Choice or circumstance: the UK as the location of asylum applications by Bosnian and Somali refugees

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Author(s)
Day, Kate and White, Paul

Aims

To address the question of why asylum seekers make their applications in particular countries rather than others.

Methodology

The research is based on interviews with 10 Somali and 12 Bosnian respondents in Sheffield.

Key issues

The article examines existing approaches to understanding migration statistics and movement among migrants and asylum

seekers. It is argued that asylum migration is more complex than suggested by aggregated statistics. Key features of the movements of Bosnian and Somali ‘choice’ and movement are outlined. There is commonly a two stage movement: first to a neighbouring haven, and then onto a more permanent place of settlement. Few of the respondents had any real choice in where they ended up. Family circumstances, cultural connections, and the actions of a variety of institutions produced scenarios in which there was generally no alternative to the actual destination arrived at.

Conclusions

A mix of individual level and institutional explanations is needed to understand patterns of asylum destinations.

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