodgements.

In 2008-09, Sri Lankans accounted for 478 applications. Subsequently, Sri Lankan applications have generally declined over time: 328 in 2009-10; 160 in 2010-11; 138 in 2011-12 and 169 in 2012-13 while overall application numbers have increased. Sri Lanka was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> among asylum applications in 2012-13.

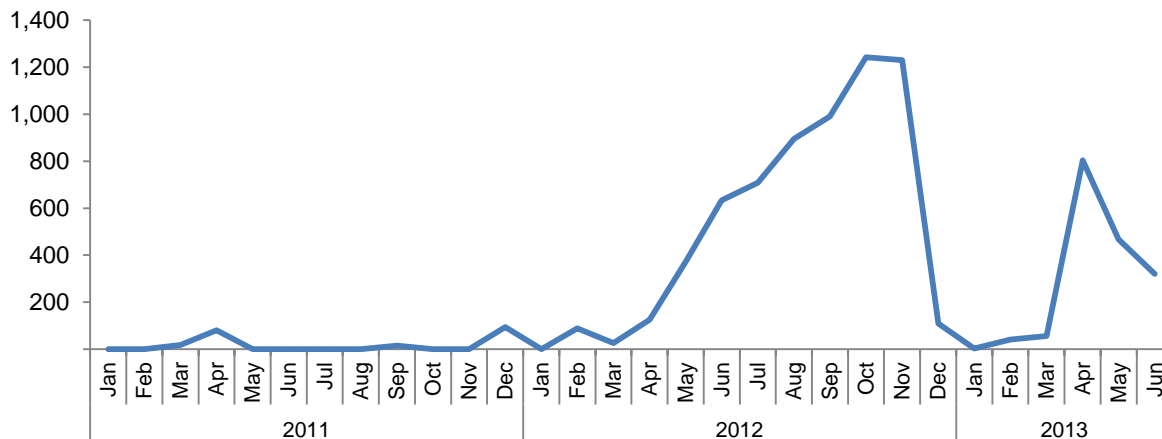
6.2 Sri Lankan irregular maritime arrivals

The significant decrease in Sri Lankan asylum claims globally from 2002 onwards, coincided with the 2002 signing of the permanent ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. Global asylum claims began to rise again in 2008 as the conflict escalated in the lead up to the LTTE defeat in 2009. Sri Lankan IMAs to Australia also increased during this time.

The dramatic increase in Sri Lankan IMA flows to Australia in 2012, however, was out of step with Sri Lankan asylum claims globally. In contrast to the Australian experience, other key Sri Lankan asylum seeker destination countries experienced decreases, plateaus or minor increases in 2012. Further to this, and unlike earlier IMA flows, in addition to protection issues, economic conditions and prospects were thought to be drivers for irregular maritime movement to Australia, especially for ethnic

Sinhalese, who began arriving in significant numbers for the first time.<sup>68</sup> To place the increase in context, in 2011 there were just over 200 IMAs from Sri Lanka, whereas in 2012 more than 6,400 Sri Lankan IMAs arrived in Australia, most of whom arrived in the second half of the year (refer Figure 9).<sup>69</sup>

Figure 9: Sri Lankan Irregular Maritime Arrivals: Jan 2011 – June 2013



Source: DIBP data (unpublished).

The large majority of IMAs from Sri Lanka were Tamils. However, in 2012, approximately 13 per cent of IMAs were Sinhalese, increasing from zero per cent in 2011.

Partly reflecting the changes in IMA dynamics and volume, returns to Sri Lanka following enhanced screening increased in volume. Between July 2012 and end May 2013, 162 voluntary and 965 involuntary returns to Sri Lanka occurred.<sup>70</sup>

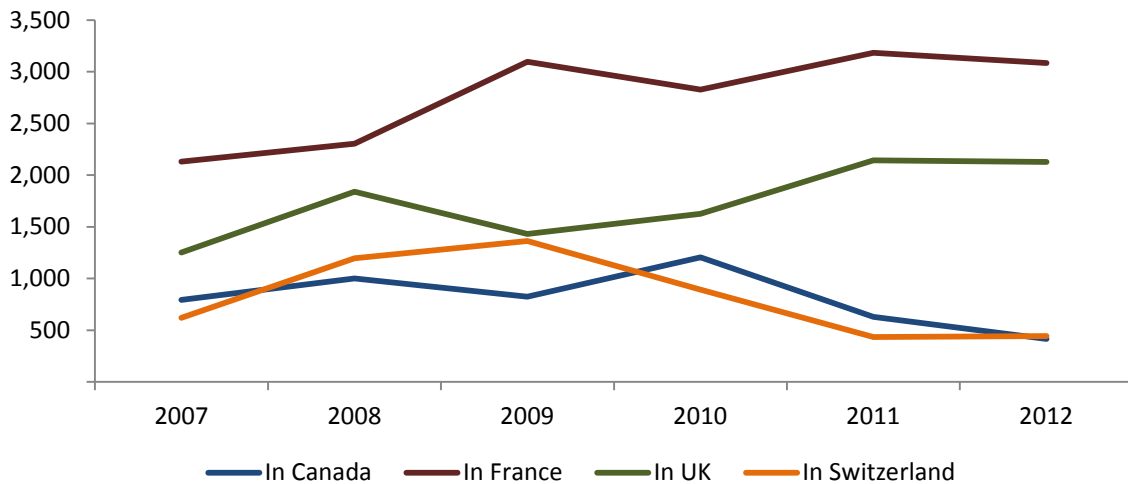
In a broader, global context, the Sri Lankan IMA flows to Australia were atypical, as shown in Figures 11 and 12. This is both in terms of the volume but also in regard to the trends, with only Australia experiencing the significant and sudden increase.

<sup>68</sup> For example, ABC Radio, Interview with Richard Danziger, Chief of Mission, International Organisation for Migration in Sri Lanka, November 2012.

<sup>69</sup> By the end of 2012, many IMAs had not at that stage lodged applications for asylum, hence they were not captured in UNHCR asylum applications data in Table 4.

<sup>70</sup> Parliament of Australia (28 May 2013) pp. 52-53 & 115-116.

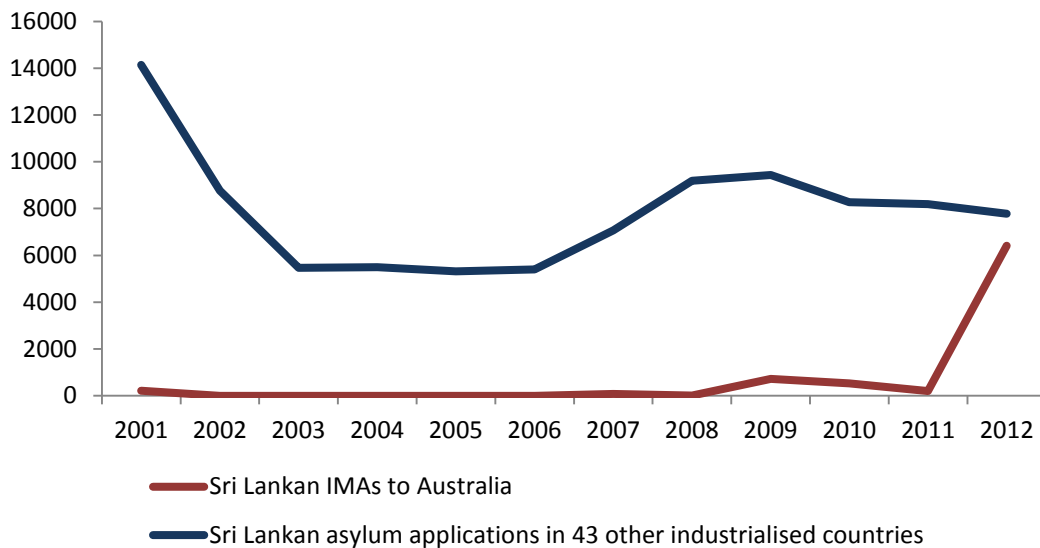
Figure 10: Sri Lankan asylum seekers: Key destination countries: 2007-2012



Source: UNHCR (2008–2013) *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries* (various editions)

Figure 10 reveals the significant increase in Sri Lankan asylum seekers that occurred in Australia did not occur in other key destination countries. When Sri Lankan asylum applications submitted in all 44 industrialised countries are examined, a similar picture emerges (as shown in Figure 11).

Figure 11: Sri Lankan asylum applications in 43 industrialised countries (excluding Australia) and Sri Lankan IMAs: 2001-2012



Sources: UNHCR (2002–2013) *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries* (various editions); DIBP (unpublished)  
 Notes: The 43 industrialised countries include the 44 industrialised countries listed in the UNHCR report except Australia.

## 7. REASONS POTENTIAL IRREGULAR MIGRANTS FROM SRI LANKA CHOOSE TO TRAVEL TO DESTINATION COUNTRIES

In 2012, some people believed Sri Lankan IMAs entered Australia for economic reasons.<sup>71</sup> This is hardly surprising; literature suggests economic factors are an important reason people seek asylum,<sup>72</sup> and Australia has been one of the few OECD countries where the economy remained resilient throughout the global financial crisis. Others claimed Sri Lankans entered due to humanitarian reasons, citing political persecution and torture<sup>73</sup>. Yet, according to literature,<sup>74</sup> the reasons were likely to be multidimensional, with neither economic prospects nor humanitarian issues representing the only reason for an IMA to enter Australia.

Surveys conducted in Sri Lanka during January and May 2013 on behalf of the Australian government sought the views of potential irregular migrants themselves. Both surveys involved a pilot of over 400 people and a final survey of over 4,000 people using iPad technology (hence a total of 8,800 people were surveyed over two waves). Districts, the largest administrative unit in Sri Lanka, were selected based on source locations of irregular migrants. Simple random sampling was then employed to select Divisional Secretariats (DSs), the second largest administrative unit and Grama Niladhari (GNs), the lowest administrative unit. Households within GNs were selected randomly when possible. Data was weighted to consider non-response, ethnicity, IMA source location and gender.<sup>75</sup>

The surveys asked respondents about their intentions as they related to migration to Australia by boat. Based on responses to survey questions, respondents were then categorised as 'Non Intenders', 'Intenders', 'Active Intenders' and/or 'Paid Intenders'.<sup>76</sup> In essence, 'Intenders' expressed a desire to travel overseas by boat, 'Active Intenders' demonstrated action by having made plans to travel and 'Paid Intenders' had provided some commitment by making a payment towards such travel. The focus of the results presented in this paper is on 'Intenders' given the low sample sizes and hence relatively larger margins of error involved in analysing the sub-samples 'Active Intenders' and 'Paid Intenders'. Further information on the 'Intender Continuum' is in Appendix B.

### 7.1 Reasons why people expressed an intention to travel to Australia by boat for asylum

Figure 12 illustrates reasons captured during the surveys as to why Intenders want to leave Sri Lanka and enter Australia. Note that the sample size is too small to allow categorisation according to ethnicity.<sup>77</sup>

A very high proportion of respondents (89 per cent) who were categorised as Intenders indicated that they desired to travel to Australia by boat for asylum to 'give their families a 'better future'. While acknowledging that this was a very broad response option that is multi-dimensional in nature, it

<sup>71</sup> March, S (2012)

<sup>72</sup> Neumayer (2005)

<sup>73</sup> Doherty (2012)

<sup>74</sup> Monsutti (2005)

<sup>75</sup> Male responses were given greater weighting than female responses (by a ratio of 89:11) as males overwhelmingly represent IMA. Greater weightings were also provided for districts that were source areas for IMAs. Ethnicity was weighted such that it was reflective of the populations in the districts surveyed (these were predominately Tamil, with all but one of the five districts surveyed having Tamil populations greater than 80%). Areas with higher non-response were given greater weighting (although levels of non-response were largely consistent across districts).

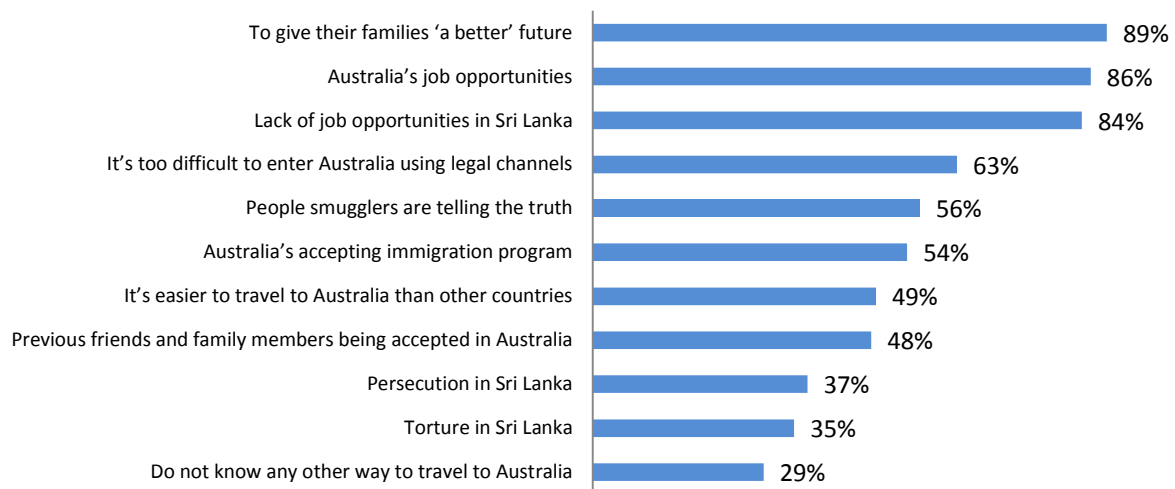
<sup>76</sup> In January 2013, Intenders, Active Intenders and Paid Intenders represented an estimated 7.92%, 1.46% and 0.22% of the population in the districts surveyed respectively. This reduced to 4.53%, 0.54% and 0.16% across Intenders, Active Intenders and Paid Intenders respectively during the May 2013 survey.

<sup>77</sup> Intenders represent a small percentage of the total sample and hence a further breakdown across ethnicity would increase the margins of error.

is worth highlighting that the responses reflect two key aspects in the decision making of potential irregular migrants: a wish for a better *future*; and a desire to create that future for their *families*.

When this result is examined in conjunction with the next two highest ranking results – ‘Australia’s job opportunities’ (86 per cent) and ‘lack of job opportunities in Sri Lanka’ (84 per cent) – it is possible that many respondents view the attainment of a better future as being linked, in part, to employment and the ability to earn an income. The importance of remittances to the Sri Lankan economy and, therefore, Sri Lankan families, means that it is possible that ‘giving their families a better future’ includes family members that would remain in Sri Lanka.

Figure 12: Reasons why Intenders want to leave Sri Lanka and enter Australia via boat.



Source: January and May 2013 survey commissioned for the Australian Government

However economic factors are unlikely to be the only reasons for wanting a better life. People who referred to persecution *or* torture amounted to almost 40 per cent of respondents. Notwithstanding the English definitions of ‘torture’ and ‘persecution’, these are ambiguous terms in Tamil and Sinhala. For example, ‘torture’ may refer to torture or violence from domestic partners rather than from state agents as might be assumed, while persecution may refer to Northern Tamils ‘persecuting’ Southern Tamils or vice versa with no consideration of whether or not the state could provide effective protection in such circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Further research is required to gain a better understanding of potential irregular migrants’ views on more precise meanings of ‘torture’ and ‘persecution’.

The difficulties involved with entering Australia using legal channels (63 per cent) could be due to the requirements necessary for skilled and other migration, and challenges of being accepted via Australia’s Humanitarian Program. Further, while people smugglers are criminals and may lie to increase the number of clients, they may also have successfully facilitated previous transfers of irregular migrants to Australia via boat. This could point to the reason why ‘people smugglers’ are known as ‘agents’ by some Sri Lankans and why 56 per cent of Intenders believe people smugglers tell the truth.

That over 50 per cent of people stated ‘Australia’s accepting immigration program’ as a reason why they chose Australia as a destination seems significant. However, the most attractive features of the immigration policy have not been identified. Moreover, an ‘accepting immigration program’ could conceivably refer to the Skilled Migration Program, the numerous advertisements encouraging

<sup>78</sup> Jayasuriya and Gibson (2013)

students to travel to Australia or possibly the way asylum seekers are treated in Australia. Further research is clearly required to determine which aspects of Australia's immigration program are most attractive.

The fact that 49 per cent of Intenders believe it is easier to travel to Australia compared to other countries may be surprising given the documented deaths of asylum seekers at sea and the close proximity to other potential countries such as India. However, many Sri Lankans living in coastal towns are fisherman and hence, spending two weeks to a month at sea, which is approximately how long it takes to travel from Sri Lanka to Australia by boat, is unlikely to be an issue. Note, while India is certainly easier to travel to than Australia, survey results indicate that India is not a 'preferred' destination (refer Figure 14 below).

The 48 per cent of Intenders who say previous friends and family being accepted in Australia is a reason for wanting to travel to Australia is reasonable and consistent with similar studies highlighting the importance for asylum seekers of relatives who live in destination countries.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, future asylum seekers may believe they have similar chances of resettlement, will have an inside track on the process and potentially a strong support network if they are granted protection.

While 29 per cent of Intenders state not knowing any other way to travel to Australia is a reason for travelling by boat, it is conceivable that more than 29 per cent actually do not know other forms of travel – even if it's not a reason. Indeed, the chances of potential irregular migrants entering through regular programs are likely to be minimal.

#### 7.1.1 Examination of 'economic intenders'

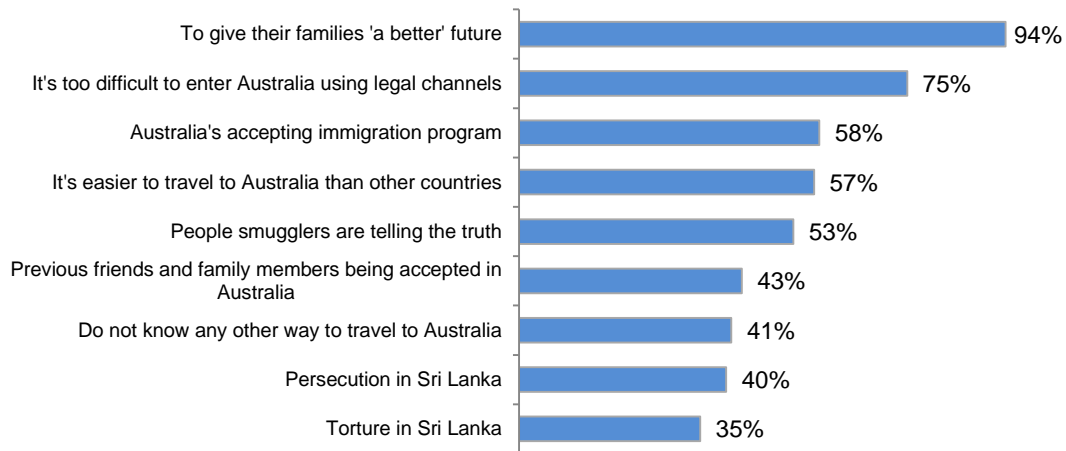
Economic factors were clearly one reason the large majority of people (approximately 85 per cent) intended leaving Sri Lanka to travel to Australia. Yet many of these people also had other reasons for travel, and it would be unwise to not recognise the multi-dimensional factors involved in migrant decision making.

To highlight this point, Figure 13 replicates Figure 12 but restricts the analysis to 'Economic Intenders' (those who stated they intended to leave Sri Lanka because of lack of job opportunities or intended to travel to Australia for job opportunities). Figure 13 shows 'Economic Intenders' also had other reasons for seeking asylum; i.e. these people are not *only* Intenders due to economic reasons.

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<sup>79</sup> Robinson and Segrott (2002)

Figure 13: Reasons why Intenders wanted to leave Sri Lanka and why they wanted to enter Australia via boat– sample restricted to ‘Economic Intenders’<sup>80</sup>



Source: January and May 2013 survey commissioned by the Australian Government

The reasons why ‘Economic Intenders’ desire to travel to Australia by boat (Figure 13) were similar to all Intenders (Figure 12). Of interest is that among ‘Economic’ Intenders, those who referred to persecution or torture amounted to approximately 42 per cent, suggesting at least 58 per cent of the Economic Intenders potentially wanted to travel to Australia for non-protection reasons.<sup>81</sup>

A key limitation of this survey data is that analysis focuses on people with an ‘*intention*’ (i.e. Intenders) to travel overseas for asylum and not people with a demonstrated ‘*action*’ (i.e. Active Intenders) or people who have ‘*committed*’ to travelling overseas for asylum (i.e. Paid Intenders).<sup>82</sup> Results relating to Intenders, Active Intenders and Paid Intenders are likely to vary significantly. To illustrate, among Active Intenders considering travelling to Australia for economic reasons, the number who referred to persecution or torture increased to 66 per cent, suggesting that the remaining 34 per cent may have intended travelling for reasons that did not overtly include protection-related concerns.<sup>83</sup> Future research should consider a larger sample size that is likely to capture a larger absolute number of Active Intenders and Paid Intenders.

Additionally, Figures 13 and 14 list reasons why Intenders desire to travel to Australia by boat without demonstrating their relative importance. To illustrate, while economic reasons and persecution may be important drivers, the presence of family and friends in Australia may be a key determinant. Future research is required to analyse the relative importance of drivers and determinants.

Finally future research should consider presenting a more comprehensive list of possible factors influencing irregular migration.

## 7.2 Intenders to Australia relative to the rest of the world

The May 2013 survey data found that 41 per cent of Intenders wanted to travel to Canada for asylum, followed by the UK (32 per cent) and France (28 per cent). Australia ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 13 countries listed, at 20 per cent (refer Figure 14). This suggests that while Australia is still a preferred destination for asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, its importance may be diminishing. Australia’s position relative to other countries could be due to a host of reasons including but not limited to geography, diaspora

<sup>80</sup> Data was pooled from the January and May surveys to increase the sample size of Intenders to Australia however this still produces a margin of error of approximately 5.4%.

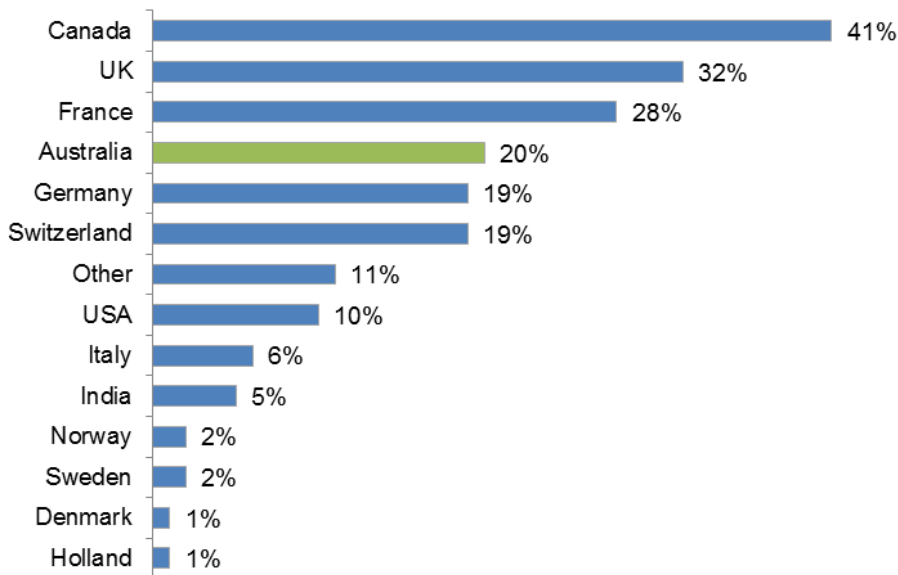
<sup>81</sup> ‘At least’ is used because, as noted previously, torture and persecution in Sri Lanka are ambiguous terms.

<sup>82</sup> Refer Appendix B.

<sup>83</sup> Results focusing on Active Intenders are subject to a margin of error of approximately 13%.

links, immigration policies and practices, and economic performance. Additional research is required to distil the relative importance of the multiple factors influencing decisions about potential migrants' preferred destinations.

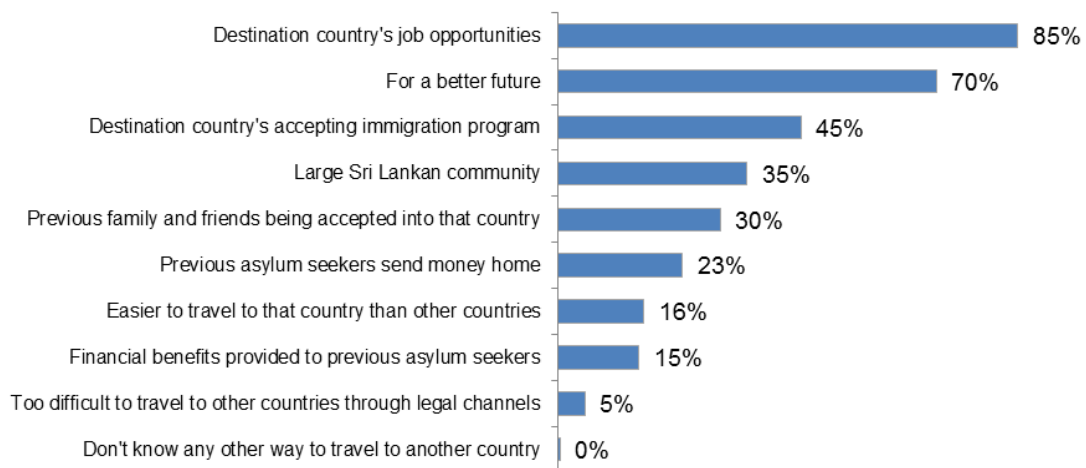
Figure 14: Intenders preferred destinations (May 2013 survey)<sup>84</sup>



Source: May 2013 survey commissioned for the Australian Government

Some reasons why Intenders want to travel to destination countries (anywhere in the world) are illustrated in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Reasons why Intenders are attracted to destination countries (all countries)<sup>85</sup>



Source: May 2013 survey commissioned for the Australian Government

The results show that economic factors are the main reason Intenders are attracted to a destination country.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Individuals may indicate a 'preference' to travel to more than one country while they have an 'intention' to travel to just one country. Results are subject to a margin of error of approximately 4.2%.

<sup>85</sup> Results are subject to a margin of error of approximately 4.2%.

<sup>86</sup> Note that these options were not shown to respondents during the survey process, suggesting results may change if they knew certain options were available. For example, intuitively, ease of travel is an important reason why would choose a certain country yet only 16% of people suggested this as an answer. Perhaps if respondents had been presented with options, more people would have selected ease of travel. Further, unlike in Figures 9 and 10, the results also do not highlight why a person may want to leave Sri Lanka. Results are subject to a 4.2% margin of error. Comparisons were not made between data in Figure 15 and why Intenders are attracted to Australia given large margins of error in the analysis.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

Many Sri Lankans travel overseas for regular and irregular migration purposes. In 2009, just over 13,000 Sri Lankans travelled for study while in 2011, approximately 260,000 migrants travelled overseas for temporary or permanent employment opportunities. The large majority of foreign workers are Sinhalese, with the large majority of Sinhalese entering Middle Eastern countries. In contrast, Tamils comprise the bulk of Sri Lanka's diaspora in industrialised countries, and make up the majority of asylum seekers and refugees.

Sri Lanka is a minor destination country for asylum seekers, with 232 registered in 2012. The number of IDPs in Sri Lanka has reduced from almost 400,000 after the war to fewer than 100,000 as at the end of 2012. Less than 10,000 were in IDP camps in December 2012.

In 2012, just over 15,000 Sri Lankans were asylum seekers globally with Australia ranked as the number one destination. When focusing on irregular maritime arrivals, Australia experienced an unusual jump from under 100 arrivals from the first quarter of 2012 to around 2600 in the third quarter of 2012. This number was also unusual when compared to asylum applications globally, with other countries experiencing decreases, plateaus or minor increases in 2012. While beyond the scope of this paper, it is likely that a range of complex factors were involved in the anomalous increase.

Surveys undertaken in high IMA source areas of Sri Lanka during January and May of 2013 revealed that the reasons people intended to travel by boat to Australia involved multiple, inter-related factors, including factors related to protection, visa access, employment, people smuggling, geography and family/community links. The most prominent factors related primarily to economic prosperity. This is unsurprising given economic factors were also the primary reason for people desiring to travel to other countries. Of more interest is among people traveling for economic reasons, results show at least 58 per cent of people with a desire (Intenders), and at least 36 per cent of people with plans in place (Active Intenders), to travel by boat to Australia appeared to do so for non-protection reasons. That said, further research is required for a more precise analysis of the drivers and determinants of Active Intenders and Paid Intenders.

The survey findings are consistent with Koser's discussion of a paradigm shift involving the convergence of 'political refugees and economic migrants into a single migration route', as *asylum seeking*.<sup>87</sup> Seeking asylum via irregular migration channels can be an effective strategy whereby people, including genuine asylum seekers, can gain a legitimate migration status relatively swiftly that would be virtually impossible to obtain by staying where they are or attempting to move via regular pathways.

The survey results in this paper highlight the multi-dimensional factors potential irregular migrants take into account when assessing and re-assessing whether to, and where to, migrate. Further examination of both potential and actual migrants' views (including IMAs) would allow for a deeper understanding of the drivers and motivations of those Sri Lankans who migrate irregularly by maritime means. Another useful research focus would be the possible decision making factors involved in potential irregular migrants who decide not to migrate, including in relation to those who may be facing protection issues. Adhikari's research on the impact of a range of factors on potential refugee decision making in Nepal highlights that individual decision making, even in extreme conflict situations, is based on more than just the threat to one's life and includes factors related to economic livelihoods and social networks.<sup>88</sup>

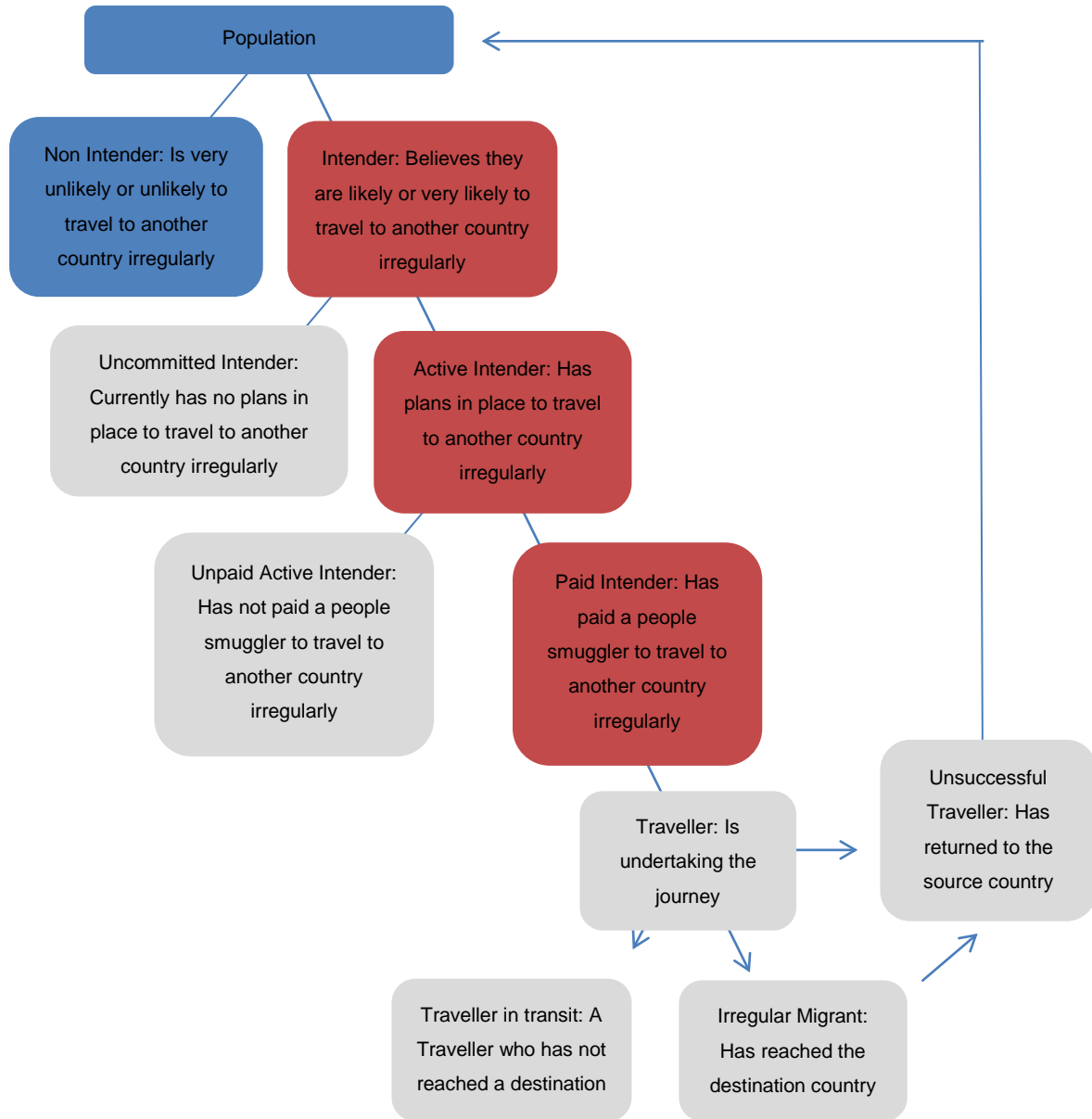
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<sup>87</sup> Koser (2001) p. 88

<sup>88</sup> Adhikari (2012)



Appendix B – Intender Continuum



The surveys ascertained if people were Non Intenders, Intenders, Active Intenders and/or Paid Intenders relating to boat travel. In essence, Intenders have a ‘desire’ to travel overseas by boat irregularly, Active Intenders have demonstrated ‘action’ by having plans in place while Paid Intenders have ‘committed’. The focus of the data presented in this paper is on Intenders given the low sample sizes and hence relatively larger margins of error involved in analysing Active Intenders and Paid Intenders.

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