REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, THE CRISIS IN EUROPE AND THE FUTURE OF POLICY

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Forced displacement

- UNHCR *Global Trends* documents 60 million forcibly displaced at the end of 2014.
- The High Commissioner remarks that: "We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before" (UNHCR, 2015a, p. 3).
- The number is up from 37.5 million ten years ago.
- Most of the 60 million are internally displaced/stateless/returned refugees etc.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- Refugees are much smaller numbers and the trends look a little different.

- The total number of refugees (as defined in the 1951 Convention) is 13.7m—less than the peak of 17.8m in 1992.

- The annual *flow* of asylum applications to 38 'industrialized countries', which has dominated the headlines, is smaller still.

- It increased steeply to a total of 845,000 in 2014—about the same as in 2002. But it is set to go much higher (1.4m in Jan-Oct 2015).

Figure 1: Refugees and Asylum Seekers, 1982-2014
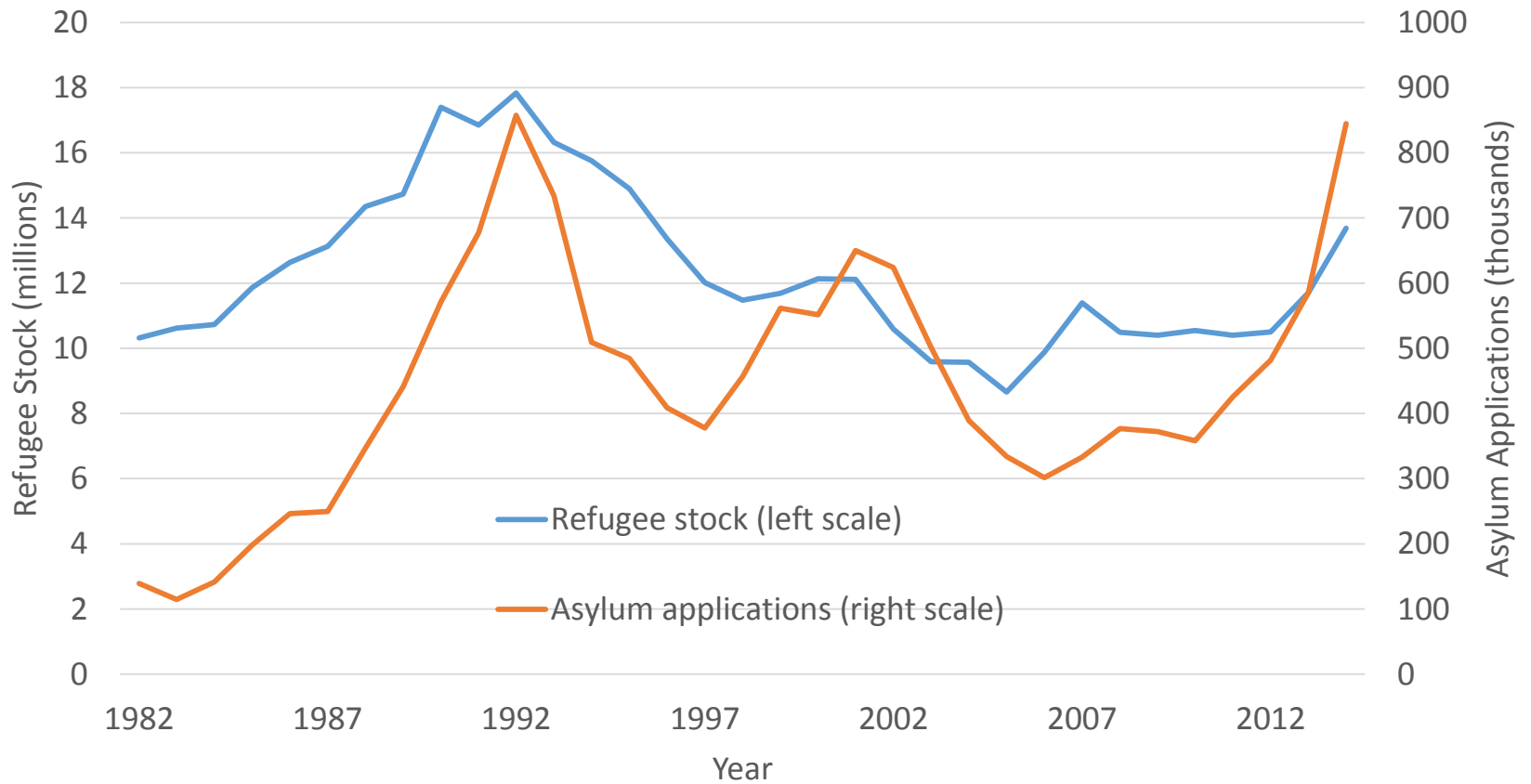
Asylum Applications

- The recent surge partly reflects an the upward shift in the causes of displacement.

- But there may also be a ratchet effect to a permanently higher level, as there was in the 1980s.

- Recent events have sparked a political and policy backlash. They have re-ignited the debate about genuine refugees versus 'economic migrants'

- On one hand, most asylum applicants come from strife-prone countries. But on the other, over half are rejected as not being genuine refugees.

- So what drives surges in asylum applications to the OECD?

Determinants of Asylum Applications

- Applications to 19 countries (EU-14, Switzerland, Norway, US Canada, Australia) from 48 strife-prone origins, 1997-2012.

- Results from regressions with origin-destination dyad fixed effects:

- War, terror, human rights abuse. These are the most important, particularly the political terror scale. Wars matter but their effects are captured by the terror scale

- Economic variables. Origin country GDP per capita is negatively related to applications. So economic imperatives matter: a ten percent increase in origin GDP per capita reduces applications by about five percent.

Determinants of (log) asylum applications

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Political terror scale	0.214** (4.48)	0.221** (4.53)	0.221** (4.57)	
Civil liberties (Freedom House index)	0.285** (4.93)	0.289** (4.74)	0.292** (4.80)	
Political rights (Freedom House index)	-0.044 (1.06)	-0.050 (1.21)	-0.049 (1.19)	
Civil war battle deaths (000s)	0.012 (0.76)	0.010 (0.62)	0.010 (0.64)	
Log origin country real GDP per capita	-0.517** (2.35)	-0.533** (2.26)	-0.542** (2.32)	
Log migrant stock in 2000/1 from origin at destination	0.226** (8.54)			0.226** (8.59)
Log distance from origin to destination	-0.777** (4.07)			-0.788** (4.00)

Determinants of asylum applications (contd.)

Log destination country GDP per capita	0.178 (0.35)	0.066 (0.12)	-0.122 (0.23)	0.043 (0.09)
Unemployment rate at destination	-0.025** (2.22)	-0.024** (2.14)	-0.024** (2.19)	-0.029** (2.60)
Asylum policy index overall		-0.046** (4.03)		
Policy on access			-0.115** (4.12)	-0.110** (3.19)
Policy on processing			-0.100** (6.45)	-0.103** (6.78)
Policy on welfare			0.049* (1.76)	0.034 (1.20)
Fixed effects (number of FE)	Origin (48)	Origin × Dest(626)	Origin × Dest (626)	Origin × Year (765)
Destination dummies	Yes	No	No	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
R^2 Within	0.40	0.12	0.13	0.40
No of Obs.	9610	9610	9610	9610

Determinants of asylum applications (contd.)

- Destination country conditions matter, particularly asylum policies. I use a 15-component policy index.

- Policies aimed at limiting access to the country's territory, (border controls, visa restrictions, carrier sanctions etc.) have strong deterrent effects.

- The process of determining refugee status (definition of a refugee, defining some claims as 'manifestly unfounded' etc.) also have strong deterrent effects.

- Policies towards asylum seeker welfare (welfare benefits; dispersal, detention etc.) have no effect.

- It is the chance of gaining permanent settlement that drives asylum applications despite the hardships that this involves.

Trends in Asylum Policies
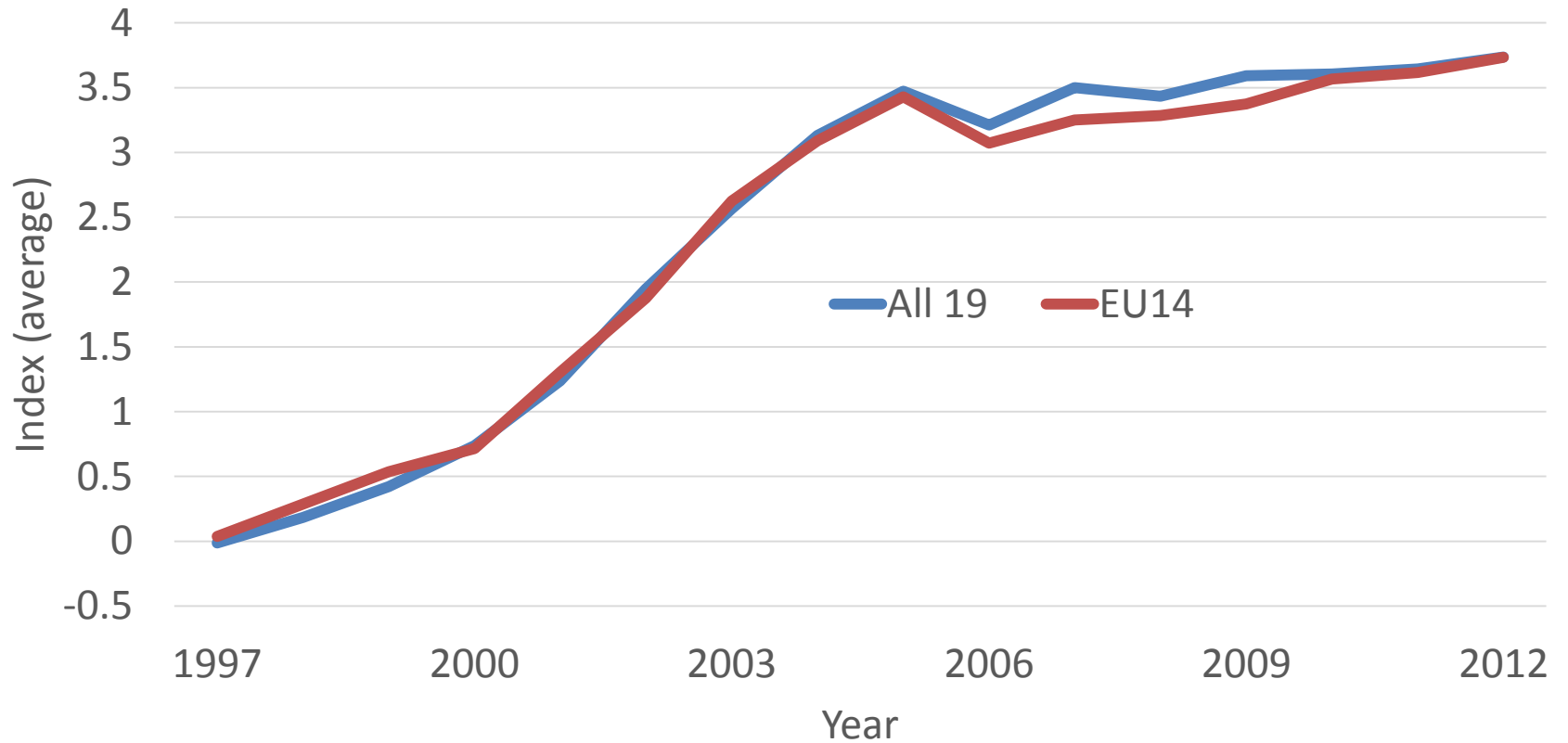
Trends in asylum policies (contd)

- Higher numbers represent tougher (more restrictive) policy.

- Some evidence of a steep tightening of asylum policies in 2000 to 2005.

- Possibly a reaction to 9/11 and the preceding asylum surge; the pattern is similar for the EU-14 only.

- It is visible in all policy dimensions but especially border controls and refugee status determination procedures.

- Much less tightening of policy from 2005 to 2012.

- That could be because asylum application were lower in 2004-11, but it could reflect the increasing influence of the EU's Common European Asylum System.

Politics and public opinion

- Policymakers must pay attention to public opinion, especially on high-salience issues such as asylum.

- A notable development is the growth in support for far right populist parties that have an anti-immigration agenda.

- Even if not in power these parties have influence the platforms of the mainstream centrist parties.

- There is a large literature that analyses opinion surveys. Most of this is cross sectional; some multilevel analysis.

- But these do not tell us much about the trends over time or what drives them.

ESS Public Opinion

- Here I look at the European Social Survey (ESS) in 2002 and 2014 (the latter just released).

- These are the relevant questions:

- To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of a different race or ethnic group as most [country] people to come and live here? (many/some/a few/none).

- How about people from the poorer countries outside Europe? (many/some/a few/ none).

- Government should be generous judging applications for refugee status (strongly agree/agree/neither/disagree/ strongly disagree).

Public Opinion: ESS 2002 and 2014

	Different ethnic group		From poor countries		Generous to refugees	
	% few or none		% few or none		% disagree	
	2014	Change	2014	Change	2014	Change
Austria	50.3	-16.3	57.4	-8.3	37.9	-5.7
Belgium	41.1	-3.6	47.6	3.9	44.4	-15.1
Switzerland	37.1	3.5	44.5	13.9	34.9	-14.9
Czech Rep.	73.2	19.4	73.2	23.4	45.2	-17.3
Germany	25.7	-18	36	-6.3	34.8	-26
Denmark	38.7	-12.8	55.2	1.4	29	-21.3
Finland	53.1	-9.6	64.8	4.7	21.8	-11.3
France	38.8	-8.4	48.3	-2.9	17.5	-1.2
Ireland	50.1	14.5	58.9	22.5	20.7	-0.4
Netherlands	32.4	-9.6	46.5	2.6	46.2	-28.7
Norway	23.5	-19.8	32	-6.2	18.3	-28
Poland	42.7	-1.5	47.7	5.3	8.6	-4.5
Sweden	7.6	-9.3	12.6	-2.8	9.8	-13.3
Slovenia	35.8	-8	47.8	4.3	24.1	-25.4
Average	39.3	-5.7	48.0	4.0	28.1	-15.2

Changes in opinion 2002-2014

- On average opinion has become more positive towards ethnic minority immigrants and more negative to immigration from poor countries. But it has become much more positive towards genuine refugees.

- Cross country correlations of changes in opinion:

- Different ethnic groups and poor country immig: 0.96

- Different ethnic group and generous to refugees: 0.39

- Poor country immig and generous to refugees 0.24

- So opinion on refugees is not so closely linked with that on other types of immigrants.

Public opinion and asylum applications

- It seems possible that opinion has been shaped by the number of asylum applications.

- Here I correlate the change in opinion between 2002 and 2012 with the change in asylum applications per capita between 1997-2001 and 2009-2013.

- Asylum flow and different ethnic group opinion: 0.37

- Asylum flow and opinion on poor country immig: 0.48

- Asylum flow and opinion on generous to refugees: -0.15

- So a surge of asylum applications is associated with more negative opinion on immigration of different ethnicities and from poor countries but *not* with opinion towards genuine refugees.

Refugees and 'economic migrants'

- Most observers agree that the flow of asylum applicants is 'mixed migration'. The effect of origin country income on applications is consistent with this.

- Public opinion has become more favourable to genuine refugees. But it is massively against illegal immigration and has not become much more favourable towards ethnic minorities and migrants from poor countries.

- If a backlash is to be avoided and the capacity to host refugees increased with public support then that would imply screening potential refugees *before* they arrive in the EU.

The Common European Asylum System

- The CEAS has gone through three phases. These have mainly involved harmonising standards, with directives on refugee definition, processing standards, reception conditions etc.

- But asylum seeker destination-country preferences are very unbalanced. If popular countries can't have tougher policies then this will persist.

- Tentative evidence (Hatton 2009) suggested that convergence in policy leads to divergence in asylum application rates.

- The Dublin regulation is not helpful and should be (has effectively been?) abandoned.

Asylum applications per 1000 population 2009-13
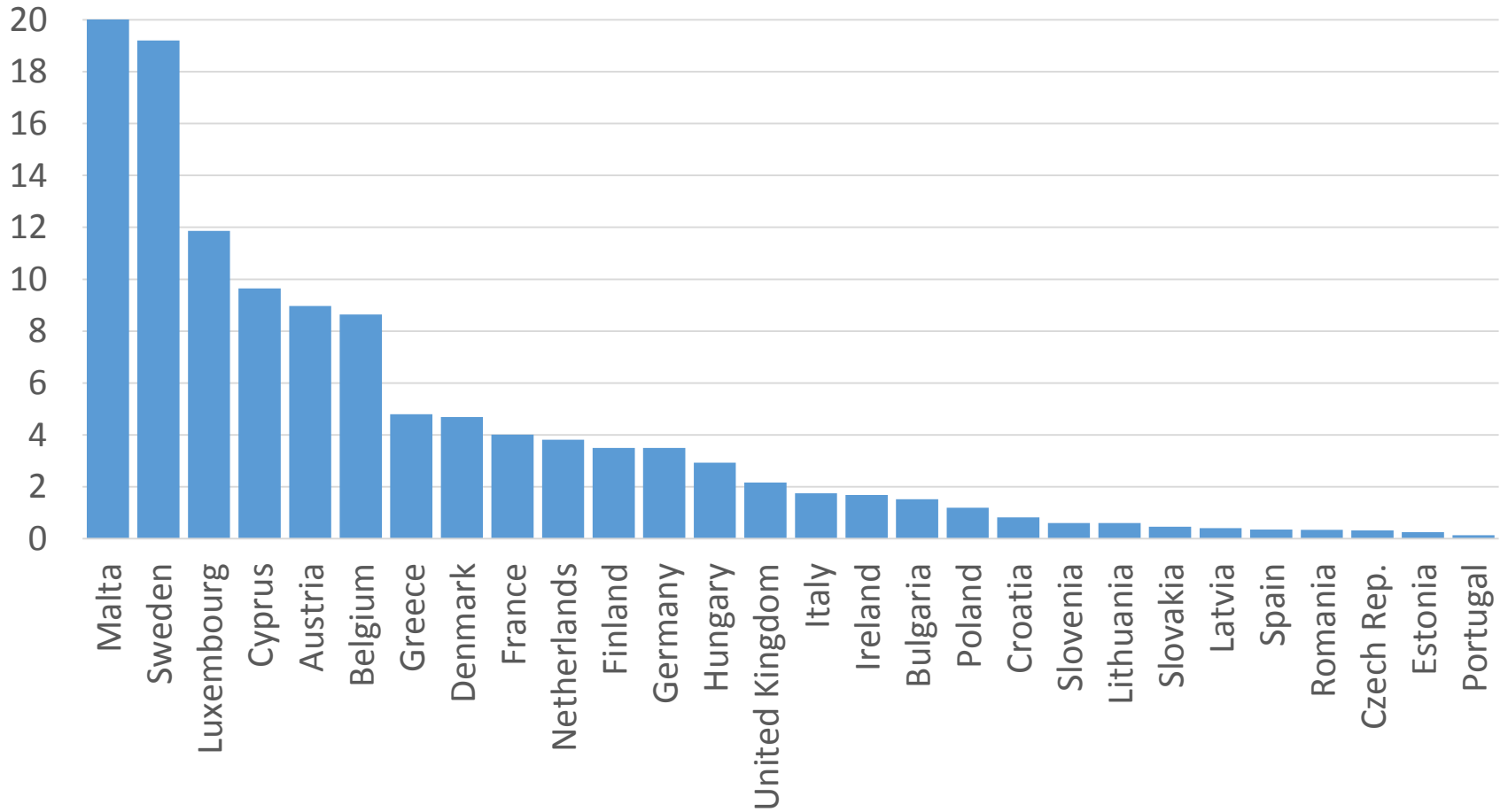
Burden sharing

- If we do care about refugees, they can be viewed as a public good. EU citizens gain benefit from seeing refugees protected.

- But they are less keen on their own country bearing the cost.

- If refugees are thought of as a public good then, in the absence of cooperation, capacity will be under-provided.

- Despite periodic discussion the CEAS has made no progress on this--until now. 120,000 is not many but it is a start.

- In order to build on this start and to radically increase total refugee hosting capacity, policy must be ceded to a supra national body. The EU as the social planner.

Public opinion on a common immigration policy

- Would public opinion be supportive of a more centralised EU asylum policy?

- We don't have much evidence specifically for asylum but support among EU citizens for a common policy on migration is surprisingly high (and increasing).

- Eurobarometer Spring 2015: "Please tell me whether you are for it or against it... A common European policy on migration"

- The country average of the share in favour is 70.3 percent for the EU-27 (exc Latvia) and 71.8 percent for the EU-15.

Some implications, especially for the EU

- Making life miserable for asylum applicants is not a deterrent, so put more effort resources into refugee welfare.

- Providing aid to origin (and transit) countries won't stop them coming. It would require an unimaginably large development programme—not just 1.8 million Euros.

- Tougher border controls will reduce the numbers but they need to be draconian (vis Australia).

- Public opinion is increasingly favourable to 'genuine refugees', not so much to others and very negative towards illegal immigrants.

- Stronger border controls could reduce the numbers and gain public confidence but it would screen out genuine refugees.

Implications for the EU (contd.)

- Two policies need to follow from this:

- First, provide more support for refugees in transit countries and embark on a large resettlement scheme. Then asylum policy will be targeted to those most in need, not those with the energy/enterprise/resources to risk the trip to Europe.

- Second, if we do care about refugees, they can be viewed as a locally-provided public good, which in the absence of cooperation will be under-provided.

- There is surprisingly strong public support for EU-wide policy. Building on the existing EU distribution 'agreement' could increase total capacity to host refugees through a vastly increased resettlement programme.

Conclusion

- There are no easy solutions to the refugee crisis that has preoccupied Europe for the last three years.

- But we could do better by (a) tightening the borders and (b) resettling vastly more of those in the greatest need.

- Any policy needs to be politically feasible, and these measures would work with the grain of public opinion, not against it. Otherwise we risk a massive backlash.

- It would be a constructive way of developing EU asylum policy but it would go only a modest way towards alleviating the hardships and misery of 60 million people.