

Acting on Thresholds: Policies and geographical thresholds to mobility

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Abstract

This paper aims for a better understanding of the mutual relationship between national policies and migrant mobilities. The theoretical background is given by the threshold approach that we have developed on borders, mobility and migration. Central in this approach are the mental processes individuals who (want to) move in space are involved in. During this process they have to decide on three geographical thresholds. The first threshold concerns the idea to become mobile, to leave the familiar places and to cross national borders (for many people not that obvious), the second the location of the destination and its borders and 'bordering', and the third concerns the mobility trajectories or routes. Examples are presented from the EU and the ASEAN, respectively the crossing of borders between the Netherlands and Germany, mobility in the EU during the 2008 financial crisis, the 2015/16 flows of refugees crossing the Turkish-EU border, Philippine labour emigration and the Indonesian-Malaysian migration corridor. Finally, the approach and cases will be discussed in relation to policies and governance with regard to mobility and borders.

Keywords:

Borders; Mobility, Migration; Thresholds; Decision Making

Introduction¹

All over the world, rich countries of the North have to cope with increasing flows of migrants from the South. Most recently, the so-called refugee-crisis in the EU has put migration, migration control and decision making both from migrants and governments, firmly on the agenda again. But also in other parts of the world international migration is cause for concern. The migrant-flows consist of both people fleeing their home and country because they feel their lives are at risk, and those who want to escape poverty and are looking for employment and a better life². This all happens in a global society in which it seemed that borders are disappearing. To a large degree that might be the case where it concerns goods, capital as well as for (especially rich) mobile people. But the migrant crises and the war on terrorism show that solid borders are again on the political agenda when it concerns people.

Especially in Europe, or better put in the Schengen-zone, it is easy to travel internationally. But when it comes to travelling and migrating across the outer EU-border it tends to become more complicated both for European and non-EU citizens who want to enter Europe. Passports, visa and other travel and residence permits are then still necessary. In general, the longer one intends to stay at a certain

¹This introduction is largely based on a paper that was published in the Dutch journal *Geografie* (Van Naerssen & Van der Velde, 2016)

²We are well aware of the fact that in practice these two categories of migrants are not always easy to distinguish since often in the mind of people migrants with different motives are merged.

place and the bigger the socio-economic differences, the more far-reaching crossing the border is for the traveller. So it is understandable that many decide to stay put. Some 97 per cent of the world population is still living in their country of birth. But at the same time due to the world-wide population growth (and at least in the mind of many) many people still decide to leave their residence. Of course we have to keep in mind that as the world population is growing with about 80 million per year, also the stock of mobile people should increase by some 2.5 million, being 3 per cent of this growth. Secondly when people do become mobile, the flows are very often highly directional. Or as Faist put it: "Why are there so few migrants from so many places and so many from only a few places." (2000, 1)

It is in this context of (perceived) mass directed mobility and quite persistent immobility that this paper wants to present and illustrate an approach that we have developed to better understand the dynamics of (im)mobility and the impact of policies on this dynamics and vice versa. We call this the threshold approach (Van der Velde & Van Naerssen, 2015). The approach is basically applicable to all forms of mobility, but this paper confines itself to cross-border international mobility. The first part will discuss the approach as such. In the second part we'll present some empirical underpinning and illustrations from the EU and Southeast Asia. The third part will be dedicated to some thoughts on the relevance of this approach for policies and governance with regard to mobility and migration.

Part I: The Thresholds-approach

The majority of theories on the causes of cross-border migration focuses on factors that impact on the decision of migrants to leave. For example: Structural (social and economic) factors at the macro-level that push or pull migrants to be mobile or institutions at the micro-level such as the family or the household that decide whether someone will go. Instead, in our approach the migrant him/herself is at the central actor and the core of our lies in the mental processes of the migrants (to be). These processes concern perceptions, which include rational considerations but also emotions people are involved in. Before becoming mobile, one has to overcome certain mental thresholds. These barriers or impediments may in the end result in a (conscious or unconscious) decision not to move. In this approach the issue of immobility is therefore explicitly incorporated. The barriers or thresholds can differ greatly in nature as well as impact. In geography of course the geographical dimension is of particular interest. In the approach we distinguish three geographical barriers: thresholds related to (a) the intention to become mobile at all, (b) to the (potential) destination and (c) to the spatial trajectory or route to reach this destination. These factors together are making up the mobility arena (fig. 1).

In the mobility arena itself geographical factors are playing an important role, but are not autonomous. The arena is 'surrounded' by a 'force field' in which socio-economic factors are weighing in on the decision making process of people that do or in the end do not move. The core central arrow is representing the set of decisions that have to be taken in order to reach a (final or intermediate) destination. The smaller arrows are visualizing the possible relations between the location and the trajectory thresholds. Here the route can influence the final destination, but also the other way round the projected destination may influence the route. The complexity of the trajectories is represented by the dotted smaller arrows. To enter the arena first of all a mental threshold with regard to becoming mobile that we call indifference threshold, has to be surpassed. Next a distinction is made with regard to internal and external aspects of thresholds related to the location and the trajectory. The first are representing the migrant's perception of these thresholds and the second are the physical or geographical aspects. Or put differently, the first aspects are more related to the decision making process and the second linked to actual movement. In the graph the location and trajectory threshold are positioned next to each other on purpose. It is too simplistic to suppose that the destination determines the trajectory. Of course in many instances

this is the case, certainly when it concerns regular migration. But especially with undocumented migration this is more often than not, not the case. The route determines sometimes the (intermediate) destinations and not the other way round.

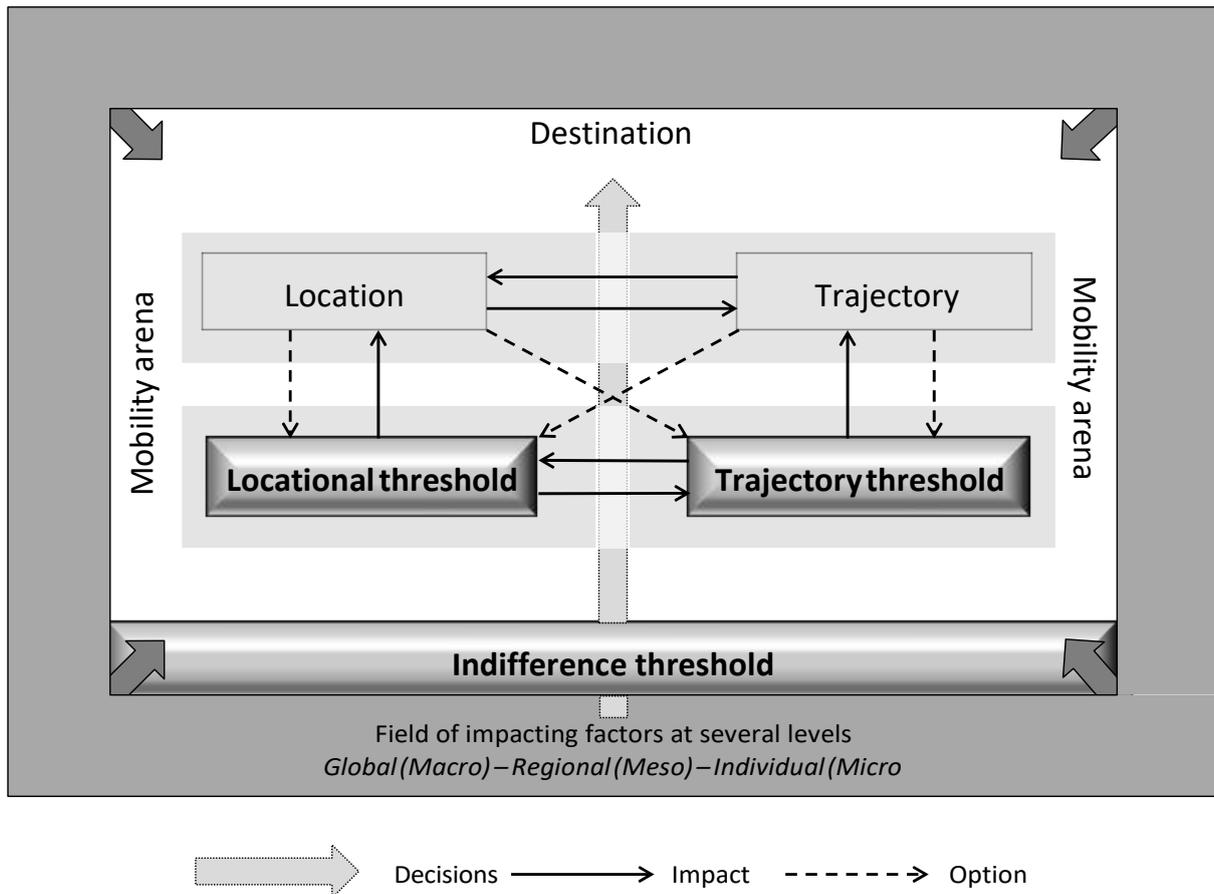


Figure 1: Field of factors, thresholds and decision-making in spatial mobility
 Source: Van der Velde & van Naerssen, 2105, p. 274

The next sections will elaborate a bit more on the different parts of the graphical representation of the approach.

Push and Pull

By far the most research on decision making by migrant is related to (a part of) the (external) force field, to wit the reasons for people to migrate and the societal factors die are influencing migration decisions. Already at the end of the 19th century Ravenstein published his Laws of Migration (1885; 1889), in which distance, stage of life and economic circumstances are playing a major role. In the 60s Lee has transformed this in a push-and-pull model, meaning that people are moving for instance because of poverty in the home country (push) or better economic perspectives in other countries (pull) (Lee, 1966). Push and pull are each other’s mirror images. Other arguments for push and pull are easily extended, for example with violence in the home country or safety in other countries.

On a macro level these factors relate to countries, their economy and institutions as judicial systems. On the meso level regions are at play. Here you can think of the contrasts between the North of Nigeria where Boko Haram is creating turmoil and the South where it is relatively quiet. On the micro level households and individuals are determining. In this sense migration is considered as a strategy by households, in which livelihoods are safeguarded because members of these households are involved in different income generating activities (Stark and Bloom, 1985). Some are working in the

countryside, others in cities or even abroad. This way households are reducing the risk of poverty. According to this theory a decision on the strategy is made by the household and not the individual. Notwithstanding the important role of the household in this force field, of course it remains still to the individual to finally decide to move or not.

Staying

Migration studies until now have a tendency to focus especially on those that actually have moved. But as Arango puts it: "... the usefulness of theories that try to explain why people move is in our days dimmed by their inability to explain why [*relatively speaking*] so few people move". (2000, 293; insertion by the authors). Of course this is mainly focussing on international migration. *Intranational* movement is not included. But still we do maintain (maybe somewhat provocatively) that mobility is the aberration. It is not surprising then, that seldom the explicit question is raised why people rather stay. This is all the more remarkable noticing that many prefer to stay in the home country notwithstanding poverty, lack of social security and even unsafe circumstances. This is partly understandable as we take into account that migration to unknown destinations means insecurity and risk. Not everybody is willing to take this 'adventure'. Partly not moving is also perforce. Not everybody is has the opportunity to leave. This involves after all knowledge, money and contacts. And these resources on their turn determine to a certain extent the possible destinations. Here all kinds of keep and repel factors are at play.

Threshold of Indifference

Approaches in the tradition mentioned above can be labelled as being more functionalist or historical-structural (Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2014). Individual decision making is then put in a very rational perspective where they are almost considered as atoms in a force field. Other approaches do put migrants themselves more up front. When we consider the individual migrant and his/her decisions that are made with regard to mobility at all, destinations and trajectories, there are thresholds that people consciously or unconsciously have to take before they become mobile. First of all someone has to have a disposition where they are at all willing to leave there current location. By far the most people are immobile, that is to say: they stay in the country where they are born. As already mentioned only 3 per cent of the world population lives in another country then where they were born. Most are very much attached to the region where they grew up and considerable reason have to exist in order to make them leave. They stay – even if they do have the knowledge, money and networks to leave. Very often they do not even consider to move, and if they do they prefer to stay close to their original location and within the country of origin. In our approach it is stated then that in the first place a (mental) threshold of indifference has to be overcome or in other words: they do consider departing for another country as a viable option and they are not indifferent towards migration.

Locational Threshold

When this first threshold is taken, it is logical for the potential migrant to think about a destination country. Where would s/he want to go and – equally important – where can s/he go? S/he has to take a threshold with regard to the location. This can be quite different for every migrant but also depending on the possible destination. As mentioned before the migrant in general wants to stay in a more or less familiar region, for instance where it concerns language or religion. A region that is geographically close also makes it possible to return quickly when it is necessary or possible. And of course also the resources that are necessary are smaller. Also when looking at the geographical aspect, the thresholds are different. Based on nationalities these may be more difficult to pass (Van Houtum, 2010). Because of globalization, the possible destination countries have become more abundant than ever. The main reasons are cheaper and faster transportation and the presence of many fellow countrymen, which means the presence of a social network is already present or can be organized relatively easy, which would lower the locational threshold.

Trajectory Threshold

Next to a decision on a destination, also a route has to be determined. For legal labour migrants taking this hurdle is relatively easy. When they are in possession of a working permit and passport they can take the plane. Because of the fact that the public focus in Europe is very much on refugees coming from the Middle East, it is easily forgotten that legal labour migration is by far the biggest migration flows worldwide. For example in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States alone there are more than ten million labour migrants, of which one in five are female domestic workers from countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia and The Philippines. The large majority are working there on a contract base as it is quite difficult to enter these countries illegally. In these cases the destination determines the trajectory as these migrants are travelling in the quickest and most direct way to their destinations. The trajectory threshold is relatively easy taken. For undocumented labour migrants and refugees the route is mostly very complicated and full of uncertainties. This is also why often the route is decided on stage by stage, both where it concerns the destination as well as the mode of transportation. As this is the case, one can easily understand that a destination (if that at all existed) that was decided upon at the start of the journey often is not the same as the final destination. As Schapendonk has illustrated by real life stories (2009; 2011), these routes are also often interrupted for shorter or longer periods. And in each of these phases the migrant again has to make a decision: Where can I go? Where will I go? Which routes are available? And with each of these decision the final destination might also change.

The central position of the mobility arena and the graphic accentuation of the thresholds (fig. 1) indicate that the mental flow of decisions remains at the very core of our approach. This is in our opinion still a neglected theme in mobility and migration decision-making (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2015). However, the threshold approach incorporates also real movements in space.

Part II: Empirical 'Underpinning'

This section will try to illustrate the approach with some empirical evidence stemming from earlier research. The first case tries to illustrate some of the ways the first threshold of the mental disposition expresses or exposes itself. This is done in the context of cross-border labour mobility at one of the 'old' EU-inner borders between Germany and the Netherlands. The second case concerns labour mobility in the EU and the financial crisis and shed some empirical light especially on the locational threshold. The third case focuses on the so-called refugee-crisis with a focus on the trajectory threshold. Finally we will present two examples from Southeast Asia to demonstrate how the thresholds of indifference and location impact differently on various social groups

Case 1. Cross border labour mobility in an EU border region: the threshold of indifference

This case illustrates especially the first hurdle to be overcome, the threshold of indifference. This is basically determining whether someone has an inclination to consider moving to certain places. 'True' indifference is epistemologically a different concept. It addresses in a way the unconscious processes in decision-making or rather non-decision making. Based on the results from a small research project on search behaviour on the labour market in the Dutch-German border region (Van der Velde, Janssen and van Houtum, 2004). Indifference is closely related to a rationality of belonging. In general there is an urge of people to claim a part of space as theirs (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). This comes out of a need to belong somewhere or to feel at familiar, secure and safe. This feeling can be viewed upon as being based on a belief in a common destination that is produced and reproduced in everyday practices, resulting in a common, 'natural', internalised and compliant behavioural pattern. This does not mean that everyone must follow these patterns without reserve. It stresses that parts of our everyday practices are unravelling in a very obvious way, without being evaluated and deliberated extensively.



Figure2: Dutch-German Border Region

These spatial frames are very important when unravelling what is presumed to be rational behaviour. When defining a *space of belonging* a mental distance is created towards places. At the same time, a space of ease and comfort is created. Again we emphasise that this should not be equated with a deterministic stance, but nevertheless it is also difficult to ignore this process. One important consequence of this process is that a space of legitimised indifference is created (Van Houtum, 2003); a space that does not need (consciously or unconsciously) to be included in all kinds of processes and decisions related life, also including mobility.

In the aforementioned project at least four different forms of indifference could be discerned when it comes to considering the other side of the border. The first one stems from the factor that there is no need to probe on the other side of the border because there are ample opportunities on this side. Therefore, it is not so much a matter of not wanting to consider 'the other side', but more a matter of an unconscious act.

A second group of indifferent jobseekers consisted of those who have simply never considered looking abroad, although they may have had difficulties finding a job in their own country. For this group the level of indifference is closely connected to the level of information received. One might expect that if the exact information had been provided, then the jobseekers in this group would consider the opportunities available abroad.

The third and fourth form of indifference can be labelled as more or less overt 'conscious' (and therefore not truly as indifference in the strict sense. These forms are labelled as a conscious act because, although the need exists to look further, beyond the own region, the region across the border is not considered to be an option. Based on the results obtained from the questionnaires, two different forms can be distinguished. Jobseekers in the first of these two groups act on 'hearsay' and 'gut-feelings'. They do not have first-hand experiences with the situation across the border, but in addition they still do not feel the necessity to gather relevant information.

A second 'overt'-group has acquired the necessary information one way or another. Based on this information, they do not (rightfully or not) regard the region across the border worth including in a process of rational choice making. This final group should be clearly distinguished from those who do put regions across the border on the shortlist, but who in the end, based on a 'rational' choice decide not to take a job abroad. The latter have surpassed the threshold of indifference.

From a policy point of view these distinctions could prove to be very useful when trying to understand mobility and especially the directionality. For someone becoming mobile at all might be something that is completely out of the scope and not considered. This could be encouraged by indifference towards any or all possible destinations. And if mobility is considered, indifference could also explain the selectivity in the destinations and therewith start answering the question of Faist (2000) we started with, why is it the so many come from so few places and so few come from so many places.

Case 2: Mobility in times of crisis: Locational specificities in an expanded EU

A second empirical illustration of the thresholds concerns the hurdle with regard to the possible destinations and is based on a project to understand the mobility flows in the EU in the early 21st century before, during and after the financial crises (Van der Velde, 2015). In general it is quite hard to provide a solid snapshot of the state of mobility in the EU. Especially onward migratory movements are hard to track. The project itself confined itself to some indicators on more permanent migration. This was mainly done for reasons of data availability. With regard to permanent migration two indicators were used, foreign citizenship (as a more static indicator) and international migration flows (as a more dynamic one).



Figure 3: Europe

When looking at foreign citizenship it shows that about 26 million inhabitants of the EU-28 between the age of 15 and 64 did possess a citizenship other than the country of living. This is a little less than 8 per cent of the active population. 10 million inhabitants came from one of the other countries of the EU-28. So, about 3 per cent of the active population can be regarded to have been mobile within the EU-28. This share is growing, but at a moderate pace. When breaking down this total regionally, there are quite big differences. Many of the central European countries are at the bottom of the list and countries hosting major international institutions like Belgium, and Luxemburg are at the top.

When the aggregate data is unravelled three things stand out (tab. 1). First it is a rather concentrated pattern. In many cases a few countries make up the bulk of the foreign citizens. Secondly it is a short distance phenomenon. Many countries of origin are neighbouring countries. And thirdly, if the migration flows do take place over longer distances, there are often historical and traditional explanations (e.g. Romanians migrating to Mediterranean countries).

Table 1: Most Important Foreign Citizenships per Country (> 10% of all Foreign EU Citizens, 2011)

Hosting country	Foreign EU-citizens	Citizenship
Belgium	556,803	Italy (22%); France (19%); the Netherlands (18%)
Czech Republic	120.681	Slovakia (52%); Poland (13%); Germany (10%)
Denmark	106.061	Poland (18%); Germany (17%); Slovenia (10%); United Kingdom (12%)
Finland	50.006	Slovenia (14%)
Germany	2.153.355	Italy (19%); Poland (16%); Greece (10%)
Hungary	105.104	Romania (61%); Germany (16%)
Ireland	250.331	Poland (29%); United Kingdom (27%); Lithuania (12%)
Italy	1.117.484	Romania (71%)
Latvia	8.073	Lithuania (38%); Germany (12%)
Netherlands	280.520	Germany (21%); Poland (16%); United Kingdom (12%)
Poland	11.826	Germany (30%)
Portugal	83.505	Romania (36%); United Kingdom (17%)
Slovakia	37.684	Czech Republic (21%); Romania (14%); Hungary (13%); Poland (13%)
Slovenia	4.308	Croatia (59%)
Spain	1815.339	Romania (36%); United Kingdom (16%)
Sweden	204.391	Finland (26%); Denmark (15%); Poland (15%); Germany (10%)
United Kingdom	1.566.716	Poland (35%); Ireland (22%)

Bold: neighbouring country

Hosting countries that are not listed do not report on the breakdown of foreign citizenships

Source: Van der Velde 2015 (adapted from Eurostat 2013)

So from this short description it can already be concluded that apparently *locational thresholds are working out differently for different destinations*. Not surprisingly distance is a major part of the hurdle. The further a possible destination, the bigger the threshold. And secondly that this hurdle in some cases can be counterbalanced by (historical) relations, networks etc. between distant locations.

To add a more dynamic perspective we can use yearly migration flows. Again for data availability reasons, a selection of countries had to be made. In general one can observe a quite strong reciprocity in the migration flows of countries. That is, countries that are foci of immigration are most of the time also important as the destination for emigration or are becoming so after a certain time. This could point in the direction of the growing importance of return migration. The locational threshold is of course quite low for the country of origin when onward/return migration is considered. A second general observation is that mobility in general has increased. Of course in and shortly after the accession years 2004 and 2007 the increase is partly caused by migration from the central European countries. But the fact that mobility is staying at a relatively high level thereafter might again be evidence of return migration. Here one could maybe conclude that the threshold of indifference to become mobile is staying on a relatively low level, when a person has become mobile once. Thirdly when looking at the composition of the emigration flows from the EU-15 countries (as far as they are available) we can see that in most of these countries the share of nationals in the

emigration flows has decreased between 2002 and 2011, again probably caused by increasing return/onward migration.

For three countries a more detailed picture is provided. Denmark is posing for an 'average' EU-country that has experienced the crisis, but in a moderate sense. Here mobility, both inward and outward, is relatively stable in recent years, after an increase in the early years of this millennium. This was largely caused by the migrants from the newly acceded member-states. The composition of the migration flows is changing in the sense that mobility to and from countries of the EU-15 is somewhat declining. This is compensated however especially by return migration from citizens of the accession countries.

Lithuania is posing for the accession countries. They do experience relatively high levels of mobility. First of all this is a consequence of the accession itself, when it became easier for their citizens to become mobile. Recently mobility towards these countries has increased possibly as a consequence of return migration. In the case of Lithuania we do have to take into account the fact that this country was of course, albeit late, hit by the financial crisis but also experienced a remarkable recovery recently, which shows clearly in the migration flows.

Finally, Spain as one of the countries in the EU-15 that has been hit the hardest by the financial crises, witnesses a pattern until 2008 that are comparable to the other EU-15 countries. Since then it experienced relatively high levels of mobility, consisting of two groups. First immigrants from earlier years are moving on, even to a greater extent than in other EU-15 countries. Next to that, mobility is rising because of the emigration of nationals. It seems that the crisis has pushed many across a mental hurdle to become mobile. Apparently many are considering mobility now as a way out of the personal crisis. Although it is not possible to prove unconditionally, it maybe supposed that this flow is very much directed to other EU-15 countries.

Overall when looking at the locational threshold, this seems very much at work. First of all cross-border mobility is still to a large extent a phenomenon that plays out over relatively short distances. Secondly, if mobility is taking place over longer distances, it turns out to be focussed on only a few countries. Given this dominance, apparently there is a certain level of indifference towards many other possible destination countries.

Case 3: Refugees on route: How to get where. The trajectory threshold

When it comes to documented or regular mobility it seems that especially the indifference and locational threshold are at work. The trajectory seems mostly not to play a crucial role. The route comes as a consequence of the destination. Of course also in the case of regular mobility it could be that wishes for certain destination are harder to accomplish than others and this could in the end cause a potential migrant or commuter to choose another destination. The possible and evaluated trajectories are much more important when it comes to refugees. They often will go where a (perceived) possible trajectory leads them. In the following the example of the Syrian refugees is used, who due to the war in the country usually relatively easy obtain a status and temporary permit to stay in EU countries. The quotes below are from the edited volume *Race to the North. The Story of Europe* and are based on contributions of journalists who during 2015 were reporting on the refugee flow (Zoutberg, 2016) and focuses on the trajectory thresholds.

Before the trajectory-threshold comes on the screen, for many people from Syria obviously the threshold of indifference is low. The war in Syria has led to some eight million refugees in the country itself (Internal displaced people or IDPs) and four million outside the country. The latter stay in refugee camps in Turkey and Lebanon. Also the locational threshold in these countries are low due to their nearness and some cultural similarities, notably the Islamic religion (although not all Syrian refugees are Muslim). The better off migrants chose the EU as destination. Which country they

preferred to go often depend on the existing social network of family members and friends staying abroad. “‘I go to the Netherlands. I don’t need to go elsewhere. I rather prefer to die there than to go to another place’. His daughter is already in The Hague, tells Rafiq” (Zoutberg, 2016, 84). Images are also contributing to constituting locational threshold.

When in summer 2015 it became known that Sweden and Germany welcomed refugees, the EU destinations became more specific and a large flow of people to these countries started and took these countries by surprise. Statements of the German Chancellor Merkel and her “We can manage”-attitude regarding the arrival of refugees have an unexpected and unprecedented incentive to a flow of refugees and other migrants to Germany and Northern Europe. Within one year Germany received one million migrants³. They arrived in the EU mostly by way of taking a boat from the Turkish coast to Greece, member of the EU but this country was meant to be a transit country since the majority of the refugees wanted to go to Germany and to a lesser degree to the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands.

Imaging proved to be important in locational threshold formation. When the EU decided to distribute 160.000 refugees over the EU countries (a total failure, since some East European countries refused to co-operate), Luxembourg, one of the smallest but richest countries in the EU, was willing to take its share but only a small number of refugees (some 60 people) accepted the invitation. “As the president of the European Commission remarked: ‘It is unbelievable’ Luxembourg, one of the richest countries but yet the refugees insist to go to Germany or Sweden. This reflex contributes to the drama and that is not acceptable” (Zoutberg, 2015, 211). Nevertheless, it was reality and shows the limits of migration management from above.

Herd behaviour, well known because of the 2008 economic crisis, surely also play a role in lowering locational and trajectory thresholds. For example, a refugee wants to go to Sweden via Turkey. However during the journey (the trajectory) it becomes known that Germany, which is closer by, is welcoming refugees. In that case the locational threshold for Germany is overcome. The same is the case for refugees who stayed in poorer countries of the EU. Some Syrians who were already in Poland took their bags and went to Germany when Merkel announced the easing of the German asylum policy.

As for the trajectory threshold, in 2014 Syrian refugees had several options to travel to the EU. One option was to go from Egypt to Libya overland and in Libya take the boat to Italy in the EU. Once in Italy, they take the train to Milan, and from there to Paris. From there they could go to various countries in Europe and ask for asylum in one of these countries. Another option was to go to the Turkish coast and then by sea to Greece. In 2015 the latter became the preferred route, possibly because of the increasingly dangerous situation in Libya and a substantial increase of the smuggling. Once in Greece, migrants continued the travel by public transport and feet overland to the chosen location further in the west of Europe. For a while also a Northern route was used. Migrants took a plane to Moscow, and a connected flight or train to Murmansk. Next they had to buy a bicycle to cross the border to Norway, as it is not allowed to cross this border on foot.

³ Not all them came from Syria; many originate from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Albania. Especially refugees from Albania and other countries from the Balkan region were not accepted.



Figure 4: Migration routes for Syrian refugees
 Source: Wall Street Journal, 2015

In the course of 2015, based on new information refugees increasingly had to take new trajectory decisions during their travel. Hungary, a strategically located country on the way to Germany, built a fence to prevent refugees to enter the country and the migrant flow changed the route to Croatia and Slovenia, which in due course also introduced fences and severe border control. Macedonia and Serbia became new transit countries. But as these countries were increasingly reluctant to accept the refugee flow, refugees stranded in Greece. Finally, in the beginning of 2016, an agreement between the EU and Turkey made an end to the trajectory via Southeast EU. Whether this will temporary or for the longer term, is not clear at the moment of writing this paper.

One thing is clear. What happened during the so-called refugee crisis shows both the effectiveness and the failures of migration control by the EU countries. Or as a young Eritrean refugee puts it in the: 'In fact I am travelling randomly.' (Zoutberg, 2016, 71)

Case 4: Low thresholds for Philippine migrants

The following two cases show more extensively the working of the thresholds of indifference and of location in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia in general is a highly dynamic region in terms of population mobility, as manifested in large scale population movements within the respective countries but also

in the existence of international migration corridors. The cases concern respectively emigrants from the Philippines and Indonesia. Since in these examples the trajectory threshold is of minor or no importance we leave this threshold out of consideration.

From the 1970s following the infusion of petro-dollars in West Asia and the rise of newly industrialized countries in East and Southeast Asia in the 1980s, Asia transformed into a hub of international migration. The Philippines responded to the labour needs of the Gulf countries and also sent their nationals to work in Japan, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. The Philippines is one of the countries with a substantial number of its population living abroad. According to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO, nd), in 2012 some 10.5 million people of Philippine origin, equivalent to ten per cent of the country's total population, were living abroad. Around 5 million of them could be considered as permanent emigrants, 4.2 million are temporary (contract workers) and 1.3 are irregularly staying abroad.

International migration is undoubtedly an important aspect of Philippine life. It is part of many household livelihood strategies and the expression "Culture of Migration" referring to international migration already indicates that the threshold of indifference towards cross-border migration comparatively low. Of course, poverty plays a role since nearly 25 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line but other factors such as the widespread knowledge of the English language, considered to be one of the two national languages, and the role of the national state and other institutions in international migration are certainly as important.

Philippine labour migration started in the late 1970a/beginning of the 1980s when under the regime of dictator Marcos the economic development reached a low point. The government then started with an export labour policy encouraging Filipino's to work abroad. The Filipino emigrant population grew rapidly and has continued to increase since then. The successor of Marcos, president Cory Aquino (1986 – 1992) declared these overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) 'national heroes' who sacrifice their family lives for economic improvement of the families and the country as well, bringing in foreign currencies for the latter. Migrant workers therefore belong to the *Philippine Global Nation*. Advertisements in newspapers and billboards suggest that cross border migration belongs to the 'better life'.

Cross-border migration has become strongly institutionally embedded. The state-led labour migration program has developed an institutional and legal framework that enables the Philippines to tap overseas labour markets and to provide protection for OFWs. The CFO is the core agency mandated to support the executive and legislative departments in the formulation of national migration policies. The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) promotes, coordinates, organises and monitors overseas employment and private recruitment offices in the Philippines. For example when the 2008 economic crisis hit the country and the level of unemployment increased, POEA took action to have more contracts for labour abroad. The Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) has the task to take care of the welfare of migrant workers and their families and protect their rights and the Philippine embassies abroad are instructed to work along the lines of OWWA. Another agency, the National Reintegration Center for OFWs (NRCO) develops and implements reintegration programmes for returnees. Private institutions include of course intermediary recruitment agencies (licensed by the state) and educational institutions. The latter offer courses in nursing, accounting and ICT for careers overseas. For example, Filipino health education institutions advertise that after having finished their studies the students have better chances for working abroad. Next to these private institutions, various types of migrant NGOs are active in providing services in the whole migration chain, including pre-departure courses, counselling and supporting 'families left behind', human rights for migrants, re-integration programmes, lobbying and advocacy. Thus governmental and non-governmental institutions are of

major importance in removing obstacles of the indifference threshold and maintain the culture of migration.

However, although the threshold of indifference is relatively low, our approach holds this true for specific countries and regions, since people can be mobile or immobile dependent on specific locations. Filipinos are relatively mobile concerning the United States, Saudi Arabia/the Gulf States and the richer East Asian countries. The *locational thresholds* are low. This could of course be explained by the demand for work at the destinations, while for East Asian countries the relatively greater familiarity with cultures is a major factor that might compensate for the comparatively lower wages with the other labour receiving countries. On the other hand, the locational threshold is relatively high and the Filipinos are relatively immobile when it comes to Europe and, not surprisingly Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

In 2010, the United States was home to about 1.7 million Filipino immigrants, making them the second-largest immigrant group in the United States after Mexican immigrants. In addition, there are more than 1.4 million native-born US citizens who claim Filipino ancestry, and some estimated 270,000 undocumented migrants. In total this implies that the Philippine Diaspora in the United States counts around 3.5 million people (MPI, 2010). The majority of this community has a permanent resident status and is U.S. citizen (this contrary to many other destinations for Filipino labour migration, where they mostly have a temporary status). As for contract workers or Overseas Foreign Workers (OFWs), the statistics show an overwhelming number residing in the Middle Eastern Gulf States. In the year 2008 Saudi Arabia was the top destination with 275,000 OFWs (adding to some 750,000 Filipinos who already stayed there), followed by the U.A.E., who received some 194,000 OFWs (adding to 300,000 already staying there) (POEA, 2009).

The popularity of the United States as a destination can be explained by the history of the Philippines, which was a colony of the US during 1898-1946, while after Independence the country continued to be dominated by the US. During colonial time many institutions were built according to the example of the colonial power. Thus the formal political system shows a similarity of that of the United States with a powerful president, a congress and a senate. The Americans also introduced their educational system and English became a dominant language in secondary and higher education.

The locational threshold varies by geographical destination area but it also differs by age group, gender, occupation and other social groups one might distinguish. For example, in 2008 among the 491,000 Filipino-born male workers age 16 and older employed in the civilian labour force in the United States, 15.5 per cent reported working in health-care support occupations and 14.5 was working in construction, extraction, and transportation. The figures for all foreign-born male workers were 0.6 and 25.9 respectively. Filipino immigrant women outnumbered men. Nearly three of every five Filipino immigrants residing in the United States in 2008 were women (58.8 per cent) and 41.2 per cent were men compared to 49.8 per cent women and 50.2 per cent men among all immigrants. Some 23 per cent reported working as registered nurses, compared to 3.4 per cent all foreign-born female workers (MPI, 2010).

An interesting study of Baggio and Asis (2008) based on a survey amongst Philippine migrants in Italy provides an insight in the working of the locational threshold at lower than national levels⁴. Although the case does not concern a major country to migrate to for the Philippines, the example is exemplary. Batangas is one of the top ten provinces of origin of migrants (of the 80 Philippine provinces).

⁴ Data collection was undertaken between June and November 2005 in both sites and the survey covered the earliest migrant arrived in 1979 and the most recent arrival in 2005 as well.

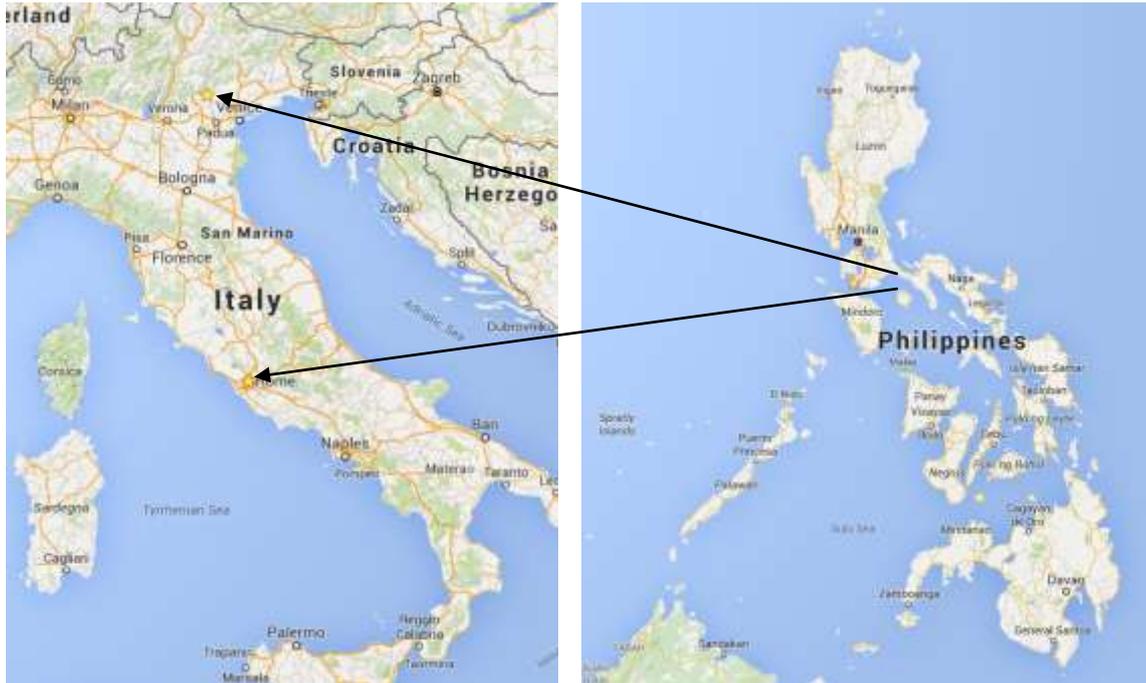


Figure 5: ‘Directional’ migration flows from Mabini to Italy

This dates back to the 1970s, when many *Batangueños* were among the pioneer migrants who went to the Middle East. The study shows the specificity of origin and destination with regard to two locations in Italy, namely Rome (the capital of Italy; with a population of some 2.6 million) and Bassano del Grappa (a small town counting less than 45,000 inhabitants) in the northern part of the country. In terms of origin most Filipino immigrants came from Batangas, and some 35 per cent of the respondents from the municipality of Mabini (44,000 inhabitants) alone. Indeed the municipality of Mabini has come to be known as a municipality of which many residents are now working in Italy. According to the researchers, emigration started in the 1980s when 3 residents left for Italy. By 2005 an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 migrants were staying in Italy. In this expansion the role of family networks seems important as four in five respondents had at least one immediate family member in Italy. Compared to other municipalities and provinces in the Philippines, the thresholds for this particular Italian location are low for people from Mabini and Batangas.

From the foregoing we can draw the following conclusions:

- Government intervention can deliberately create low thresholds of indifference;
- Locational thresholds differ dependent on demand for work, remuneration and familiarity with cultural norms and practices;
- The meaning of thresholds differ by gender and occupational group;
- Low thresholds link specific localities and regions in both countries of origin and destination to each other.

Overall we can conclude that thresholds works at several scale levels and that the meaning of borders differs, fitting our observation that people can be mobile and immobile at the same time depending on countries, regions and places of origin and destination.

Case 5: The Indonesia-Malaysia migration corridor: documented versus undocumented workers

The second case from Southeast Asia concerns the movement between Indonesia and Malaysia. The two countries share a long border and have much in common in culture and history but are very different in geographical size, number of population and economic growth. The following case shows

how thresholds may differ pending on the status of migrants regarding the regularity of the migration process⁵.

Indonesia is an archipelago of over 17,000 islands with a total land area of some 1,9 million square km. and from west to east stretching over a distance of around 5,000 km. Indonesia has some 250 million inhabitants. The country is considered as a lower middle-income country. The World Bank estimated the per capita income at US\$ 3,490 (current US\$) or US\$ 10,033 PPP in 2014. Despite economic growth and declining unemployment rates, un- and underemployment remains significant. Compared to Indonesia, Malaysia is much smaller. It consists of two parts, West (or Peninsular) Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) in the northern part of the island of Borneo. The population counts some 31 million people, of which around 80 per cent lives in West Malaysia. Malaysia is an upper middle-income country. The economic record is impressive with a consistent 5 to 7 per cent yearly growth of the GNP during the last four decades. The per capita income BNP was estimated at US\$ 7,304 and PPP even at US\$ 23,578 capita BNP (World Bank data).

Economic development created a substantial demand for work in the oil palm sector, in building and construction, in the electronic industry and as domestic workers. Estimations of foreign labour force in Malaysia range from 3 to 4 million (20 to 30 per cent of the total work force) (ILO 2016). The majority of the labour migrants is from Indonesia. Hence the existence of an Indonesian-Malaysia migration corridor. According to data from the Indonesia National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI), in 2012 some 4.3 million Indonesians were working abroad⁶. Around 70 per cent of the legal labour migrants are female. In terms of formal labour migration, Malaysia is the second most important destination country for Indonesian workers after Saudi Arabia. Women especially are employed in the electronic industry and as domestic workers. While much of this migration is legal, a large part of it takes place outside control of the national governments. It has been estimated that of the two to three million Indonesians employed in Malaysia, half of them undocumented

Intermediaries play a role in facilitating undocumented labour. The fee paid to Indonesian intermediaries and Malaysian outsourcing companies range between RM 1,000 to RM 2,000 (US \$ 250 to 500). To this other expenses should be added such as the passport, introduction courses, medical checks and levies. Since the monthly wage of an average migrant worker will be around RM 200, it is not difficult to understand why one of the main reasons given by migrants for not coming through the official channels of contract work is the cost of legal entry. Although by definition undocumented migrants do not have the officially needed documents, the system that brings them to work is basically the same, that will say they also use intermediaries and their networks although these are often members of the same kin or friends from the village of origin. It is easy to cross the long and difficult to control borders with Malaysia. This allows to take seasonal work, and going up and down the two sides of the border. Also, since it is legally not possible for a migrant to change the job as stated in the work permit, many workers who change jobs to improve working conditions or to obtain a higher wage automatically change their status from legal to undocumented (Wong and Anwar, 2003).

What does the foregoing mean for Indonesia- Malaysia migration corridor? Since Indonesia is a large country with a steady growing economy and an expanding urban sector, it does not surprise that the majority of its migration concerns internal rural-urban mobility. The number of some 4 million Indonesians labour migrants abroad constitute a relatively small percentage of the total population

⁵ Based on Spaan and van Naerssen (forthcoming)

⁶ This is less than 2 per cent of the population and substantially less compared to the some 5.5 million temporary and undocumented migrants from the Philippines (5.5 per cent of the population)

of 250 million. Apparently, the majority of the population do not consider to search for employment abroad and by consequence will not pass the threshold of indifference for international mobility.

Once, people decide to look for work abroad, naturally they will look for those countries where a demand for foreign workers exists and where wages are higher than in Indonesia. In Asia, there are two regions where countries offer these opportunities: the Middle East and East Asia. As for the latter, Indonesians – particularly women – do work in Japan, Taiwan and Singapore but the transfer costs are high. So are the cultural barriers since most of the Indonesians are of Malay stock and Muslim. The locational thresholds are less in the cases of Malaysia and Saudi Arabia/ the Gulf States. The wages are higher in Saudi Arabia compared to Malaysia but so are the costs, if only because the intermediaries have to be paid for the transportation by air. Saudi Arabia is familiar because of the *Hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, mandatory for Muslims once in their life. On the other hand, many Indonesians confess a moderate and eclectic form of Islam and are often alien to the dominant *Wahabism* in Saudi Arabia, which might serve as a repel factor to stay for a longer period⁷. In favour of labour migration to Malaysia is the history of human mobility in the Southeast Asian region, similarities in culture and its location, which in many cases allows for visits back home. The majority of the Indonesian legal migrants is female. There are cases of maltreatment of domestic workers in Malaysia but in this respect particularly Saudi Arabia got a bad reputation, more recently because of the execution of two women in 2015⁸. All in all, the location thresholds for legal migrants both countries are more or less equal for regular migrants.

This is different in the case of irregular migrants. The costly and time-consuming formal procedures for securing a legal job in both the Middle East and Malaysia act as a stimulus for irregular migration. However, in practice the migrants have to travel by air to Saudi Arabia and by consequence it is nearly impossible to enter the country without the necessary documents. Overstaying is the most probable way to become undocumented. The trajectory threshold for irregular migrants is much lower for Malaysia: its nearness, the easy-to-cross-borders and the existence of informal support networks of family members and friends are important factors to direct irregular migrants to Malaysia.

The barriers put up by migration laws and policies of countries deter immigration, but they are not sufficient to stop people from leaving or to keep people out. Irregular migration is symptomatic of policy limitations, labour needs, and the felt assertion of the right to migrate. Defining irregular migration as a departure from the norms and regulations of the origin, transit or destination country and thereby defining irregular migrants as violators privileges the state as the authority over migration matters. However, as shown above, the state, through conflicting, incoherent or unrealistic laws and policies can contribute to irregular migration. The lack or limited channels for legal migration amidst a high demand for workers can lead to high volume of irregular migration to the extent that in the case of Malaysia the number of irregular migrant workers seems to surpass the number of legal migrant workers.

Part III: Policy conclusions with regard to international migration

The threshold approach that centres around the mental processes migrants are engaged in shows their involvement with many (partial) decisions: mobility and migration often encompass more than a simple movement van A to B via the shortest or quickest route. The threshold approach gives

⁷ Much of the recruitment for the Middle East therefore takes place at the more conservative Islamic schools.

⁸ For this reason, the Indonesian government announced a moratorium on female migration for domestic work in Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries (it has not yet been effectuated yet)

insight in choices that have to be made by (potential) migrants. This can be useful to determine the benefits and effects of directly or indirectly related policies on destinations and routes of migrants. .

Cross-border migration concern processes in which decisions are often based on unexpected, incomplete and/or inaccurate information. By consequence, migration flows and movements are often hard to predict, especially when it concerns undocumented labour migrants and refugees.. This goes both for the migrant as well as the policy makers. One thing is clear. Any policy that aims at managing and controlling migration has to understand how migrants perceive the opportunities to leave the place they live and reach certain destinations where they feel safe and can built a new life. Policy makers are faced with surprises if they does not take this basic fact into consideration..

The recent and current flows of refugees from the Middle East to the EU provide several examples. In the beginning of 2015 the quite liberal stance of Sweden turned this country into a favoured destination for refugees and other migrants. Later that year Chancellor Merkel explicitly welcoming refugees, created a significant flow towards Germany which size took the country by surprise. For refugees the country became an ideal destination , more than before. In terms of the threshold approach, both the Swedish government and Merkel lowered the location threshold of their countries. The impact on the flows of immigrants was by far larger than they had expected which would perhaps not be the case if they were better informed about the strong desire of migrants to go, their sub-standard living situation in refugee camps in the region, their perception of greener pastures in the EU and more general the herd behaviour of people.

Policies also affected the routes taken and with that the trajectory threshold. This s could be witnessed in Southeast EU. . Migrants travelling from Turkey to Greece used to cross the Evros-river to enter the EU until this relatively safe route was blocked by a fence of 12.5 km December 2012. . After that, the trajectory changed and the route from the Turkish coast to Greece islands (especially Lesbos and Kos) by sea and riskier than the earlier route became popular. Greece however was a transit country on the way to EU northern countries such as Germany and the Scandinavian countries. . In summer 2015, the overland route Greece, Serbia, Hungary and Austria towards Germany became more than ever popular after Ms. Merkel announcement of a “welcome culture” in the country. The large flows of refugees had to chang the route when Hungary fenced of the border. The Balkan route via Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia became the alternate. As physical barriers are erected there, migrants stranded in Greece. Since the recent agreement between the EU and Turkey the flow of migrants dried up but probably the much more dangerous route from Libya a to Italy will become to be used again much more. Also a completely new route towards Europe developed amongst the migrants, flying to Moscow and Murmansk, buying a bicycle and cross the border with Norway, since it is not allowed to cross the Russian-Norwegian border on foot. In 2015 some 5.500 refugees took this route. Norway intend to deport the migrants back to Russia but at the moment of writing it is not clear whether this occurred. The foregoing shows that border fencing and governments agreements can be tools to increase the trajectory thresholds substantially . But it remains to be seen how effective they are in the long term, at least as long as the threshold of indifference will be low for refugees and the push to reach certain locations in the EU exist (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett 2016). In the long term, to improve conditions among potential migrants seems to be the most effective and human way to increase a threshold of indifference.

The Southeast Asian cases concern other type of migrants: not refugees but labour migrants. In these cases we can neglect the trajectory threshold. The Philippines shows that a government can deliberately create a “Culture of Migration” and decrease the indifference threshold substantially. Moreover, via bilateral agreements the Philippine government can lower the locational threshold for specific destinations. In the case of the Indonesian- Malaysian corridor, we noticed the limits of government efforts to stop undocumented migration so far. Notwithstanding the mobilization of civil groups to be alert on migrants, severe punishments allowed by law, human rights abuses in

detention camps and, on the positive side, mass legalization programs, the locational threshold remains low for undocumented migrants in particular the ones from Indonesia.

Our overall conclusion is that migration policy makers should be more aware of the geographical thresholds to migration and *the place bounded origins and locational preferences* of migrants if they want to take measures that are effective and human as well.

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