

Chapter 7

Intention to return

7.1 Introduction

Return migration is defined as ‘movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle’. It must be distinguished from circular migration and re-emigration (Gmelch, 1980). In case of forced migrants, return is mainly upon the establishment of peace in the place of origin. The end of civil war in Sri Lanka has resulted in the initiation of talks on repatriation and resettlement of refugees and IDPs in their homeland. The return of refugees and other forced migrants has been a growing concern for both the government and international organisations. Also, this interest comes from different directions, including domestic political concern in countries and region of origin, as well as desire to promote durable solutions for forced migrants (Black and Gent, 2006). UNHCR protocol says that repatriation should be a voluntary process and the host country/government should not force repatriation. (UNHCR, 1996).

Many studies show that most of the forced migrants intend to return back to their country of origin. They also highlight different mechanisms adopted by the forced migrants to return back to their native place. Often governments initiate dialogue to undertake measures for resettlement and ensure peace that does not bring back the resolved crisis. The objective of this chapter is to examine the factors determining the intention to return to origin and not stay back in the host. It also explores reasons for intention to return and reasons for wanting to stay back in the host. In line with this, the chapter also tests the hypothesis that **refugees with better adjustment with host population have lower intention towards repatriation.**

Both quantitative and qualitative data have been used to carry out the analysis and bring out the results. The analysis in this chapter is aimed to outline the factors that determine intention to return, with special focus on social connection and network, and health and adjustment. The qualitative data are used to bring out the reasons that push the refugees to return to Sri Lanka and the reasons that hold the refugees back in India. Along with this, it also assesses the reasons for this decision. It is often found that migrants with some social security in the origin would have greater intention of returning back. The study collected information on social securities of refugees in the

origin such as own house and land, and further analysed whether their possession has an impact on the decision to return.

7.2 Intention of refugees to return

Respondents were asked whether they would like to settle in India or go back to Sri Lanka. Table 7.1 shows that three-fifths of the respondents wanted to settle in India, while the remaining preferred to return to Sri Lanka. Giammatteo (2009) found that half of the Sri Lankan refugees wanted to return back to Sri Lanka. The results are slightly different between these two studies which could be because of the lower sample size covered by the former.

Figure 7.1 Percentage distribution of respondents by intention to return



Further analysis was carried out to look at the intention to return by background characteristics (Table 7.1). Education, marital status, income, proficiency in Tamil, duration of stay, number of movement as refugees, and feeling of sadness/depression/fear have a significant relation with the refugees' intention to return to Sri Lanka or stay back in India. More than half of the respondents with twelve years or more years of education have intention to return. In the case of marital status, the respondents who are married have intention to return to Sri Lanka as compared with unmarried and widowed/deserted respondents. Economic status plays a significant role in refugees' intention to return to Sri Lanka. As compared with lower income group, refugees falling in middle and higher income groups have more intention

to return to Sri Lanka. As regards the type of employment, compared with the refugees who are in full-time employment, those with part-time employment have more intention towards returning to Sri Lanka. However, the result is statistically insignificant. On the other hand, almost two-fifths of refugees from large families have intention to return as compared with slightly lower proportion of refugees having small families.

Table 7.1 Percentage distribution of respondents by intention to return			
	Stay back in India	Return to Sri Lanka	Total (N)
Sex (P = 0.963)			
Males	60.7	39.3	122
Females	61.0	39.0	82
Age group (P = 0.343)			
18-29 years	56.1	43.9	57
30-49 years	59.2	40.8	98
50 years and above	69.4	30.6	49
Education (P = 0.031)			
No education or <5 years completed	70.0	30.0	40
5-7 years completed	52.0	48.0	50
8-11 years completed	69.3	30.7	75
12 or more years completed	46.2	53.8	39
Marital status (P = 0.002)			
Unmarried	76.9	23.1	26
Currently married	54.4	45.6	158
Widowed/deserted	90.0	10.0	20
Household size (P = 0.401)			
One-three members	65.1	34.9	63
Four members and above	58.9	41.1	141
Type of employment (P = 0.460)			
Full-time	63.6	36.4	66
Part-time	57.8	42.2	90
Monthly household income (P = 0.051)			
Less than Rs. 2000	77.8	22.2	36
Rs. 2001 to Rs. 4000	53.8	46.2	78
Rs. 4001 and above	60.0	40.0	90
Speak, read, write Tamil (P = 0.054)			
No	74.4	25.6	39
Yes	57.6	42.4	165
Speak, read, write Sinhala (P = 0.474)			
No	60.0	40.0	185
Yes	68.4	31.6	19
Phase of arrival (P = 0.000)			
First phase (1983-87)	84.2	15.8	38
Second phase (1989-91)	64.3	35.7	112
Third-Fourth phases (1996 onwards)	37.0	63.0	54

Table 7.1 Continued			
	Stay back in India	Return to Sri Lanka	Total (N)
No of moves (P = 0.037)			
Single move	56.8	43.2	155
More than one move	73.5	26.5	49
Feeling sad/depressed/fear (P = 0.027)			
No	64.3	35.7	168
Yes	44.4	55.6	36
Feeling uncertain about future (P = 0.529)			
No	64.3	35.7	56
Yes	59.5	40.5	148
Refugee feeling (P = 0.312)			
No	63.8	36.2	116
Yes	56.8	43.2	88
All respondents	60.8	39.2	204
<i>Note: Figures in parenthesis represent the significance test from Chi-Square.</i>			

Proficiency in Tamil does not show any impact on the intention to stay in India. A larger number of respondents proficient in Tamil have intention to return to Sri Lanka as compared with those who are not proficient. On the other hand, lesser refugees with proficiency in Sinhala have intention to return to Sri Lanka. But the result is statistically not significant. These findings deviate from the common assumption that proficiency in local language could influence the decision accordingly. However, regression analysis would bring out a clearer picture while other variables are kept constant.

The phase of arrival is significant in determining the intention to return to Sri Lanka. As compared with those who arrived during first phase, three-fifths of the refugees who arrived during the recent phases reported that they would want to return back. On the other hand, only 16 per cent of refugees who arrived during the first phase have this intention. Of the number of movement as refugees, two-fifths of the respondents who moved only once as refugees have intention to return to Sri Lanka as compared with those who have moved more than once. Results for both these variables are found to be statistically significant.

With regard to health status variables, the refugees who have had feelings of sadness/depression/fear in the recent past have significant relation with the intention

to return. Fifty six per cent of refugees who reported sadness/depression/fear reported that they would want to go back as compared with only 36 per cent of refugees without these health problem. Though respondents with the feeling of uncertain future and refugee-feeling have higher intention to return back, but the results are statistically insignificant.

Association of social network, health and adjustment on intention to return

Binomial logistic regression has been used to investigate the factors that determine the decision to return. The dependent variable is dichotomous where '0' stands for stay back in India, while '1' stands for return to Sri Lanka. Independent variables include social network variables such as mutual communication with Sri Lanka, with refugees, and with local Tamils; mental health variables including sadness/depression/fear, refugee feeling, uncertain feeling about future; and refugee adjustment index. Other indicators include phase of arrival in India, possession of land and house in Sri Lanka, number of movements as refugees and background variables including age, sex, family size, education, monthly household income and camp infrastructure index.

Mutual communication with social connections in Sri Lanka, poor mental health, possession of land in Sri Lanka and number of movements as refugees determine the refugees' intention to return there. These results are statistically significant. As compared with refugees who are not in contact with their social connections in Sri Lanka, those with contact are five times more likely to return back. Mutual communication within refugees in Tamil Nadu does not have an impact on the intention to return back. Those respondents with social connections in Tamil Nadu are less likely to return to Sri Lanka. However, this result is statistically insignificant to conclude that this sub-group will return to Sri Lanka.

Psycho-social and mental health plays an important role in deciding the return to Sri Lanka. Respondents who recently had symptoms like sadness/depression/fear are thrice more likely to return to Sri Lanka as compared with those without these symptoms. Though the odds of returning to Sri Lanka are high among those with feeling of uncertain future, the result is not statistically significant.

Table 7.2 Results of binary logistic regression				
Dependent variable "Intention to return"				
Want to stay back in India = 0; Return to Sri Lanka = 1				
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	95% Conf. Interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Mutual communication with Sri Lanka:				
No	1.000			
Yes	5.352 ^a	2.387	2.233	12.828
Mutual communication within refugees:				
No	1.000			
Yes	0.325 ^b	0.136	0.144	0.736
Mutual communication with local Tamils:				
No	1.000			
Yes	0.957	0.433	0.394	2.324
Sadness/depression/fear: No				
Yes	1.000			
Yes	3.609 ^c	2.027	1.200	10.849
Refugee feeling: No				
Yes	1.000			
Yes	0.733	0.301	0.328	1.637
Feeling uncertain about future: No				
Yes	1.000			
Yes	1.282	0.567	0.538	3.050
Refugee adjustment index:				
High adjustment	1.000			
Low adjustment	2.768 ^c	1.521	0.943	8.128
Phase of arrival:				
First phase (1983-87)	1.000			
Second phase (1989-91)	9.496 ^c	8.284	1.718	52.492
Third-Fourth phases (1996 onwards)	43.560 ^a	43.994	6.017	315.335
No of moves as refugees:				
Single move	1.000			
More than one move	3.564 ^c	2.723	0.797	15.935
Had land in Sri Lanka: Yes				
No	1.000			
No	0.780	0.554	0.194	3.138
Had house in Sri Lanka: Yes				
No	1.000			
No	1.900	1.459	0.422	8.556
Age (cont)	1.014	0.018	0.980	1.049
Sex	1.070	0.447	0.472	2.426
Family size (cont)	1.103	0.135	0.868	1.402
Education (cont)	1.071	0.055	0.968	1.184
Household monthly income (cont)	1.000	0.000	1.000	1.000
Camp infrastructure index (cont)	1.934 ^b	0.445	1.233	3.036

^a Significance at 99%; ^b Significance at 95%; ^c Significance at 90%
'cont' – continuous variable

Adjustment with the host population could be one of the factors that is expected to highly impact the intention to return to the country of origin. Refugees with low adjustment in host population are twice more likely to return to Sri Lanka as compared with those with high adjustment. The result is statistically significant. The findings also support in answering the hypothesis that the **refugees with better adjustment with the host population have lower intention of repatriation.**

The phase of arrival explains the duration of stay of refugees in India and its impact on the decision to return to Sri Lanka. As compared with the refugees who arrived in India for a longer duration (first phase), those arriving during the second phase and later are more likely to return back to Sri Lanka. Further, the most recently arrived refugees (1996 onwards) are more likely to return to Sri Lanka as compared with those who arrived during the first phase. This could be because the recently arrived refugees would have unwean memories, social connections and possessions as compared with protracted refugees who would have lost ties with their origin. The returnees have a multitude of reasons and expectations in the host country of which material economic well-being is a primary one. As part of quantitative data, information was collected on possession of land and house in Sri Lanka. Among both land and house, possession of the former is significantly associated with the intention to return. Compared with those with land in Sri Lanka, the refugees without it are less likely to return to Sri Lanka. All the background variables such as age, sex, family size, education, household monthly income and camp infrastructure index are positively associated with refugees' intention to return. However, except camp infrastructure index, other variables are statistically insignificant.

Qualitative information collected in this study is useful in substantiating the results on both intention to return to Sri Lanka and to stay back in India. Those who wanted to return, further question was asked "Why do you want to go back to Sri Lanka? What are the expectations you have when you return to Sri Lanka?" In case of those who wanted to stay back, another question was asked "Why do you want to settle in India? What are the expectations you have in India?" Opinion on the intention is accordingly seen as a push factor and halt factor and is presented in the section below.

7.3 Reasons behind intention to return to Sri Lanka

Refugees who intend to return to Sri Lanka and the reasons they mentioned for that is described as push factors in this study. The reasons for their wanting to return are multitude. However, primary reasons that are cited by respondents are eagerness to see their family members, better socio-economic conditions, uncertain future in the host country and refugee feeling.

Eagerness to see family members/relatives

The respondents reported almost the same opinion about their returning to Sri Lanka. While eagerness to see family members and relatives are reported by most of them, there is also expectation that they will have better lifestyle and their children will have better education and employment there. Some of the anecdotes are highlighted below from the qualitative data.

I can continue my work there and take care of my land. I can live with my relatives there. We have lived so many years here. So want to see our relatives. Our relatives say that there is no problem now. We also hope that there is no problem (Male, age 43).

Our relatives are there. When I came here thinking that we will return in some days. But we never thought that we will spend 20 years like this. I am 51 years old now. I want to meet my relatives before I die (Male, age 51).

I want to go back to Sri Lanka to see my relatives. If the situation becomes normal, then I will go back to Sri Lanka. I want to do fishing job there (Male, age 42).

We have our relatives there. They say that there is no problem now. So we can live peacefully there. We don't have anything here. So we don't want to live here (Male, age 24).

Our relatives are there. We have to take care of them. Our children cannot continue living like this in the shelter (Female, age 39).

Better socio-economic status

Like all human beings, refugees also have rational thinking regarding socio-economic status. One of the reasons quoted by them for returning back is better social and economic status which they do not have here. Also, given their refugee status, they cannot acquire land or assets in India. Also, few respondents reported that they can continue the work for which they have expertise. The qualitative data presented below shows their opinion about returning to Sri Lanka and to have better social and economic life.

We have relatives there. We will get job there. We can educate our children as we will have good income there. We can send them to foreign countries. My husband can also go abroad. But this will happen only when we go there. This will not happen here (Female, age 23).

Sri Lanka is my mother land. My profession was agriculture. But here, I am doing coolie work which is not giving me good living. I want to live a dignified life (Male, age 55).

We can earn more there. I can do fishing. I can earn more. My relatives are there. We can have our own house there. Here we don't have a house. It is too congested and no ventilation is there in the camp we live here (Male, age 21).

I cannot buy even a vehicle here. Opening a bank account is also difficult here. We cannot buy any asset here. Having lived a good life in Sri Lanka, we are struggling here in this camp (Male, age 26).

Majority of the respondents have land and house in Sri Lanka. The feeling of claiming back their assets is one of the reasons quoted for return. Also, the respondents feel that their children can inherit them in future.

We have our land there. We can give it to our children. We will have good livelihood there When we came here, we thought we will return in a year or two. But now it has been twenty years and we are still here. Though we are living peacefully, we do not have any rights here. We cannot buy assets (Male, age 51).

I don't have any asset here. We will have our own land there. Children can study here as well as there. I can continue my agricultural work there. Our relatives there say that the problem is solved. So we want to go back (Male, age 41).

In addition to qualitative data presented here, the quantitative data enquired about the socio-economic status of refugees including the possession of land and house.

Table 7.3 Percentage distribution of respondents by possession of land and house in Sri Lanka and their status	
Had own land in Sri Lanka	Percentage (N)
Yes	80.0 (164)
No	20.0 (40)
Current status of that land	
Sold	2.4 (4)
With relatives/family members	40.3 (66)
Damaged	15.9 (26)
Army occupied	15.9 (26)
Don't know	25.6 (42)
Had own house in Sri Lanka	
Yes	81.4 (166)
No	18.6 (38)
Current status of that house	
Sold	3.6 (6)
With relatives/family members	20.5 (34)
Damaged	51.8 (86)
Army occupied	7.2 (12)
Don't know	16.9 (28)

Table 7.3 presents the position with respect to land and asset in Sri Lanka. Four-fifths of the respondents reported having land and house in Sri Lanka. Also, most of them are aware of the current status of their land and house. While few of the respondents sold their land and house before taking refuge, almost two-fifths of them have handed over their land and its related documents to their relatives/family members. While more than half of the respondents who had house reported that it is damaged due to the war, one-fifth of them have handed it over to their relatives/family members.

Uncertain future in the host country

When the future is uncertain, migrants tend to move away to seek certain future. Similarly, refugees reported that their future is not certain in India due to which they prefer moving to Sri Lanka.

We want to live normal life. I want to get back our assets and live with our people.... Indian government will not provide citizenship to us. It will cause same citizenship problem to people from other countries (Male, age 60).

Our children cannot progress here. We are very uncertain about their future. Our relatives are there. We have our land there (Female, age 40).

... We don't have citizenship here. We cannot keep on looking forward for government aid (Male, age 41).

Refugee feeling

As found in chapter 5, refugee feeling is high among respondents. This is one of the reasons that push respondents to return to Sri Lanka. The anecdotes presented below highlight the refugee feeling reported by respondents as a reason to return.

India is not our country. Even though we have lived here for past 21 years, we are called refugees. This feeling makes me to go back. In

Sri Lanka we live at least with dignity. I am waiting for a good atmosphere in Sri Lanka (Male, age 52).

My elder sister and brother are in Sri Lanka. My son is studying here. He may get a good job in Sri Lanka. Here I always feel as a refugee....We hope we get good status in Sri Lanka (Male, age 35).

7.4 Reasons behind intention to stay back in India

The refugees who intended to remain in India were asked the reasons why they want to stay back. While Lee's theory (1966) explains the push and pull factors of migration, in this study the reasons that lead to refugees' decision to stay back in India are termed as "halt factors" which could be applied to the context of refugees and other forced migrants. The key reasons stated by refugees for staying back in India are analysed from the qualitative data. They are broadly categorised as safety and insecurity, absence of resources in the country of origin, social support and expectation of citizenship and uncertainty in the country of origin. These reasons are intermingled. The anecdotes given below throw light on the subject.

Safety and insecurity

Safety for life for self and loved ones emerges as the major reason for wanting to settle in India. Also, the past experience of losing the family members and loved ones keeps refugees away from going back to Sri Lanka. Peaceful life and sustainable livelihood are also stated as one of the reasons for it. Some statements made by them are given below.

I have grown here. We don't like going there. We want to save for us like our parents did for us. We would like to live as normal citizens here. I feel as a refugee when there are some issues that affect me and my family (Male, age 29).

India is better. At least we can be alive here. We have to fear for our lives there. We have two children. Both are male.... We don't want them to suffer there. We don't want to go there as we want to save our lives (Female, age 21).

Though we have left our land, some people are staying there who are Tamils. Our ancestors lived here and we are culturally linked. In Sri Lanka, we will be considered as foreigners. My brother and grandfather were killed. We cannot live there given the local tension (Male, age 57).

We have a training camp near our house in Sri Lanka. My mother died when our house was burnt. Our uncle was kidnapped and we don't know what happened to him. We came here to survive. We want to live here (Male, age 37).

Here I am getting good job opportunities with sufficient income. I feel I have a safe, comfortable and peaceful life in India. We want to become Indian citizens. I hope we will get it (Male, age 26).

Because, we had experienced a fierce war, I don't want to go there. So we had come twice to India. Children also grew up here and so we don't want to go back. We don't have any asset there (Female, age 40).

Absence of resources in Sri Lanka

Reasons mentioned by the refugees support the results of logistic regression where positive results are found with the availability of assets such as land in Sri Lanka. Also, a strong relation was found in the previous section where possession of assets in Sri Lanka has a positive relation with the intention to return.

We don't have any asset there. Our children are growing here and we have spent 20 years. If we go there, we have to live like refugees. But here we at least have safety of lives. We would be grateful if we are provided Indian citizenship. That will ensure that our children are safe and secure (Male, age 33).

We don't have any asset there. Our land is redistributed. We will have to adjust completely if we go there. We are doubtful that they will give us land. Even if they give, it will be in an interior and unutilised place. We have most of our relatives here. So we do not want to go there (Male, age 63).

My children have grown here. We have nothing there. We would be grateful if we are provided citizenship here so that we could live with minimum subsistence. We have worked here and don't want to go back (Male, 56).

My children have grown and settled here. I don't have anything there. So I want to be here. The problem in Sri Lanka seems to be never ending (Female, age 60).

We have freedom here.... We don't have any possession there. I am already aged and don't have to do anything new there (Male, age 60).

Social support and expectations of citizenship

Most of the refugees want to have Indian citizenship. They strongly feel that they be granted Indian citizenship on the ground of their close ethnic ties with India and Tamil Nadu. Besides, a new generation was born and has grown in India which does not know the intensity of the problem their ancestors faced in Sri Lanka.

We have work here and want to live here. We don't have anything there and don't want to go there. Though I want to go and see our relatives, I don't want to settle there permanently due to insurgency problem. Our lives are not secure there and so we want to live here (Male, age 20).

Tamil Nadu is our place of origin. We don't want to go to Sri Lanka. All our relatives are here.... We would be grateful if we are given Indian citizenship (Male, age 26).

Our children are growing here. We will have less option there in terms of employment and education. We have to sign every week to take salary from the government. We would be grateful if we are offered citizenship here (Male, age 32).

I am getting regular work here. My father also gets regular work and income. I want to mingle with the local population. We would be grateful if we are given citizenship here so that we will not be attached the word "refugee". We are secure without fear for our life (Male, age 19).

We are safe, comfortable and peaceful here. Even after 21 years of our stay in India, we are called refugees. We want to become Indian citizens and stay here (Male, age 51).

Our children are grown and have studied here. They work here. So we don't want to go there. There are problems for us. So I don't want to go. In the initial days, I wanted to go back, but now I don't want to go back (Female, age 41).

Children have grown here. Given the problem there, I don't want to take my children there. I can provide them good education and facilities here (Male, age 38).

Uncertainty in Sri Lanka

Respondents have a strong feeling that the situation is uncertain in Sri Lanka which prevents them to go back. Following anecdotes show the feeling the refugees have about the situation in Sri Lanka.

We have moved to at least five places in Sri Lanka. We have become nomads now. We are very unsure how we are going to establish ourselves there. (Male, age 27).

Our children have to complete their studies here. After that we want to go back. Also, the situation should become normal there. Currently, what we hear is that the situation is not conducive as people don't have a source of livelihood (Female, age 45).

We are not treated equally there. We would always like to go back provided our rights are guaranteed. We don't get jobs there. We live normal life here without any threat. (Female, age 30).

Extensive measures have been taken by Sri Lankan Government and UNHCR for the resettlement of refugees and IDPs. The task of resettlement of IDPs is more challenging than that of refugees. Over time uncertainty would wean-off and the situation will improve, bringing conducive environment for refugees and IDPs to resettle in their own land.