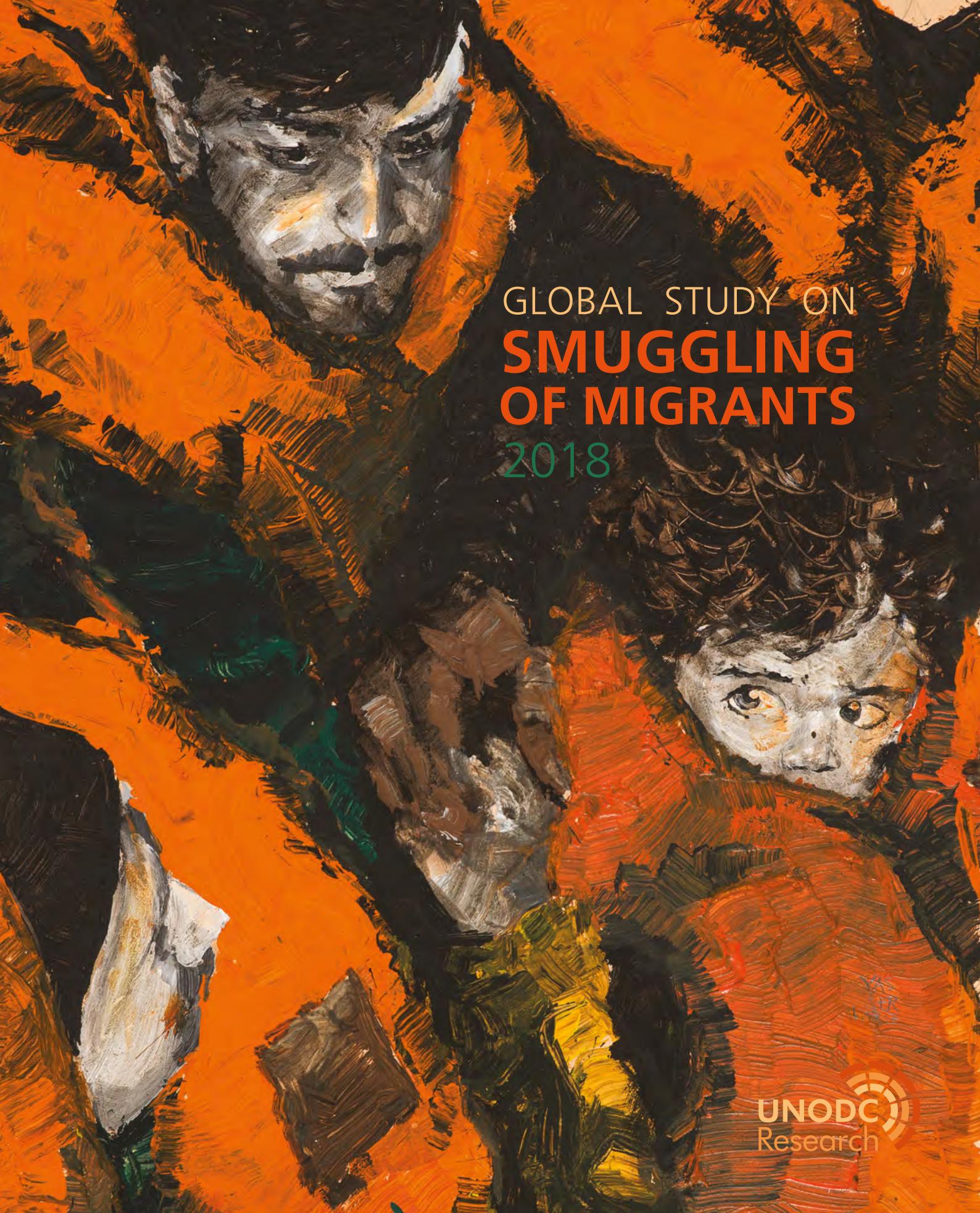




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A large, abstract painting serves as the background for the cover. It depicts a group of people, possibly migrants, in a dark, cramped space. The figures are rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. One figure's face is partially visible in the lower right corner, looking directly at the viewer.

GLOBAL STUDY ON  
**SMUGGLING  
OF MIGRANTS**

2018



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UNITED NATIONS OFFICE ON DRUGS AND CRIME  
Vienna

# Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018



UNITED NATIONS  
New York, 2018

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## PREFACE

This is the first Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Every year, thousands of migrants and refugees, desperately seeking to escape violence, conflict and dire economic straits, die on perilous journeys by land, sea or air, often at the hands of criminal smugglers. Concerted, comprehensive action to counter this crime and protect people is needed.

This research represents a start towards developing a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the crime of migrant smuggling and its terrible toll. Complementing UNODC's existing support to Member States, it can help to inform effective criminal justice responses, and contribute to continuing efforts towards the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

Based on an extensive review of existing data and literature, the study presents a detailed account of the nature and scale of migrant smuggling. It focuses on major smuggling routes connecting origin, transit, and destination points; the modus operandi of smugglers; the risks the journeys pose for migrants and refugees; and the profile of smugglers and the vulnerable groups on which they prey.

The global study shines a light on patterns, while making clear that there is never a one-size-fits-all explanation. What stands out is the bitter realization that smugglers are developing ever-more sophisticated organizational capacities, and using more dangerous routes to circumvent

border controls, while misinforming migrants about the conditions.

Our research also highlights potential avenues for strengthening measures against migrant smuggling. This includes raising awareness of the dangers posed by smugglers in destination countries. It may also include promoting alternative livelihoods for the lowest-level smugglers, who may be engaging in criminal activities out of the same desperation driving smuggled migrants to enlist their services.

At the same time, improved international cooperation and law enforcement capacities are needed to go after the large-scale criminal organizations that are pulling the strings.

This study offers insight into the complexity of the smuggling phenomenon, while also showing how much more information is needed. A global data collection system can strengthen the evidence base, and help the international community to come to grips with migrant smuggling.

We have a solid basis for such cooperative responses. More than three-quarters of all Member States are party to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol under the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Going forward, better use of this framework is needed to find solutions to these shared challenges.



## Acknowledgements

The *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018* was prepared by the UNODC Crime Research Section under the supervision of Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Director of the Division for Policy Analysis and Public Affairs and Angela Me, Chief of the Research and Trend Analysis Branch.

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The Crime Research Section wishes to thank the Section's interns, Julia Litzkow, Gamze Subasi, Nadine L. Salman, Jennifer Valentine and Michela del Buono who have all made solid contributions to the Global Study.

### Review and comments

The Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants 2018 benefited from the expertise and invaluable contributions of the UNODC colleagues in the Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Section and from the many colleagues at various UNODC Field Offices. Valuable inputs were also received from Ted Leggett and Jesper Samson of the Crime Research Section.

UNODC wishes to thank the artist Yasser Rezahi who generously donated the artwork used for this Study.

Photos of artwork by Johannes Kittel.

Infographs contain pictograms from Leremy/Shutterstock.



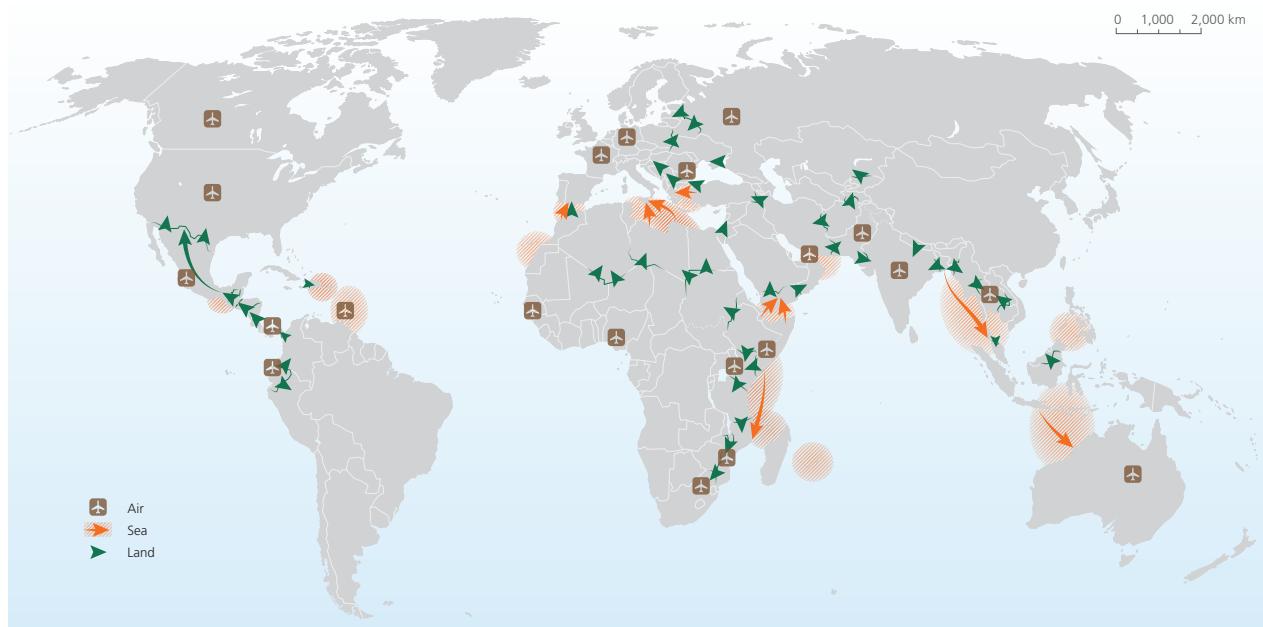
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Major land, sea and air smuggling transits and destinations discussed in this study\*



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\* The map is not intended to give a comprehensive overview of all migrant smuggling activity or the magnitude of smuggling taking place in the identified locations.

## Migrants are smuggled in all regions of the world

Smuggling of migrants affects all regions of the world. Different areas are affected to varying degrees. This *Study* describes some 30 smuggling routes, from internal African routes towards North and Southern Africa, to Asian routes towards Europe and the Middle East, or to wealthier countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific. From the Mediterranean sea routes, to land routes between Latin America and North America; and from the myriad air passages usually undertaken with counterfeit or fraudulently obtained documents, to hazardous overland journeys across deserts and mountains.

## Smuggling of migrants is a big business with high profits

There is evidence that, at a minimum, 2.5 million migrants were smuggled for an economic return of US\$5.5-7 billion in 2016. This is equivalent to what the United States of America (some US\$7 billion) or the European Union

countries (some US\$6 billion) spent on humanitarian aid globally in 2016. This is a minimum figure as it represents only the known portion of this crime. These findings, and the considerable information gaps on smuggling of migrants, will be discussed in chapter 1.

The smugglers' profits stem from the fees they charge migrants for their services. The fees are largely determined by the distance of the smuggling trajectory, number of border crossings, geographic conditions, means of transport, the use of fraudulent travel or identity documents, risk of detection and others. The fees are not fixed, and may change according to the migrants' profiles and their perceived wealth. For example, Syrian citizens are often charged more than many other migrants for smuggling along the Mediterranean routes (an extra charge that may or may not lead to a safer or more comfortable journey).

## Supply and demand

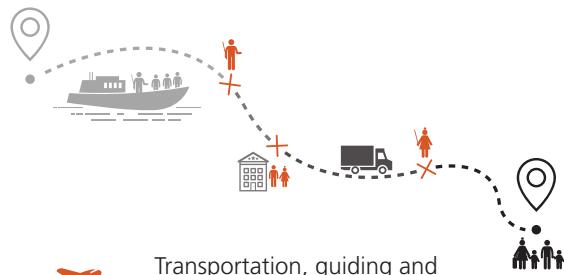
Smuggling of migrants follows the same dynamics of other transnational organized crime markets. It is driven by a demand and a supply of smuggling services to circumvent

## Factors determining the demand for smuggling



- Need to migrate due to armed conflict, persecution, socio-economic hardship or other reasons
- Mobility regulations and restrictions
- Expensive and lengthy procedures to obtain regular travel documents
- Marketing and misinformation by smugglers
- Smugglers' recruitment and community pressure

## Services supplied by smugglers



- Transportation, guiding and escorting during irregular border crossing
- Accommodation along the route
- Planning and contacts along the route
- Information and corruption
- Travel documents (counterfeit, false, fraudulently obtained, etc.)

existing regulations. The many smugglers who are prepared to offer services to facilitate irregular border crossings represent the supply of services.

From the supply side, smugglers' proactive recruitment and misinformation increase the number of migrants who are willing to buy smuggling services. Smugglers advertise their business where migrants can be easily reached, such as in neighbourhoods home to diaspora communities, in refugee camps or in various social networks online. Demand for migration is determined by socio-economic conditions, family reunification as well as persecution, instability or lack of safety in origin countries. Demand for smuggling services is determined by the limited legal channels that cannot satisfy the total demand for regular migration or by the costs of legal migration that some migrants cannot afford. Demand for smuggling services is particularly high among refugees who, for lack of other means, may need to use smugglers in order to reach a safe destination fleeing their origin countries.

### Routes change

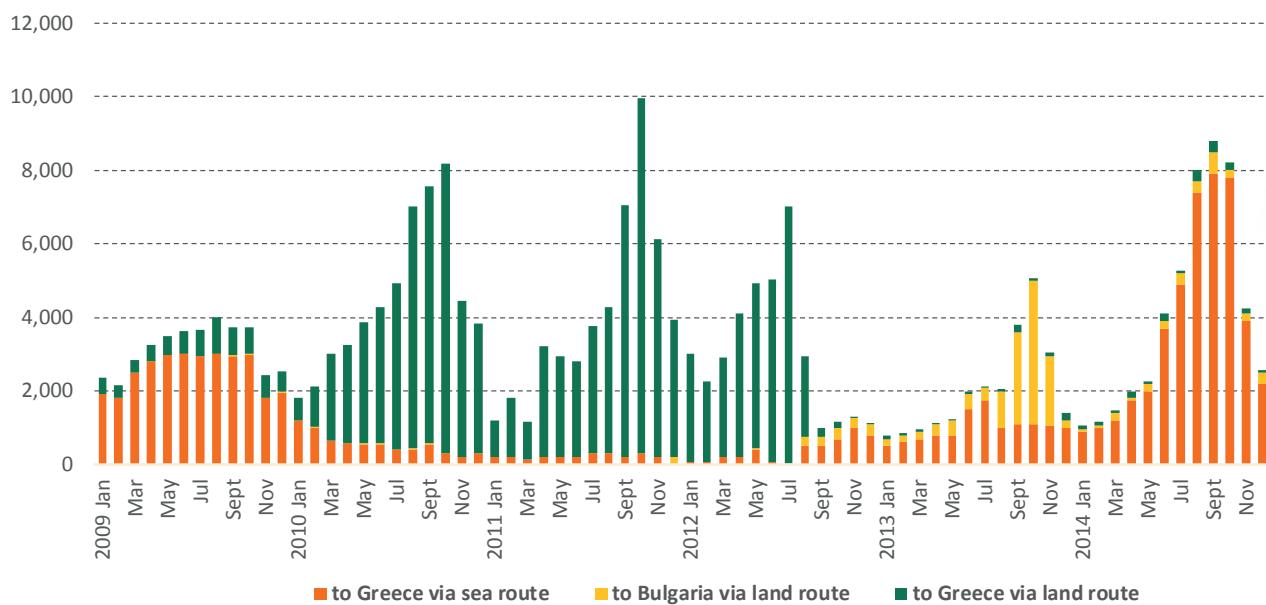
Geography, border control, migration policy in destination countries, smugglers' connections across countries and

cost of the package offered by smugglers are among the key factors that determine the routes and the travel methods. When geography allows, land routes are widely used, more than sea or air smuggling routes that generally require more resources and organization. The vast majority of migrants smuggled from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa, for example, use land routes. In recent years, among some 400 surveyed migrants, some 10 per cent travelled by air, while only 1 per cent travelled by boat.

Measures to increase or decrease border control with consequent increased or decreased risks of detection for smuggled migrants, if taken alone, typically lead to rapid route displacement rather than changes in the overall number of smuggled migrants. Stricter border control measures often increase the risks for migrants and provide more opportunities to profit for smugglers.

During the period 2009-2015, for example, a large part of the recorded smuggling activity between Turkey and the European Union shifted from land passages to sea crossings, in response to increased controls at different borders. Similar examples are the shifts in the smuggling activities across the Red Sea or the Arabian Sea from the Horn of Africa to the Arab peninsula or smuggling to

## Number of irregular border crossings from Turkey to the EU by route, January 2009–December 2014



Source: Frontex.

Spain along the Western Mediterranean route. In the latter case, arrivals at the different destination areas in Spain (Canary Islands, Ceuta, Melilla, the Andalusian coast) have fluctuated significantly in recent years, often in response to enhanced enforcement activities.

### Hubs are stable

While routes may change, smuggling hubs, where the demand and supply of smuggling services meet, are rather stable over time. Hubs are key to the migrant smuggling crime. They serve as meeting places where disparate routes converge and arrangements are made for subsequent travel. Often, the locations of smuggling hubs are capitals or large cities, although they may also be remote towns where much of the economic activity is linked to migrant smuggling. Agadez in Niger, for example, is a transit for current smuggling flows, with hundreds of thousands having organized their trip from West Africa to North Africa (and Europe) there. Already in 2003, some 65,000 migrants were reported to have left Agadez for North Africa.

### Smugglers are often ethnically connected to smuggled migrants or geographically linked to the smuggling territory

There are some large, transnational organizations involved in smuggling that may or may not have ethnic linkages with the territory where they operate or the migrants they

smuggle. As a general pattern, smaller-scale smugglers are either ethnically linked to the territories where they operate, or they share ethnic or linguistic ties with the migrants they smuggle. Smugglers who are in charge of recruiting, promoting and selling smuggling packages normally market their activities to people from the same community or same ethnic group, or at least the same citizenship. Smugglers in charge of facilitating the actual border crossing have extensive knowledge of the territory to be crossed and the best methods to reach the destination.

Ethnic and/or linguistic ties between smugglers and migrants is one of the elements that often brings migrants and smugglers together. A reliable connection is key in a market that is unregulated by definition. When demanding smuggling services, migrants seek well-reputed smugglers. In presenting their offer, smugglers aim to establish a relationship of trust with migrants. The pressing need for migrants to move and the vast information gaps seem, however, to impede migrants from making an informed decision. As a consequence, migrants try to reduce these information gaps by relying on the opinion of their communities, relatives and friends, and more recently, social media.

### The organization of migrant smuggling

The organization and size of smuggling operations vary. Some smugglers provide limited small-scale services such as a river crossing or a truck ride. These smugglers usually

operate individually, and on an ad hoc basis. Some of the migrants who were successfully smuggled turn themselves into smugglers.

The profits of these small-scale smugglers are typically not substantial, but entire communities may depend on the income from these “low-level” services, particularly in some border and transit areas. In these types of communities, smuggling-related activities may range from catering to providing telecommunication services for migrants en route to their destination.

Smugglers may also be organized in loose ‘networks’ which do not involve strict hierarchies. Participants operate with much autonomy in different parts of the smuggling process, for instance, facilitating a certain border crossing, recruiting a particular group of migrants, counterfeiting documents or preparing vessels for sea smuggling. They do not work exclusively with only one smuggling network and the links are similar to business relations. Smugglers with ‘broker’ functions play key roles in this system as they are able to maintain these different smuggling actors at easy reach.

Other smugglers belong to large and well-organized hierarchical criminal operations with transnational links and the capability of organizing sophisticated smuggling passages that might involve the use of falsified or fraudulently obtained travel documents. Often, such smuggling is sold as ‘packages’ that involve migrants travelling long distances, using multiple modes of transportation.

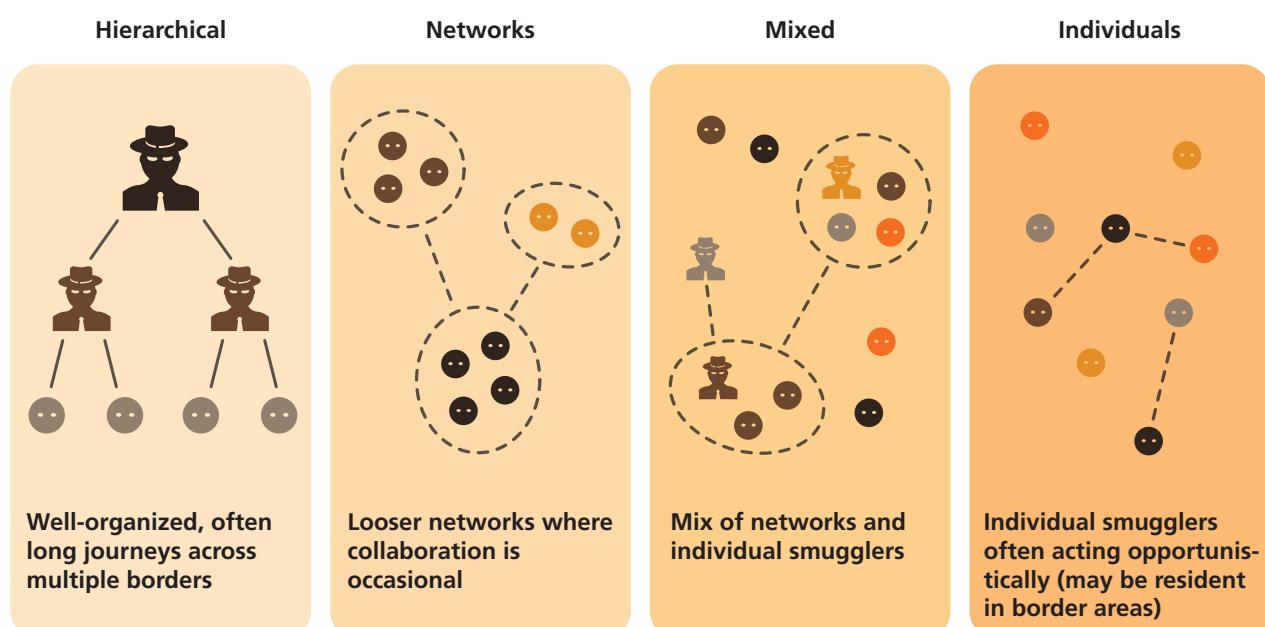
## Smugglers, other criminal organizations and corruption

Generally, smuggling networks seem not to be involved in other forms of major transnational organized crime. In some parts of the world, however, smuggling networks have links with large violent criminal organizations that they have to pay for the ‘right’ to safe passage for migrants, for example, along the border between the United States and Mexico. In other cases, smugglers may hand over migrants to such groups for extortion of ransom, robbery or other exploitation.

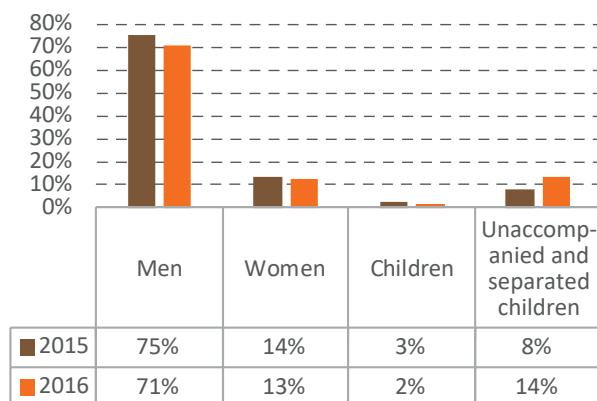
Many smuggling networks engage in systematic corruption at most levels; from petty corruption at individual border control points to grand corruption at higher levels of government. Corrupt practices linked to migrant smuggling have been reported along nearly all the identified routes.

## Smuggled migrants are mainly young men but unaccompanied children are also smuggled

Most smuggled migrants are relatively young men. That is not to say that women and children are not smuggled or do not engage in smuggling. On some routes, notably in parts of South-East Asia, women comprise large shares of smuggled migrants. The gender composition of smuggled migrant flows may also be influenced by the circumstances driving their mobility. Among Syrian smuggled migrants – most of whom are escaping from armed conflict – there are many families, whereas this is



## Share of arrivals in Italy along the Central Mediterranean route by age and sex, 2015-2016



Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

less commonly reported among other groups of smuggled migrants.

Many smuggling flows also include some unaccompanied or separated children, who might be particularly vulnerable to deception and abuse by smugglers and others. Sizable numbers of unaccompanied children have been detected along the closely monitored Mediterranean routes to

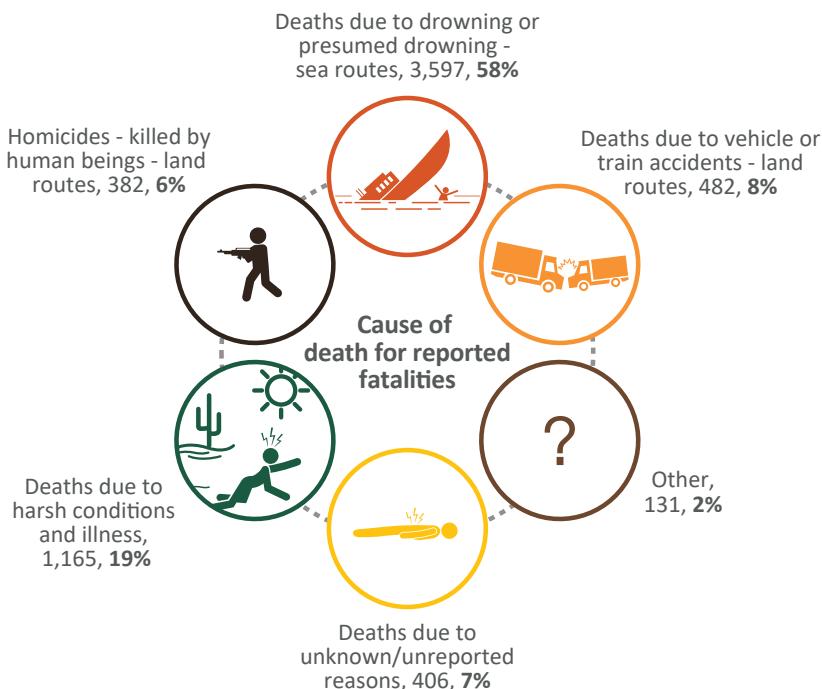
Europe and the land routes towards North America, though it may also be a significant concern elsewhere.

## Migrant smuggling can be deadly

Every year, thousands of migrants die during smuggling activities. Accidents, extreme terrain and weather conditions, as well as deliberate killings have been reported along most smuggling routes. Systematic killings of migrants have also been reported, making this a very violent illicit trade. The reported deaths – most of them along sea smuggling routes - represent only the tip of the iceberg of the ultimate human cost suffered by smuggled migrants. Many migrant deaths are likely to go unreported, along unmonitored sea routes as well as remote or inhospitable stretches of overland routes.

In addition to fatalities, smuggled migrants are also vulnerable to a range of other forms of crime. Some of the frequently reported types faced by smuggled migrants include violence, rape, theft, kidnapping, extortion and trafficking in persons. Such violations have been reported along all the smuggling routes considered. In addition, smugglers' quest for profit may also lead them to neglect the safety of migrants during journeys. For example, smugglers may set off without sufficient food and drink, the vehicles they use might be faulty, and migrants who fall ill or are injured along the way might not receive any care.

## Number of migrant fatalities reported, by cause of death, 2017



Source: UNODC elaboration of data from the International Organization for Migration.

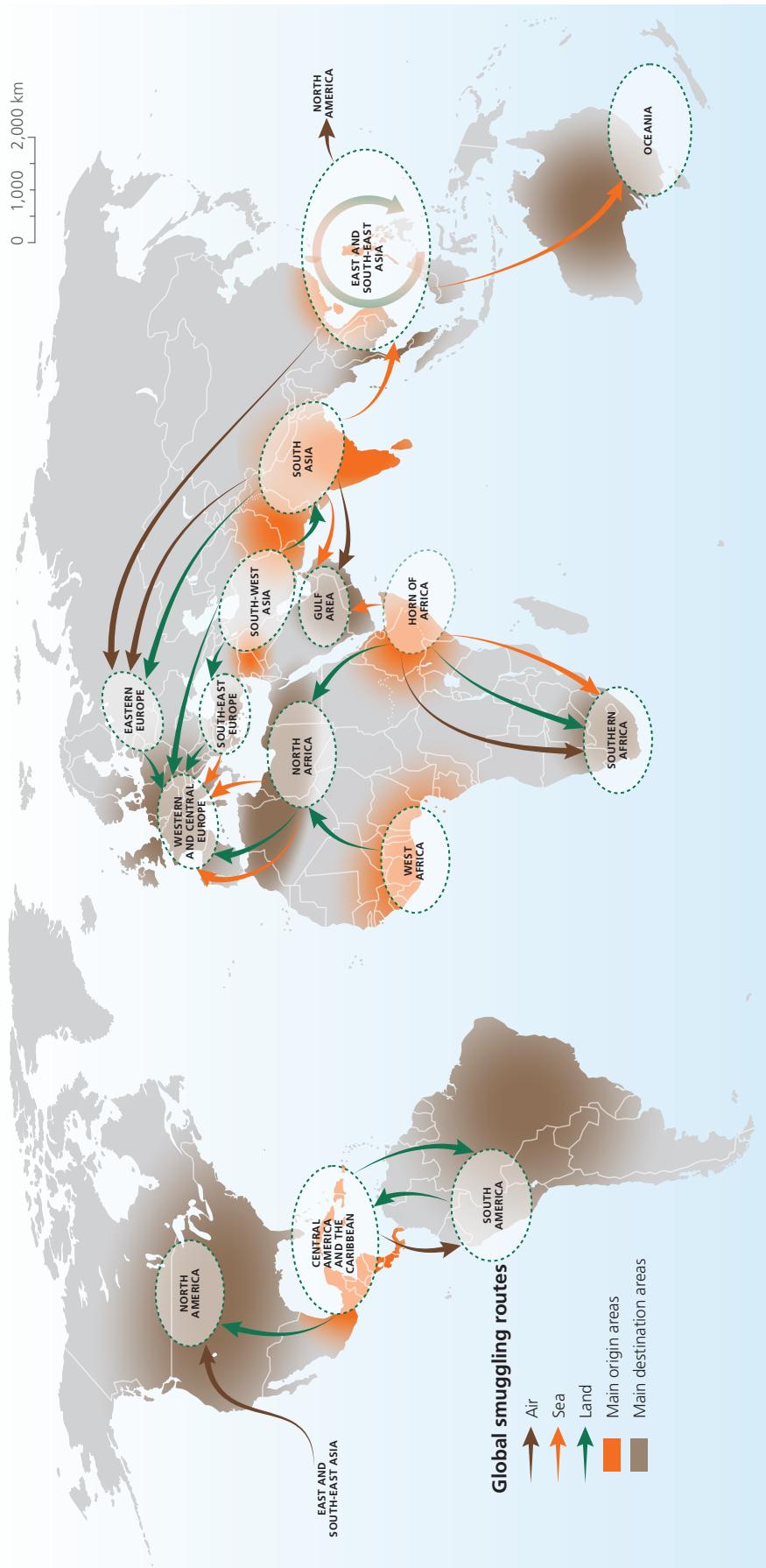
## Estimated magnitude and value of the major smuggling routes discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

## Major smuggling routes discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

## Policy implications

- This first UNODC *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants* presents a wealth of information on the different manifestations of this crime and its harm to migrants and states. While many information gaps remain, the knowledge compiled in this Study has important implications for policies and programmes.
  - The study shows that smuggling of migrants is a trans-national crime which generates significant economic returns. Among its consequences are thousands of migrants who are killed, tortured and exploited every year. The United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, is the only internationally agreed legal instrument designed to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants. The Protocol also reiterates the importance of protecting migrants' rights. Ratifying or acceding to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, and ensuring full implementation, including the defining element of 'financial and other material benefit,'<sup>a</sup> are vital first steps to effectively address the crime and protect migrants.
  - The increasing numbers of unaccompanied and separated children among smuggled migrants on some routes pose great challenges to children's rights and wellbeing. Institutions providing assistance to migrants as well as law enforcement and migration authorities need to be equipped and trained to address the particular vulnerabilities among children who are smuggled and to guarantee the best interest of the child.
  - Increased border enforcement efforts in geographically limited areas often result in displacement of smuggling routes to different borders, smuggling methods or to other routes. If applied in isolation these measures do not reduce the number of smuggled migrants or the size of the smuggling problem. Only policies that integrate different types of interventions and broaden the geographical spectrum to include countries of origin, transit, and destination can be successful in the long term. Targeting programmes to prevent migrant smuggling in smuggling hubs can be particularly effective since these hubs are more stable than routes.
  - A holistic approach to counter smuggling of migrants needs to take into account not only the geography of the crime, but also its different contributing factors. Smuggling of migrants is determined by a mix of demand and supply elements and requires a comprehensive strategy which recognizes the complexity of these factors and is guided by a knowledge-based approach.
  - Limiting the demand for migrant smuggling can be achieved by broadening the possibilities for regular migration and increasing the accessibility of regular travel documents and procedures. Making regular migration
- 

<sup>a</sup> A clarification on 'financial and other material benefit' is provided in a text box on pages 18-19.

opportunities more accessible in origin countries and refugee camps, including the expansion of migration and asylum bureaux in origin areas, would reduce opportunities for smugglers.

- Some smugglers actively recruit migrants in their communities by misinforming about the risks and the prospects in destination countries. Raising awareness in communities of origin, and particularly in refugee camps, about the dangers involved in smuggling may also help reduce the demand for smuggling services.
- Addressing the supply of migrant smuggling services requires different approaches for different profiles of smugglers. The provision of alternative livelihood programmes to communities that rely on income from migrant smuggling activity can reduce the economic drivers that attract small-scale smugglers to engage in the smuggling business.
- Tackling smuggling networks in their entirety requires improved regional and international cooperation and national criminal justice responses. These policies and interventions can be more potent with financial sanctions such as effective mechanisms to confiscate the proceeds of the crime. Like other organized crime activities, smuggling of migrants is motivated by a hunt for profits, so cutting the financial benefits may serve the purpose of reducing the crime.
- Migrants and refugees are extremely interconnected in origin countries, at destinations and sometimes also en route. Engagements with prominent actors in the private sector, such as telecommunications and social media corporations, could support migrants to have access to adequate information on first aid, risks along the routes, ruthless smugglers and other potentially lifesaving information.
- Corruption at borders and within consular and migration authorities is one of the enablers of smuggling of migrants. Combatting smuggling of migrants can only be successful if anti-corruption mechanisms are enforced in these institutions.
- This study has only scratched the surface of the many ways in which migrant smugglers rely on corrupt practices to commit their crime. Further research of broad geographical scope is needed to establish a sound evidence base for future interventions to tackle these multifaceted linkages.
- Data collection, analysis and research on smuggling of migrants remain at their infancy. In order to build a solid international body of knowledge to support policy making in the area of smuggling of migrants, there is a need to improve data collection systems at the national, regional and international levels. In particular, it is important to maintain adequate administrative records, conduct appropriate surveys, apply statistical methodologies and qualitative studies to monitor migrant smuggling patterns and routes, as well as the profiles of smugglers and their modus operandi.











## CHAPTER I GLOBAL OVERVIEW

### INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

The world has never been as connected as today. Most of humanity is only a video call away. While the vast majority of the world's population live in their countries of origin, in 2017, there were nearly 258 million recorded international migrants,<sup>a</sup> up from 220 million in 2010 and 173 million in 2000.<sup>b</sup> There are many reasons why millions of people are on the move. Some cross international borders by choice; to reunite with family members, to benefit from a better education or a job that they cannot find in their own country. Others have no choice and leave their country of origin because of conflict, environmental disasters or lack of opportunities to make a decent living. The international migration of people is highly regulated and each country or groups of countries have adopted different approaches to determine how and under what circumstances foreigners can enter, live, study, or work within their borders. Demand for emigration or immigration does not always correlate with the systems that regulate people's transnational movements and many seek alternative arrangements to move abroad. Some look for ways to overcome migration barriers, others try to shorten the processing time, lower the costs or eliminate the need to obtain official documentation that may be associated with regular migration.

Migrant smugglers exploit these needs and offer their services for profit. They may work largely on their own, within a small network in one or two countries, or as part of large, complex multinational organizations, depending on what type of smuggling service they provide. Their offers can range from a single international border crossing to transcontinental trajectories involving different modes of transportation and multiple border crossings. For some migrants, smugglers represent the only available avenue towards the dream of a better life, even if the price charged may be high, the actual travel routes complex, the transport substandard and the risk of mistreatment or even death considerable.

••

a Any person who changes his or her country of usual residence. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *United Nations Recommendation on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1, 1998*.

b United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *International migrant stock: The 2017 revision*.

As this study makes clear, the smuggling of migrants is not confined to 'hotspots' in the Mediterranean and the long-standing routes leading to North America. It occurs in every part of the world, although the intensity varies, depending on location. While many aspects differ, such as the magnitude and the modus operandi of smugglers, the crux of the problem – criminals taking advantage of people's aspiration to migrate in situations of limited regular migration options – is the same.

#### What is migrant smuggling?

The internationally agreed definition of migrant smuggling stems from the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Smuggling of Migrants Protocol). The Protocol defines the crime of migrant smuggling as 'the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.'<sup>c</sup> No Member State can adhere to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol without prior adherence to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

Parties that ratify the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol are requested to criminalize the conduct of smuggling of migrants as defined above and to criminalize the procurement of irregular stay,<sup>d</sup> as well as producing, obtaining or providing fraudulent travel or identity documents for the purpose of enabling migrant smuggling. Thus, the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol covers offences related to the facilitation of both illegal entry and illegal stay of foreigners or persons who are not permanent residents when this is done to obtain a financial or other material benefit.

The criminalization of smuggling of migrants promoted by the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol does not aim at criminalizing migrants. The stated intention of the Protocol is to criminalize and prosecute those who smuggle others for gain, and not the migrants themselves. In addition, Article 5 explicitly states that 'Migrants shall not become liable to criminal prosecution' for having been smuggled.

••

c Art. 3, para. (a), *Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*.

d Enabling of irregular stay by producing, procuring, providing or possessing fraudulent travel or identity documents or other illegal means.

## The ‘financial or other material benefit’ element of the migrant smuggling crime

Most United Nations Member States have committed to tackling the issue of migrant smuggling. This commitment is demonstrated by the fact that, as of May 2018, the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol had 146 Parties; more than three quarters of all Member States. Ratification of the Protocol entails accepting the obligation to criminalize the conduct prescribed therein.

However, as with most international treaties, considerable scope is left for Member States to implement the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol provisions in their national legislation. This is illustrated clearly by the concept of ‘financial or other material benefit’, which is a key part of the Protocol definition of the migrant smuggling crime. Many countries have excluded this requirement from their legislation. A recent UNODC issue paper surveyed 13 countries of which 11 omitted the financial or other material benefit element from their base migrant smuggling offences.<sup>a</sup> Moreover, the European Union legal framework aimed at harmonizing Member States’ legal provisions on the facilitation of unauthorised entry and residence omits this element from the definition of the conduct that EU Member States are required to criminalize.<sup>b</sup> Countries that do not include it as a constitutive element of the crime might instead choose to use it as an aggravating circumstance that could influence sentencing decisions.

The inclusion of financial or other material benefit as a constitutive element of the migrant smuggling crime is a clear indication of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol’s focus on tackling those – particularly organized crime groups - who seek to benefit from smuggling migrants. This is also confirmed in the *travaux préparatoires* of the Protocol, which states that ‘the intention was to include the activities of organized criminal groups acting for profit, but to exclude the activities of those who provided support to migrants for humanitarian reasons or on the basis of close family ties.’<sup>c</sup>

Criminalizing procurement of illegal entry or enabling irregular stay without requiring the financial or other material benefit element means that criminal justice responses can potentially be applied in a wider range of circumstances than what was intended when the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol was drafted. A key issue in this regard is the possibility of prosecuting persons who provide assistance to migrants solely on the basis of family and/or humanitarian motives. Absent a financial or other material benefit element in the relevant legislation, the act of helping a family member cross a border or rescuing migrants at sea and bringing them to shore for assistance without expectations of any benefit could be sufficient grounds for being prosecuted as a migrant smuggler.

From the little data available, however, it appears that such prosecutions are relatively rare. In practice, the absence of indications of financial gain for a suspected smuggler – particularly when this absence is coupled with clear evidence of humanitarian intent - appears to dissuade many countries from pursuing prosecutions.<sup>d</sup> However, prosecutions in cases without a financial or other material benefit element do occur in some jurisdictions. There is anecdotal evidence that family members and those assisting others to cross a border for humanitarian reasons have been prosecuted under migrant smuggling legislation in the European Union and in other traditional destination countries for smuggled migrants.<sup>e</sup>

Criminalizing procurement of illegal entry or enabling irregular stay without a financial or other material benefit element has ramifications beyond the criminal justice system. Research from the European Union has found that those involved in providing assistance to irregular migrants not only fear sanctions, but may also experience intimidation by some national authorities when carrying out their work. Moreover, in some countries, the implementation of the key EU legislation regarding the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence

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- a UNODC, *Issue paper: the concept of “Financial or other material benefit” in the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol*, 2017.
- b European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies, *Fit for purpose? The Facilitation Directive and the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance to irregular migrants*, 2016.
- c United Nations General Assembly, *Interpretative notes for the official records (travaux préparatoires) of the negotiation of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto* (A/55/383/Add.1, 3 November 2000, para. 88).
- d UNODC, Issue paper, op. cit. p. 64.
- e European Parliament, op. cit., p. 40; UNODC, Issue paper, op. cit., p. 26.

is perceived to contribute to the social exclusion of both irregular and regular migrants.<sup>f</sup>

The absence of a financial or other material benefit element in legislation is only one of several potential sources of inconsistencies between the intentions of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol and the implementation at country level. However, harmonizing regional and national legal frameworks with the Protocol in relation to the benefit element could sharpen the focus on the criminals who prey on people in desperate situations. It could also reduce the fear of prosecutions or sanctions experienced by those involved in assisting them, and consequently, protect the rights of smuggled migrants.

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f European Parliament, op. cit., p. 45.

## Differences between migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons

While trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants are often conflated, they are different crimes that require different responses with regard to the protection and assistance entitlements of trafficking victims and smuggled migrants. In brief, the key differences pertain to: consent, purpose of exploitation, transnationality, the source of criminal profits, and the object of the crime.

**Consent:** The migrants are typically willing to migrate, and usually agree with the smuggler that a service will be provided against a certain fee. For trafficking victims, on the other hand, according to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Trafficking in Persons Protocol), consent is irrelevant for adult victims when threat or use or force, deception, abuse of a position of vulnerability or any other of the means mentioned in the Trafficking in Persons Protocol have been used (for child victims, it is always irrelevant).

**Purpose of the crime:** The purpose of trafficking in persons is exploitation of the victim(s). The purpose of migrant smuggling is the facilitation of irregular entry or stay of a person in a country in which he or she is not a national or a permanent resident in order to obtain a financial or other material benefit.

**Transnationality:** Migrant smuggling is per definition always transnational in that it involves irregular movement between (at least) two different countries. Trafficking in persons may or may not be transnational; a large share of detected trafficking cases occur within a country's borders.<sup>e</sup>

**Source of criminal profits:** In migrant smuggling cases, the

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e In 2014, 43 per cent of detected trafficking cases were domestic cases (UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016*, p. 41).

profits for the criminals stem from their ability to facilitate illegal entry or stay in a country where the smuggled person is not a citizen or permanent resident. In trafficking in persons cases, the profits are typically generated by the exploitation of victims (for example, through forced labour, sexual exploitation, or removal of organs).

**Crime against what or whom:** Migrant smuggling affects the sovereignty of States over their borders. As such, it doesn't involve persons as victims (although migrants can become victims of other crimes during the smuggling process). Trafficking in persons is a crime against a person, the trafficked victim.

In practice, however, some of these differences can and do sometimes become blurred. In real life, it is difficult to have all the elements to make clear distinctions between smuggling and trafficking cases. Migrants who believe to be smuggled might be deceived or coerced into situations of exploitation at some point of their movement, which may change the nature of the crime from smuggling to trafficking or result in both offences being committed at the same time.

The confusion between trafficking and smuggling can also lead to a failure to identify some migrants as victims of trafficking. States Parties to the Trafficking in Persons Protocol have an obligation to identify victims of trafficking to ensure that their rights are not further violated and that they can access assistance and protection measures, as appropriate.

## Smuggling in the context of migration

The crime of migrant smuggling takes place in the broader context of international migration, and conceptual clarity of different terminology is crucial. Most international migration takes place according to established regulatory systems.<sup>f</sup> In general, regular migration is understood as movements of persons who cross borders in line with the

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f International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2018*, November 2017, p. 1.

**TABLE 1:** Summary of the key differences between migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons

	MIGRANT SMUGGLING	TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS
<b>Consent</b>	Typically voluntary	Irrelevant if ‘means’ are in place
<b>Purpose of the crime</b>	Obtain a financial or material benefit	Exploitation of the victim
<b>Transnationality</b>	Required	Not required
<b>Source of criminal profits</b>	Facilitation of irregular entry or stay	Exploitation of the victim
<b>Crime against what or whom<sup>g</sup></b>	Public order, authority and provisions of the state	A person

rules and procedures established by each country to regulate population movements. The specificities of these procedures vary considerably.

There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration, but it is generally understood as movements that take place outside the regulatory norms of sending, transit, or receiving countries.<sup>h</sup> From the perspective of receiving countries, irregular migration includes entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations, and from the perspective of the sending country, it can involve movements of people who do not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country.

From a conceptual point of view, there is a marked difference between smuggling of migrants and irregular migration. Smuggling of migrants describes the conduct of persons who facilitate irregular forms of migration for a financial or other material benefit, while irregular migration describes the conduct (and status) of the migrants themselves. Smugglers of migrants may not migrate with the migrants they are smuggling. Migrant smuggling can involve – but is not limited to – providing fraudulent documents (such as passports, visas, residence permits or work contracts) to enable irregular entry and/or stay, and arranging transportation of undocumented migrants across an international border. Migrants who are smuggled are, at least in the moment of border crossing, irregular migrants, while not all irregular migrants have been smuggled.

The boundaries and overlaps between regular, irregular and smuggled migrants differ when considering a population that has made a migration movement and is living in a destination country at a given point in time (stock) and movements across borders within a time period (flow).

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g United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *International classification of crime for statistical purposes (ICCS)*, version 1.0, March 2015, pp. 44 and 78.

h IOM, *Key migration terms, online briefing* ([www.iom.int/key-migration-terms#Irregular-migration](http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms#Irregular-migration)).

The total migrant population (stock) in a country includes regular as well as irregular migrants. Some migrants pertaining to both of these groups may have entered the country regularly, while others may have been smuggled across borders.

Moreover, some migrants who were smuggled into the country may have subsequently obtained regular migration status, while others may have remained with an irregular status. As a consequence, some part of the regular migrant population present in a country (at a given time) may have been smuggled there some time before the migration status regularization took place.

Looking at migration flows, movements across borders are either regular or irregular. Irregular entries may or may not be facilitated by smugglers, so while all entries facilitated by smugglers are irregular, some irregular entries may not be associated with smuggling. Some migrants irregularly cross international borders on their own.

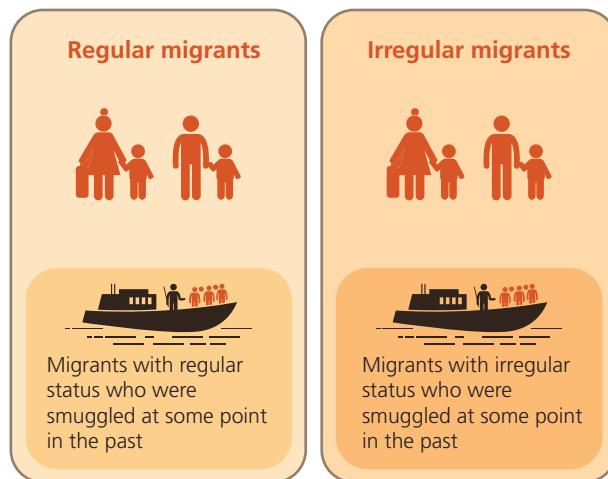
Refugees are persons who have been forced to flee their country to preserve life or freedom, with an entitlement to international protection.<sup>i</sup> Refugees may travel regularly or irregularly. According to international law,<sup>j</sup> persons who suffer persecution in his or her country have the right to seek asylum in other countries. Since procedures to apply for and access refugee status are normally carried out at destination, some refugees engage the services of migrant

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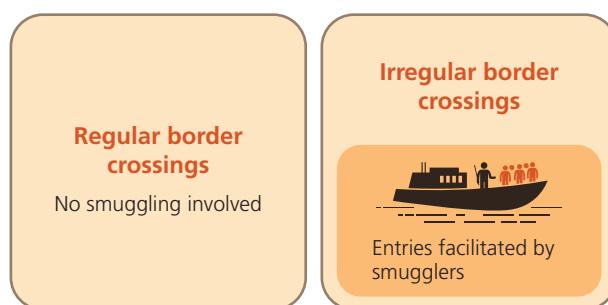
i Legal definition: A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail him or herself of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution (Article 1A (2) Status of refugees convention 1951/1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees). Several regional instruments, as well as the broader definition of refugee included in UNHCR's Statute, have extended international protection to persons fleeing indiscriminate effects of generalized violence or events seriously disrupting the public order, that do not fulfil the requirements of a refugee according to the 1951 Convention.

j Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” In International Law, this right is framed and regulated by the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.

**FIG. 1:** Overlaps between the populations (stocks) of regular and irregular migrants and migrants who were smuggled at some point in time



**FIG. 2:** Relation between migrant smuggling and migration flows



smugglers in order to reach their desired destination country to seek asylum. In addition, the costs of smuggling and the urgency of their move may leave them vulnerable to abuse and in the most severe cases to trafficking situations.

#### The UNODC Global Study on the Smuggling of Migrants

As the guardian of the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, UNODC is involved in a range of normative and operational work to enhance national responses to migrant smuggling. In 2015, the Working Group on Smuggling of Migrants, of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, encouraged UNODC to prepare a global analytical study on the migrant smuggling crime.<sup>k</sup> The *Global Study* responds to this invitation and to a number of

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<sup>k</sup> Report on the meeting of the Working Group on the Smuggling of Migrants held in Vienna from 18 to 20 November 2015, CTOC/COP/WG.7/2015/6 (4 December 2015), para. 41.

broader mandates requesting UNODC to collect data, analyse and report on crime issues under its purview, particularly those with a transnational dimension.<sup>l</sup>

The *Study* aims at describing the crime of migrant smuggling. It focuses on understanding the patterns and dynamics of the crime as defined in the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol and the typology of those involved, from the migrants who are smuggled to the smugglers who exploits the migrants' desire to migrate. The *Study* also identifies major smuggling routes, which affect all regions of the world and provides specific information on each route.

#### Methodology and sources of information

The *Study* is based on a comprehensive review of available data and information on migrant smuggling across the world. Efforts were made to collate as much quantitative and qualitative information from official national and international sources as possible. The starting point of the study was a mapping exercise. This involved dividing the world in four macro-regions – Africa, Americas, Asia and Europe – and making information assessments to demarcate the most relevant smuggling routes within each region. The relevance of routes was determined primarily by considerations of magnitude, involvement of organized crime groups and the 'human cost' to migrants. Due regard was given to ensure broad geographical coverage.

The *Study* is divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 presents route-specific information while chapter 1 'zooms out' from the characteristics of these routes and looks at the commonalities and differences between the different routes. Cross-cutting themes such as the role of smuggling hubs, the various risks faced by smuggled migrants and the fees paid for smuggling are analysed from a global perspective. Chapter 1 also includes a first attempt at generating a rough estimate of the number of migrants smuggled worldwide and the profits made by smugglers.

A wide range of open-source information from international organizations, national authorities, research institutions and non-governmental organizations was consulted for the preparation of the *Study*. Priority was given to data from governmental institutions – such as national statistics offices, law enforcement authorities, migration departments and border guards – in areas where such information could be found. Where no official information was avail-

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<sup>l</sup> General Assembly resolutions 64/179 of 26 March 2010 (A/RES/64/179, para. 12), 65/232 of 23 March 2011 (A/RES/65/232 para. 18), 66/181 of 3 April 2012 (A/RES/66/181 para. 19) and 67/189 of 20 December 2012 (A/RES/67/189 para. 21), and Economic and Social Council resolution 2013/37 of 11 October 2013 (E/RES/2013/37, para. 10).

able, UNODC considered studies based on reliable data and sound methodologies, carried out by international organizations, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Significant challenges to data collection on migrant smuggling included not only the lack of specific information on migrant smuggling in many areas – which is a common obstacle for any research that aspires to be global in coverage - but also the heterogeneity of the data that was available. As a result of countries' varied practices in, inter alia, criminalization, enforcement and reporting, much of the available information refers to different crimes collected by different agencies and covering different time periods. Much of the quantitative data presented in the *Study* do not relate only to migrant smuggling offences or solely to migrants who have been smuggled, but they were used together with other contextual information to inform the understanding of smuggling, not to quantify it. For this reason, such data is generally presented with descriptive wording reproduced from the original source as well as caveats in the accompanying analysis. This is particularly relevant for the sections on the magnitude of migrant smuggling.

## 1. GLOBAL PICTURE OF SMUGGLING ROUTES

Smuggling of migrants is a crime that affects virtually all countries in the world. Some countries are origins of migrants that are further smuggled, others are destinations, or transit areas. Smuggling operations take place across a wide range of countries. There is a myriad of routes used to smuggle migrants, some changing rather quickly. For this study, more than 30 main smuggling routes were identified. They only represent what is known to law enforcement, researchers and other actors who have studied smuggling of migrants in different parts of the world.

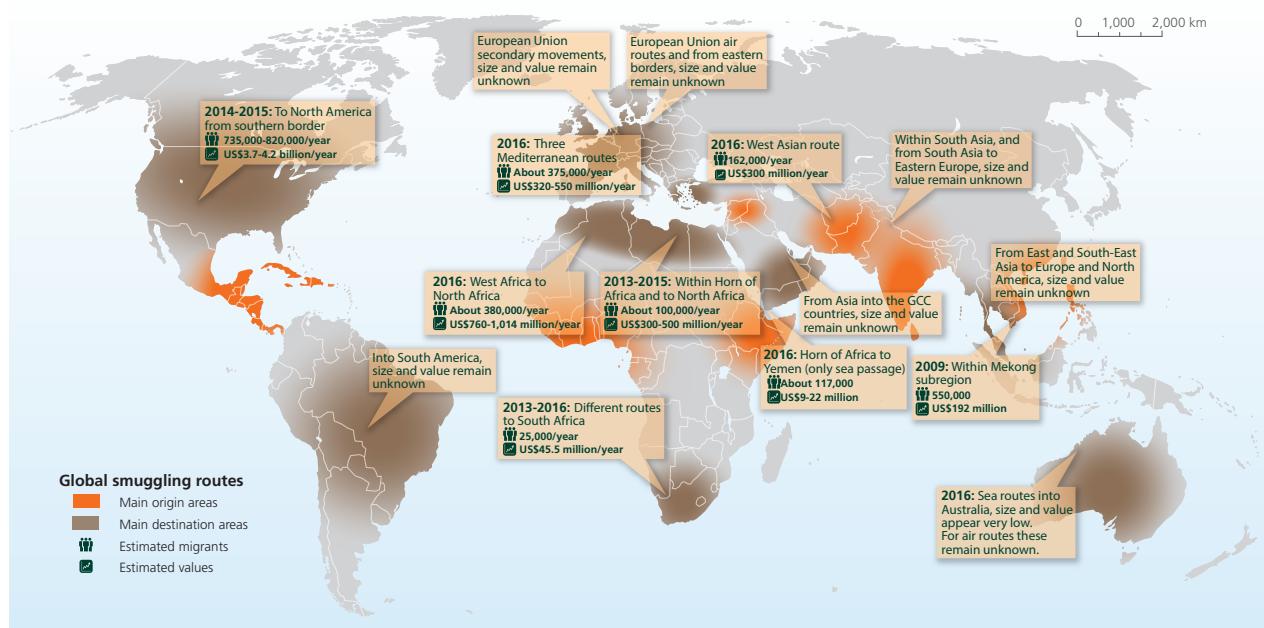
Along these routes, UNODC found that a minimum of 2.5 million migrants were smuggled in 2016,<sup>m</sup> generating a minimum annual income for smugglers of about US\$5.5 billion.

<sup>m</sup> Estimates mainly calculated for the year 2016. However, for some routes, previous years were considered. In addition, in 2016, large numbers of migrants were smuggled from West Africa and the Horn of Africa into North Africa (about 480,000 per year) and smuggled into Europe along the Central and Western Mediterranean Routes (about 200,000 per year). Aggregating the estimates for the routes into North Africa and Europe may result in double-counting of the same migrants smuggled along two different routes. The numbers should be considered as an indication of the overall scale of the smuggling phenomenon along the stated routes.

**TABLE 2: Estimated magnitude and value of selected smuggling routes discussed in this study**

ROUTE	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF MIGRANTS SMUGGLED ALONG THIS ROUTE ONLY, PER YEAR, 2016 OR EARLIER	ESTIMATED REVENUES FOR SMUGGLERS ALONG THIS ROUTE ONLY, PER YEAR, 2016 OR EARLIER (US\$)
<b>Smuggling into the European Union</b>		
<b>Total for the three Mediterranean routes</b>	Approx. 375,000	320 - 550 million
<b>Smuggling of migrants across African borders</b>		
<b>Land routes from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa</b>	Approx. 480,000	1-1.5 billion
<b>Different routes to South Africa</b>	Approx. 25,000	Approx. 45.5 million
<b>Sea routes from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian peninsula</b>	Approx. 117,000	9-22 million
<b>Smuggling of migrants to North America</b>		
<b>Land route to North America</b>	735,000-820,000	3.7-4.2 billion
<b>Smuggling of migrants within and out of Asia</b>		
<b>From neighbouring countries to Thailand</b>	550,000 (in 2010)	192 million (in 2010)
<b>Land route from South-West Asia to Turkey</b>	Approx. 162,000	Approx. 300 million
<p>The number of migrants smuggled and the revenues for the smugglers were calculated when enough information was available to generate such estimates on solid ground. For example, the scale of smuggling of migrants into and within South America and in vast parts of Asia, remain unknown. Similarly, there are no estimates on the smuggling of migrants by air in different parts of the world.</p>		

## Estimated magnitude and value of the major smuggling routes discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

to 7 billion. For many of the routes, it was not possible to collect sufficient evidence to estimate the number of smuggled migrants or the smuggling income, so these global figures represent minimum values for the magnitude and criminal profits from migrant smuggling.

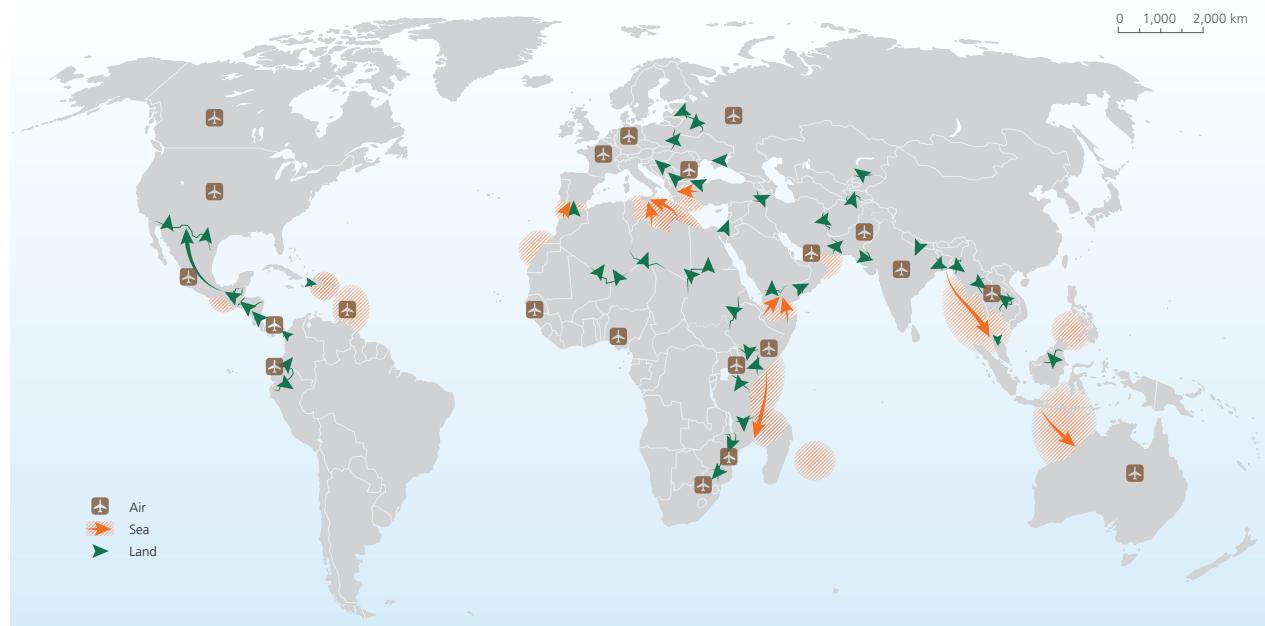
An analysis of the trends for the different smuggling routes shows the volatility of the smuggling routes and the stability of the smuggling hubs. If the demand for facilitating illegal entries and the supply of smuggling services remain the same, the sealing of certain routes does not necessarily change the overall level of migrant smuggling, but may trigger increasing flows along other routes. However, the places where the smuggling activity is organized generally remain stable over time. This is probably linked to the fact that smuggling activities are often rooted in local communities whose livelihoods depend on the income from migrant smuggling and/or are managed by groups which are highly organized and can easily change strategies.

Smuggling of migrants may be a rather simple activity, such as organizing the crossing of a lightly controlled border or paying off a border guard. Smuggling may also involve complex schemes, such as organizing fake marriages or fictitious employment, counterfeiting travel documents or corrupting senior officials.

### Main emerging characteristics for smuggling routes

- There are many smuggling routes and methods to reach destinations and myriad alternative border crossing points. Different land and sea passages can be used along the same route.
- Smuggling typically takes place in uncontrolled areas with dangerous circumstances which put migrants at risk. But smuggling also occurs through official border crossings by land or air, using fraudulent documents and corrupt practices.
- Points of departure for smuggling by sea generally require territorial control by smugglers.
- Smugglers adopt different strategies according to the protection policy applied in destination countries and the citizenship of the smuggled migrants in order to maximize the chances for migrants to remain in destination countries. Points of arrival are often selected according to whether migrants seek detection or not.
- In contrast to routes, smuggling hubs tend to be stable over time.

## Major land, sea and air smuggling transits and destinations discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

There is no ‘typical’ smuggler or smuggling operation. Migrant smugglers may organize and oversee a long, complicated travel itinerary, a single border crossing close to their place of residence, or anything in between. Moreover, smugglers may be active at the beginning, in the midst of or towards the end of a smuggling trajectory. Sometimes, smugglers offer a range of services, with some clients opting for comprehensive services and others for a limited piece of facilitated movement.

The same is true for migrants. In some cases, migrants travel largely independently, purchasing smuggling services for only certain legs of the route or for some border crossings. Migrants may also stop along the route; sometimes to work in order to make money for the rest of their travels. Others buy the entire journey prior to departure and leave most of the route decisions to the smugglers.

### **1.1 By land, sea or air – many border crossings, myriad alternatives for smugglers**

Migrant smuggling can be carried out in many ways. Different routes require certain smuggling methods and types of transportation to cross a variety of terrains and borders. Smuggling of migrants may entail arranging for the crossing of deserts, mountains, jungles, open sea, rivers and

lakes. Smuggling can also happen through official land or air border crossing points, making use of fraudulent documentation. In some cases, particularly when the departure point and intended destination are geographically distant, smugglers may facilitate the crossing of international borders at airports using commercial flights. Most of the smuggling routes described in this study involve the crossing of several international borders, and criminals use different methods or a combination of methods to smuggle a person into the desired destination country.

Decisions regarding which border to cross, at what specific location and the method to use depend on a range of factors, including the smugglers’ organizational capacity, the migrants’ economic means and available time, border controls, immigration enforcement and threats connected to the natural environment, to mention some. Within the relevant constraints, the final decision regarding where and how to cross the border is also heavily influenced by the perceived probability of smuggling success.

Migrants originating from the Horn of Africa, for example, may be smuggled to Southern Africa by a long overland journey that might be shortened by making use of sea passages along the African coasts or across the African Great Lakes.<sup>1</sup> Some may be smuggled into South Africa by flying directly from their country of origin to an airport

## Major overland smuggling routes and crossings discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

at destination, or by landing in neighbouring countries and travelling overland from there.<sup>2</sup> Asian migrants may be smuggled into Australia by sea.<sup>3</sup> Many Asians also travel overland for parts of this extensive journey. West Africans may be smuggled to North Africa and then cross the land borders into the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla to reach the European Union. Alternatively, they may be smuggled by air, with counterfeited documents, to major international airports in Europe, or they may be smuggled by sea across the Mediterranean to Italy.<sup>4</sup> Most smuggling routes involve choices and decisions regarding specific travel itineraries and means of transport.

### Smuggling at land borders

Border crossings through land borders (also known as ‘green borders’) may not require sophisticated smuggling activities. Some land borders would seemingly not even require the facilitation by a smuggler, where, for instance, border controls are not heavily enforced. This appears to be the case for some borders between the countries in the Mekong subregion or some parts of Central Asia. Even when tight controls are in place, some land passages may not require smugglers. For example, some people manage to irregularly enter the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla by simply assaulting the border fence in large numbers.

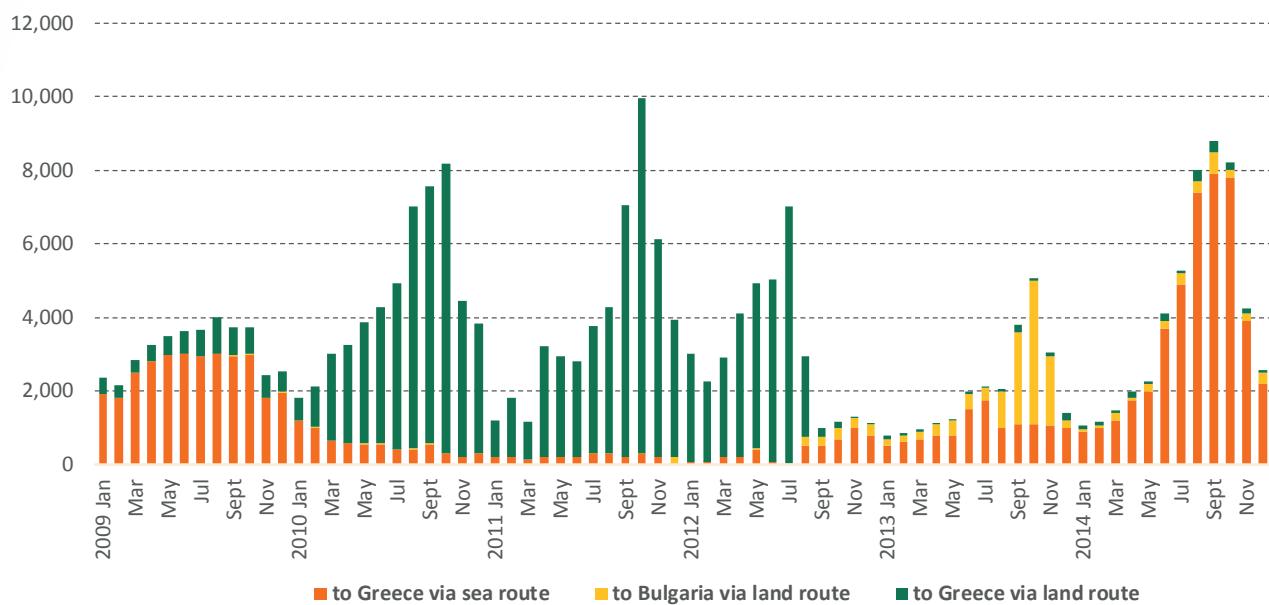
Nevertheless, these are exceptions rather than rules. Crossings of green borders often do require smugglers’ facilitation. Entering into Ceuta and Melilla is also possible by paying a smuggler to provide a counterfeit document or a safe passage hiding in trucks transiting in these cities.<sup>5</sup> The vast majority of the migrants that cross the United States-Mexico land border irregularly do so by using a professional smuggler.<sup>6</sup> Smugglers are active along many African land borders, at the eastern European Union land borders and at some overland border crossings in Central Asia.<sup>7</sup>

Smugglers are needed not only to evade border controls, but often also to increase the probability of safe passage along hazardous overland trails. Particularly dangerous trajectories assessed in this study include the jungles of South-East Asia, deserts in Africa and the Americas, as well as areas with significant risk of encounters with armed and criminal groups in many parts of the world.

### Choosing smuggling routes: between land and sea

On some routes, smugglers or migrants can choose land or sea crossings according to a range of factors that influence the chances of taking migrants safely to their destination.

**FIG. 3:** Number of irregular border crossings from Turkey to the EU by route, 2009-2014



Source: Frontex.

An illustrative example of route displacement due to enhanced enforcement is the crossing of the border between Turkey and Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Smuggling by land from Turkey to Greece was widespread between 2010 and 2012. At the end of 2012, a fence was built along the land border between these two countries. Border controls were also intensified. As a result, since the end of 2012, smuggling routes largely shifted back to the Aegean Sea and to a minor extent to the Turkish-Bulgarian land border.

Similarly, the route leading migrants from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa largely involves land passages through Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Mozambique. However, in some cases smugglers prefer to avoid the risks connected to such land passages by taking boats leaving from Somalia or the southern coastal towns of Kenya arriving at the southern coasts of Tanzania or even further south, in Mozambique.<sup>8</sup> Another recent example of the use of (in this case, more complex) sea routes as an alternative to a land route is for migrants from the Horn of Africa to cross the Arabian sea to Yemen, and crossing back on to African shores in Sudan, instead of using the more direct land route to Sudan.<sup>9</sup>

Sea or land crossings may appear to be interchangeable. However, smuggling by sea requires better planning and organization. Smugglers need to be able to obtain and manage vessels, their departure, journey and sometimes their return. In addition, people involved in the organization of smuggling by sea may also require access

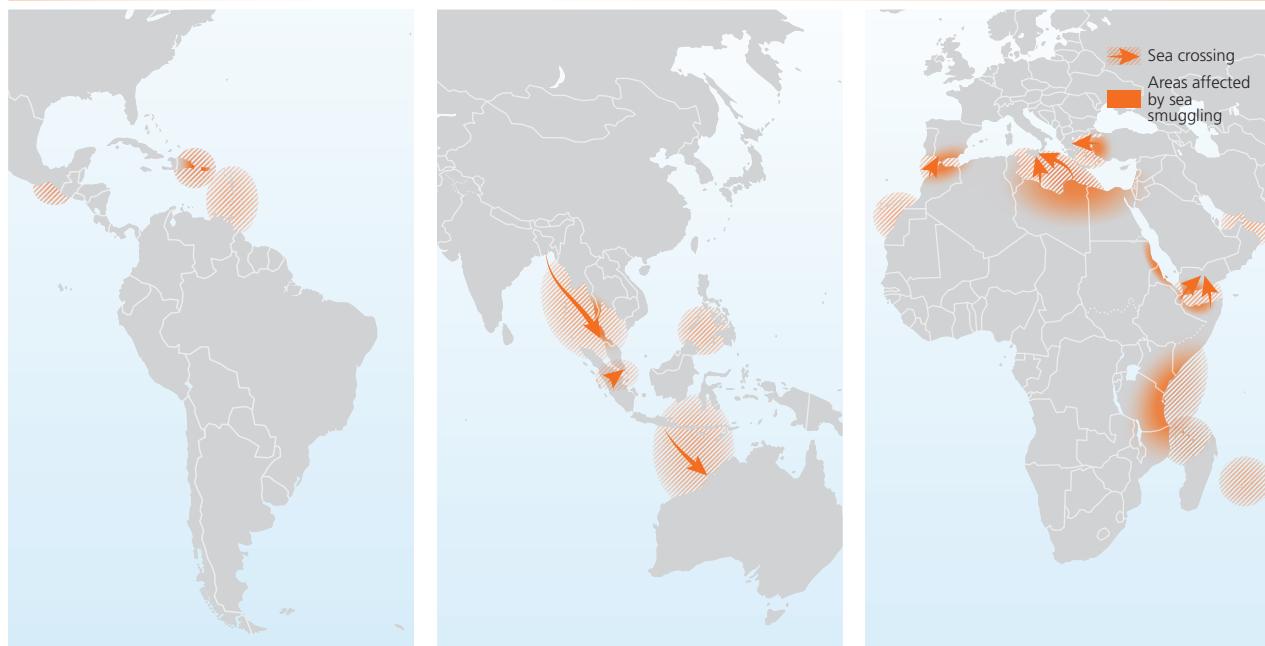
to locations to shelter large number of migrants for weeks before departure. Sometimes smugglers are also selective regarding the profiles of migrants to travel on board different vessels. Smuggling by sea requires specific logistics, access to tools and infrastructure, and the ability to move freely around territories to ensure that boarding and departure are relatively safe.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, the most relevant smuggling passages involving sea crossings are those across the Mediterranean Sea to southern Europe, from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian peninsula and across the Andaman Sea to South-East Asia. Less relevant than in the recent past are sea smuggling routes to Australia from South-East Asia.

### Smuggling by air and combinations of different methods

In contrast to crossings overland and by sea, migrant smuggling by air is more expensive but in general safer for migrants. Smugglers may arrange for migrants to board commercial flights connecting international airports. Migrants passing through airports will necessarily face document controls. As a consequence, smuggling by air normally requires a smuggling organization capable of providing migrants with travel documents (false, counterfeit, lookalike, modified or fraudulently obtained) to pass through border control and/or to bribe officials to let them in.<sup>11</sup> Other forms of smuggling by air may involve ad hoc arrangements to grant legal access to the country on fraudulent grounds, such as fictional international

## Major areas affected by sea smuggling discussed in this study



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Source: UNODC

conferences or fake marriages. It is difficult to estimate the size of this type of migrant smuggling as it is unknown how many succeed in entering each country.

Many smuggling routes involve more than one method of transportation. Often a migrant is smuggled through a combination of land, sea or air smuggling. Moreover, some of the travel might also be undertaken regularly. The routes that lead West Africans to Europe, for example, normally involve regular international bus travel from the migrants' country of origin towards a transit country in the Sahel, followed by smuggling by land into North Africa, and from there, smuggling to Europe by sea. The routes from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East require smuggling by land to Djibouti or Somalia, by sea to Yemen and again by land to other countries of the Arabian peninsula. Similarly, many Afghans traverse large parts of South-West Asia overland, often with facilitation by smugglers, are then smuggled across the sea to Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean route, and then continue overland along the Western Balkans route (often with smugglers). Routes connecting geographically distant areas, such as Asia and Europe, or much of the transcontinental smuggling into the Americas, often involve at least one passage by air. The routes may then continue by land and/or sea to reach the migrant's final destination. Different transfer

combinations could be individual parts of a pre-planned smuggling itinerary, or a sequel of smuggling passages organized separately in different moments of a long journey.

### Organization and duration

The duration of the smuggling process may vary greatly, depending on, *inter alia*, the route used and its organization. If an entire route is designed and offered by smugglers as a package, the duration of the travel may be relatively short, usually lasting a few weeks, or perhaps months. The smugglers provide migrants with lists of contacts for each step of the travel. Once they have successfully managed to cross one border, the smuggled migrants may be instructed to move to a specific location and to contact a particular person who will facilitate the crossing of the next border. This continues until the final destination is reached.<sup>12</sup> Smuggling organizations operating in this way are able to move people relatively fast. For example, surveys have shown that smugglers can move migrants from South Asia through West Asia and into Greece along the Eastern Mediterranean route in approximately 15-20 days.<sup>13</sup>

In other cases, the whole journey is a combination of different, shorter legs organized individually. Migrants decide

each specific section according to their available financial resources, the urgency of their journey and information regarding risks, enforcement measures and likelihood of a successful journey. In these cases, migrants usually contact different smugglers at each crossing point. The whole journey - from initial departure to final destination - may even take years.<sup>14</sup>

Smugglers may organize the stand by in a point of transit or departure, waiting for the right moment to cross the border. Similarly, in many cases, smugglers also organize the arrival in safe areas in destination countries.<sup>15</sup> One of the factors which may cause delays is lengthy waiting periods during the travel.

Another factor that may delay the smuggling process is when it is necessary to use slow modes of travelling. Some land borders may require one or more days of walking through hazardous areas. For instance, crossing from Eritrea or Ethiopia requires 2-6 days of walking to Sudan and 20 days to Egypt, or less if smugglers organize transportation by pick-up trucks.<sup>16</sup> From Sudan to Libya, the passage is normally organized by car and it takes a few days.<sup>17</sup> Somali migrants smuggled to Yemen need to walk up to 17 days to be smuggled into Saudi Arabia.<sup>18</sup>

The durations of sea crossings are more predictable, and largely connected to the distance between the departure and arrival points. Such voyages may take a few hours, such as the passage from the Turkish coast to the Greek islands,<sup>19</sup> a few days, such as the journey from Libya to Italy or Malta,<sup>20</sup> or even a few months, as in the August 2010 case when nearly 500 Sri Lankans arrived in Canada after three months at sea.<sup>21</sup> However, such big events are sporadic.

## **1.2 Locations of departures and arrivals: Under the control of smugglers**

### **Characteristics of departure points**

When analysing the features which can have an impact on the establishment of a significant smuggling route from a departure location, usually there is first a pressure towards the border. This is caused by an increased number of migrants hoping to cross the border but who do not have legal, affordable ways to do so. The smugglers capitalize on this demand to generate profits by facilitating irregular border crossings by migrants; that is, smuggling them. Several factors affect the selection of departure points, including geographical location, environmental characteristics, seasonal difference, safety and security considerations, sternness or leniency of border control, knowl-

edge of routes and territorial control, which may be combined with other factors.

At the border crossing, smugglers tend to choose the place of departure on the basis of its proximity to the desired destination, as this minimises travel distance and thus risks and costs. The shortest passage may not always be the preferred route to cross the borders, however. Geographical and natural obstacles may determine the selection of more distant, but safer locations. The extent of national authorities' control at origin and/or destination would normally also have an impact on the choice of departure point.

One example that illustrates how geographical distance can be trumped by other considerations relates to smuggling by sea from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula. This smuggling route typically departs from the province of Obock in Djibouti or Bossaso in Somalia. While the first passage can be undertaken in less than 6 hours, the second requires more than 24 hours of sea travel. The number of migrants using one or the other passage has fluctuated, according to seasons, border controls, protection risks for migrants and other factors.<sup>22</sup> Similar examples can be drawn from many of the border crossing assessed in this study, from African smugglers instructing migrants to use longer routes,<sup>23</sup> to the smuggling activity along the border between Mexico and the United States of America.<sup>24</sup>

Border controls play a major role in the choice of border crossing. Not surprisingly, smugglers tend to prefer crossings where controls are limited, which minimises their risk of apprehension. When possible, smugglers select departure points in territories that are very well known to them, and where they often enjoy the complicity of local communities. This makes it easier for smuggling networks to carry out their crimes.

Some clear examples can be found in the Sahel and the Sahara where many border crossings are facilitated by smugglers belonging to ethnic groups – including the Tuareg, the Toubou, the Rashaïda and others – that have historically been in control of the nomad routes along these territories.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Kurdish smuggling networks are spread across several countries along the West Asian land route, with some members roving between different transit and destination points.<sup>26</sup>

Territorial control is also useful for smugglers in other ways. Along many smuggling routes, there are establishments (often called safe houses, smuggler houses or similar) used by smugglers to hide their activities, gather the required number of migrants before departure, store

equipment, brief migrants about the passage, and to house migrants while waiting for the right moment to embark on the journey. These houses are normally located very close to the border. Especially for sea crossings, these facilities can be capable of hosting large numbers of migrants for extended periods of time. Their establishment and operation are only possible in areas where smugglers have the complicity of local communities and, often, of the authorities.

Territorial control, at least in departure zones, is required to carry out smuggling by sea. Departure points for sea crossings have to be accessible to smugglers for storage, boarding and for the actual departure of boats. In many cases, smugglers managing departure points are part of local communities historically tied to the sea, like fishermen and sailors, who have knowledge of equipment, seasons and times, as well as places to cross the sea.<sup>27</sup>

Vessels used for sea crossings normally depart from coastal villages close to major cities where smugglers sell their services to migrants through smuggling hubs. The coastal villages are where vessels are stored, boarded and depart to sea.<sup>28</sup>

### Characteristics of arrival points

The considerations that drive the selection of the arrival points partially overlap with the criteria for departure points, including geography and natural characteristics, safety and security aspects, and the nature of border controls. In addition, availability of smugglers' networks at destination as well as several policy issues such as asylum procedures and deportation practices have an impact on the selection of arrival points.

As a result, arrival points tend to change according to the routes, the smugglers and the service agreed with the migrants. In some cases, migrants buy smuggling "packages" that include inland routes or passages to the next leg of the journey. In these cases, smugglers need to have contacts or infrastructure in place on the other side of the border. Migrants who are smuggled from Somalia into Kenya, for example, cross the borders in certain locations where they can look for drivers to transport them to Nairobi where the next leg of the journey is organized by other smugglers.<sup>29</sup> Similar methods are found along other African routes, where smugglers guide migrants to locations where, once the border has been crossed, the migrants head to the closest smuggling hub where the next leg of their journey is organized.

Where to cross and arrive is strictly related to the modus operandi of the smugglers. Smugglers may choose points

of arrival according to the citizenship of migrants because this influences the action that migrants are likely to take once at destination. Smuggled migrants with particular citizenships may want to identify themselves to the authorities at destination and apply for asylum. In this case, smugglers select crossing points where the competent authorities are more likely to grant asylum for persons with these citizenships. The smugglers normally instruct migrants about asylum application procedures.<sup>30</sup> For smuggled migrants with other citizenships for which asylum may not be an option and repatriation agreements do not exist, smugglers may select points of destination where migrant reception centres are overcrowded, so that they can be quickly released with an expulsion order.<sup>31</sup> In the absence of a repatriation agreement with the country of origin, migrants are left with an order to leave the country, but are not repatriated.

Other migrants may have citizenships which smugglers know are returned immediately to the country of origin or transit once detected. For these migrants, smugglers may select arrival points to reduce the probability of detection. Smugglers may also 'sell' additional travel to specific cities or regions within the destination country. Smugglers may also guide migrants to particular locations.<sup>32</sup>

Migrants' citizenships can also determine the type of journey. For migrants who are not seeking asylum, smugglers arrange travel routes and landing spots with little surveillance. For migrants who are planning to hide at destination, smugglers attempt shorter journeys and fast boats, leveraging on the rapidity of the passage to avoid detection. In these latter cases, smugglers may release migrants in the water just off the coasts and return to the point of departure.<sup>33</sup>

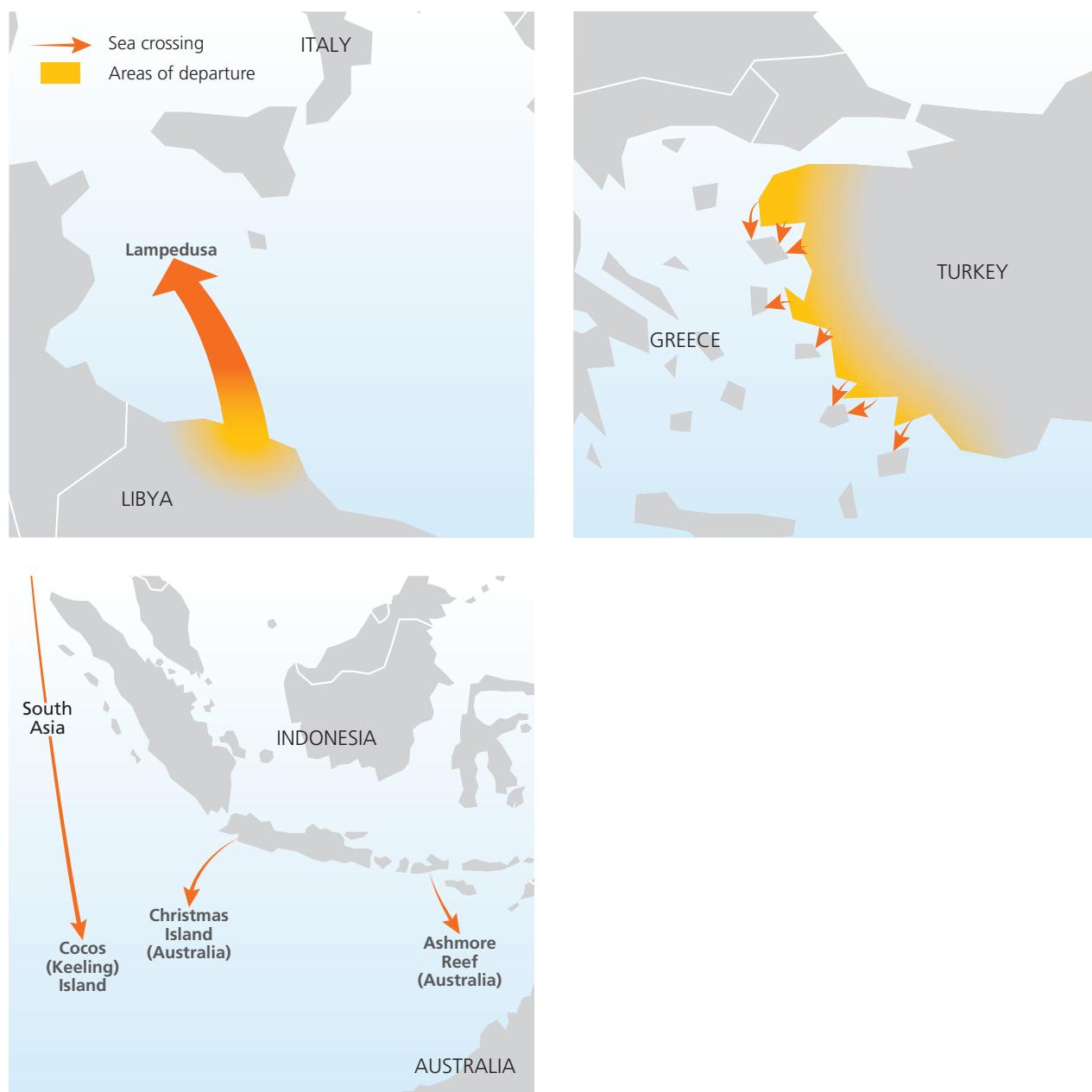
In some cases, smuggled migrants seek detection in order to apply for asylum or to be released with an expulsion.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, smugglers may opt to have the vessels intercepted at high seas by competent coast guards, leveraging international law to rescue people at sea in situations of distress.<sup>35</sup>

A pattern that emerges from the analysis of sea smuggling routes is that smugglers sometimes choose to target islands that may be distant from the mainland, but still under the authority of the destination country. Smugglers operating along the Central Mediterranean route, for example, have targeted the Italian island of Lampedusa as a point of arrival, located less than 300 kilometres north of Libya, and more than 200 kilometres south of the Italian mainland. Similarly, Lesbos, Kos, Chios and Samos, along with other Greek islands, are only a few hours away from the

Turkish coast. These islands have been selected as the key arrival points along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Other such destinations include the Spanish Canary islands, close to the western coast of Africa and far from the Spanish mainland, the Australian territories of Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef, only 350 and 150 kilometres from Indonesia, respectively, as well as the French territory of Mayotte, an archipelago in the Indian ocean, situated between Mozambique and Madagascar.

These arrival points have in common that they offer physical entry into the closest territory (relative to the location of the smuggled migrants) of a destination country. The majority of migrants that arrive in these small islands do not intend to remain there, but want to continue to the mainland. The choice of these arrival points is usually motivated by the opportunity to apply for asylum. Once the claim has been filed, the authorities typically relocate the migrants to the mainland while proceeding with the

### Selected current and past offshore destinations used for smuggling by sea



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

refugee status determination. The targeting of these small islands has largely stopped in view of various policy measures in destination countries, such as containment in origin or transit countries or immediate migrant relocation in mainland or in third countries.

### Characteristics of airports used for smuggling by air

Different patterns emerge with regard to smuggling by air. The selection of departure and arrival airports depends on the specific smuggling method employed by the criminals. One method aims at connecting major international airports at origin and destination. The second makes use of ad hoc ‘airports of convenience’ as transit before continuing the travel by land, sea or other air connections.

In the first case, smugglers usually rely on forged or fraudulently obtained travel documents and/or corrupt officials at origin and/or destination. Depending on the nationality of migrants, the targeted airports are often those with direct connections to the desired destinations.<sup>36</sup> Some South and South-West Asians, for example, have used major international airports in South Asia to fly directly to desired destinations using fraudulent documents.<sup>37</sup>

However, the second method, making use of transit airports to reach final destinations, appears to be more widespread. Such journeys start with a flight from a major airport in the migrant’s own country to a transit country. From there, local smugglers may arrange the next passage via land, sea or again by air to the final destination. These operations may be complex, and could involve, for example, Asians flying to major Eastern European airports, and then transiting overland to the European Union.<sup>38</sup>

In the European Union, the use of transit airports to smuggle migrants by air is more common than the use of direct flights. Among all entry document fraud cases detected in European airports involving citizens of African countries during the first half of 2016, almost 70 per cent related to flights coming from transit airports.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, most Asians detected with counterfeit passports at EU airports had departed from international airports in Africa or the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> Such transits are preferred to direct flights because smugglers hope for more lenient controls of passengers arriving from these third countries.

In the Western Hemisphere, migrants from the Caribbean may fly to countries with fewer access restrictions, from where they contact smugglers to cross the land borders to other South American countries.<sup>41</sup> There is evidence that smugglers use some African airports as transits for Asian migrants en route to countries in South America, Central

America or the Caribbean. From there, they may be smuggled northwards and eventually cross into the United States of America at that country’s southern land border.<sup>42</sup> During fiscal year 2016,<sup>43</sup> the United States recorded 55,000 irregular entries by citizens of countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East at its southern border, indicating that making use of a combination of air and land routes to reach North America is an established tactic of smuggling.

### 1.3 The role of hubs

In market terms, a ‘smuggling hub’ could be defined as the location where smuggling demand and supply meet. The importance of a smuggling hub is largely determined by the number of smuggling routes and destinations on offer and the number of migrants who make use of it. Hubs are the geographical areas where smugglers in roles such as brokers, coordinators or chiefs often meet potential clients and instruct affiliates along the routes about how to implement the smuggling journey.<sup>44</sup>

One key characteristic of smuggling hubs is their stability. As discussed in the previous section, smuggling hubs tend to remain stable over time while routes, departure and arrival points tend to change. This may be due to a number of factors, including, for example, the importance of smuggling of migrants for the livelihood of the communities living around the hubs.

In the hubs, smugglers are not the only ones providing services for – and making money off – migrants. For example, enterprising locals may sell telephone or communication services, and residents may rent out rooms, apartments or houses. In well-organized hubs, there may be several hundred people involved in a smuggling network, including boat owners, boat makers, boat crews, owners of restaurants and cafés, accommodation managers, telephone centres, truck drivers, landlords, police officers and local government officials.<sup>45</sup> Some cities at the border between Ethiopia and Kenya serve as hubs for the route leading to Southern Africa from the Horn of Africa. Here, some studies have estimated that some 60 per cent of the major hub cities’ income stems from migrant smuggling and related services.<sup>46</sup>

Along routes from West Africa to North Africa and Europe, major smuggling activities are concentrated around the city of Agadez.<sup>47</sup> Different smuggler profiles are found there, including organizers, drivers, recruiters, those handling bribes and those providing lodging to migrants. The community’s livelihood is closely linked to the migrant smuggling business, also in Agadez, with

thousands of migrants and trucks passing through each week.<sup>48</sup>

The existence of a community livelihood based on migrant smuggling may explain why, while departure and arrival points as well as border crossings may change very quickly, the role of hubs tends to be more constant over time. The role of Agadez in the smuggling of migrants has been known for decades. Already in 2003, some 65,000 migrants were reported to have left Agadez for North Africa; mainly Libya, and to a minor extent Algeria.<sup>49</sup>

Many smuggling hubs were identified along each of the routes considered in this study. As a general pattern, some hubs are only relevant for the initial phase of the journey or relate to the crossing of a specific border only. Other hubs have international significance, offering multi-country journeys. These large smuggling hubs are typically located in major cities with a presence of foreign communities.

Capitals or major cities along smuggling routes are often significant smuggling hubs. This is the case for the smuggling routes from South Asia to West Asia, and then onwards to Europe, from Central America to North America, and along many African routes.

In Europe, many of the smuggling hubs for ‘secondary movements’ within the European Union are major cities or capitals. However, some smaller cities also serve as smuggling hubs, usually due to their location close to a widely used border crossing point.<sup>50</sup>

In Africa, capital cities, such as Addis Ababa and Khartoum, play a role in the smuggling route from the Horn of Africa to North Africa and Europe. Smugglers can be easily found in certain well-known neighbourhoods, such as the Somali neighbourhood of Bole Mikhel in Addis Ababa or Souq Libya and Al Haj Yousif neighbourhoods in Khartoum.<sup>51</sup> Along this route, smaller hubs are also relevant in guiding migrants towards the major international hubs. There are, for example, reports of smugglers settling at refugee camps in Sudan in order to have easy access to potential clients, since many of those who are smuggled from the Horn of Africa to Sudan first travel to a refugee camp in order to find a smuggler to arrange their passage to Khartoum.<sup>52</sup> Other refugee camps are used by smugglers to locate their smuggling activity, including Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya.<sup>53</sup>

## 2. THE SMUGGLED MIGRANTS

### Main emerging characteristics for smuggled migrants

- While many migrants are smuggled to destinations relatively close to their origin countries, some are smuggled across regions and continents. Migrants who are smuggled through long-distance routes typically originate from the Horn of Africa and West Africa, the Syrian Arab Republic and Afghanistan, and South and East Asia.
- Most smuggled migrants are adult males. Larger shares of females and minors are recorded for some citizenships.
- Socio-economic conditions, insecurity and environmental disasters often drive large migration movements. The demand for migrant smuggling largely stems from limited opportunities for legal migration and proactive recruitment and misinformation by smugglers.
- Smuggling of migrants is a deadly crime. Every year, thousands of migrants are killed as a result of smuggling activities.
- Mass killings, systematic torture, sexual violence, exploitation and kidnapping of smuggled migrants for extortion are recorded along many of the smuggling routes.
- Violations of migrants’ rights to protection, enshrined in the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, have been recorded in some countries.

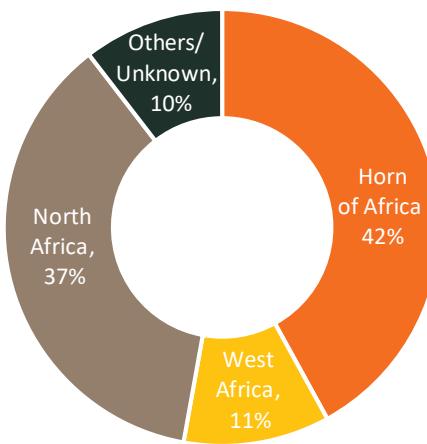
### 2.1 The profile of migrants: pushed and pulled

Virtually all countries have been sources of migratory flows at certain points in time. Today, however, there are some countries or regions which experience large outflows of migrants who typically rely on the services of smugglers to reach their destination. While there are some commonalities, each smuggling flow has distinct drivers, different migrant profiles and affect specific routes and types of journeys.

#### Citizenship and ethnic background

The citizenship profiles of smuggled migrants can be analysed from different perspectives. From the origin point of view, one may ask which citizens are leaving their countries in big numbers, whereas receiving countries might

**FIG. 4:** Newly registered asylum seekers in Israel, by region of origin, 2013



Source: UNHCR.

look at the most common citizenships among the smuggled migrants that arrive. While migrant smuggling affects most countries, some are more strongly affected than others.

Some of the main origin areas for smuggled migrants are the Horn of Africa, West Africa, Central America, some parts of the Middle East and different areas in South and East Asia. Migrants from these areas are smuggled along multiple routes to reach different destinations. These migrants share either the quest for better economic conditions, or are fleeing persecution and war, or both.

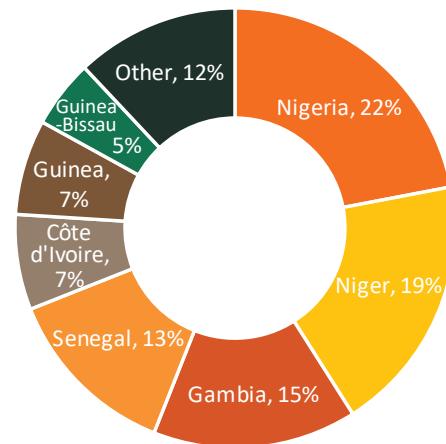
### Horn of Africa and West Africa as origins

Smuggled migrants from the Horn of Africa comprise large shares of the migrants smuggled along four major routes to the Middle East, Southern Africa, North Africa and Europe.

Nearly all the arrivals by sea in Yemen in 2016 were from the Horn of Africa, and these smuggled migrants also account for a large part of those recorded in North Africa and the Middle East. Migrants and refugees smuggled to Italy from the Horn of Africa comprised about 15 per cent of the total between 2016 and mid-2017. About 20 per cent of the new asylum seekers in 2015 in South Africa were from this area of Africa.

Smuggled migrants from the Horn of Africa as a subregion dominate some smuggling routes. Their specific destinations, however, tend to differ according to their country of origin. Most of the migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa who are smuggled into Europe are reported by authorities at destination to come from Eritrea, and to a lesser extent from Somalia, while Somalis account for

**FIG. 5:** Main nationalities recorded in outgoing flows from Niger into North Africa, February-September 2016



Source: IOM.

the majority of migrants smuggled to Yemen. Ethiopians are also frequently smuggled to Yemen. The smuggling flow connecting the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa includes mainly Ethiopians, and to a lesser extent Somalis.<sup>54</sup>

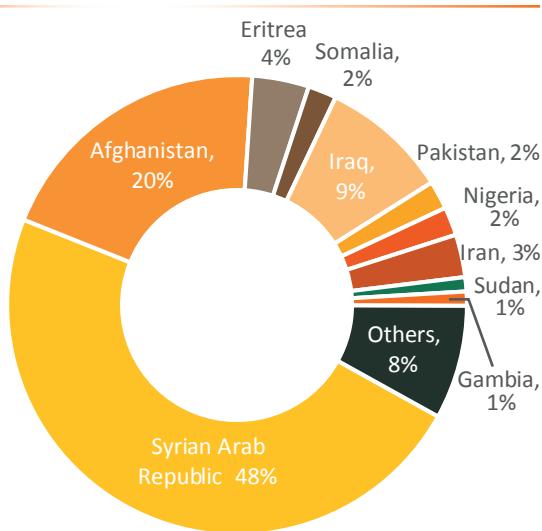
Migrants and refugees are smuggled from many different West African countries to Europe, as well as to North and Southern Africa. Niger is a key transit country for the smuggling route from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe. In 2016, there was no dominant citizenship among smuggled migrants who transited Niger according to IOM monitoring (see Figure). While Nigerians comprised the largest share, there were also many Nigeriens, Gambians, Senegalese and others.

### Asia as origin

The impact of conflict-driven displacement on the smuggling of migrants of some citizenships can be clearly seen with regard to Syrians. In 2015, Syrians represented about half of all irregular arrivals into the European Union, most of them along the Eastern Mediterranean route. Although the numbers declined drastically in 2016 and 2017, nearly half of the migrants smuggled into Greece in these years were still Syrian refugees. Syrian citizens also represent a large majority of asylum seekers recorded in North Africa, and they undertake most of the detected irregular entries into Turkey.

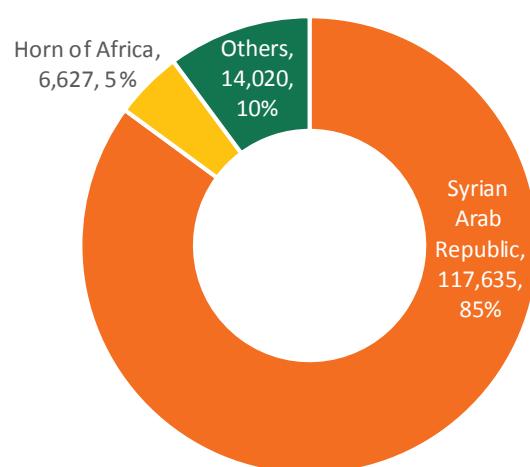
Citizens of many Asian countries are smuggled to a wide range of destinations. One significant origin country is Afghanistan. Afghan citizens are smuggled along different routes in Asia, either to South and West Asia, to South-East Asia and Australia, as well as to Western and Eastern

**FIG. 6:** Shares of citizenships among people who arrived in the EU along the three Mediterranean migrant smuggling routes, by country of citizenship, 2015



Source: UNODC elaboration of UNHCR and IOM data.

**FIG. 7:** Newly registered asylum seekers in Egypt, by origin country, 2015



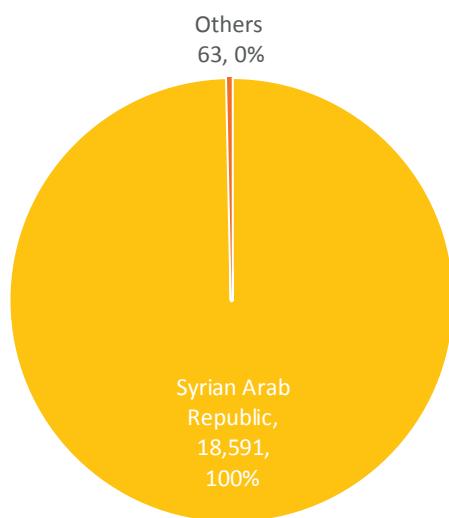
Source: UNHCR.

Europe. In 2015, Afghans accounted for about 20 per cent of the migrants smuggled by sea along the three Mediterranean routes into the European Union (see Figure).

A large share of Afghans heading to Europe are ethnic Hazaras, from both rural and urban areas. Many of the Afghan Hazaras were born in the Islamic Republic of Iran or arrived there very young.<sup>55</sup> There are also relatively high numbers of rural Pashtuns from the southwest and west of the country.<sup>56</sup>

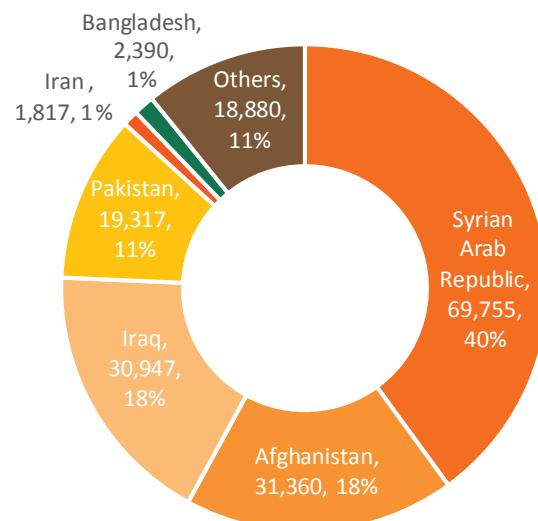
Migrants from other South and South-West Asian countries are also smuggled along the same land routes used

**FIG. 8:** Newly registered asylum seekers in Libya, by origin country, 2015



Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 9:** Irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey, by citizenship, 2016



Source: Ministry of Interior of Turkey.

by Afghan migrants and refugees into West Asia, and along the Eastern Mediterranean route into Europe. In 2016 and 2017, about 10 per cent of the recorded migrants who were smuggled along the Central Mediterranean route were citizens of countries in South Asia. Similarly, about 12 per cent of the intercepted irregular migrants in Turkey originate from this part of the world.

South Asians are also smuggled by air across different continents, from Europe, to Southern Africa, Australia and North America. Some 700 South Asian citizens were refused entry at British airports in 2016, and several hundreds more at other major European Union airports,<sup>57</sup>

though it is not clear how many of them were smuggled. South Asians are also smuggled by air to North America, directly or by combining air and land passages via Central America.<sup>58</sup> About one fourth of the smuggled migrants who reached Australia by sea prior to 2014 came from South Asia. This smuggling flow appears to have drastically decreased during the last few years, however.

Some South and South-West Asians are also smuggled to South Africa. More than 10,000 South Asian asylum seekers were recorded in South Africa in 2015; although it is not clear how many were smuggled. South Asians are typically smuggled overland through the United Republic of Tanzania and Mozambique.<sup>59</sup> South Asian smuggled migrants are often sponsored by fellow citizens already resident in South Africa.<sup>60</sup>

South-East Asia sees significant levels of intra-regional migrant smuggling, along several routes with multiple origins and destinations. One such route, or rather cluster of routes, involves smuggling of migrants within the greater Mekong area, from poorer to richer areas on opposite sides of international borders. This smuggling is generally directed to Thailand, from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar. A similar smuggling route is directed to Malaysia; a destination for smuggled migrants seeking work in the manufacturing and domestic service industries. Many come from rural areas across Indonesia.<sup>61</sup>

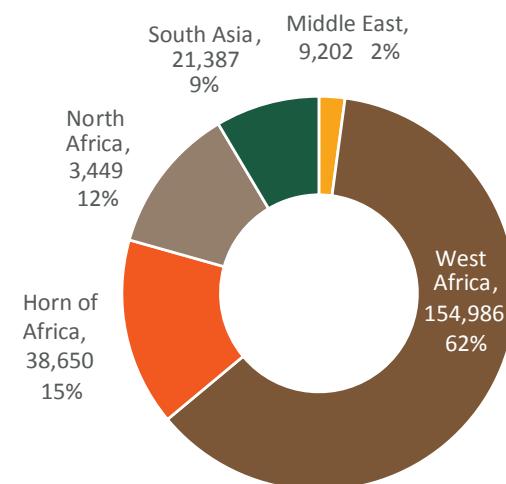
East Asian migrants are also smuggled to Europe, North America and South Africa, often combining air, land and/or sea passages.

### Europe as destination

Shifting the perspective from origin to destination, Europe is a key destination area, attracting smuggled migrants from many countries and areas. The citizenships of migrants smuggled to Europe vary according to the smuggling route and destination country. Those who arrive in Italy by sea, via the Central Mediterranean route, are mainly from Africa (89 per cent); mostly West Africa. An even larger share of maritime arrivals in Spain, via the Western Mediterranean route, are African (94 per cent); again, mainly West Africans but also a sizable share of North Africans.

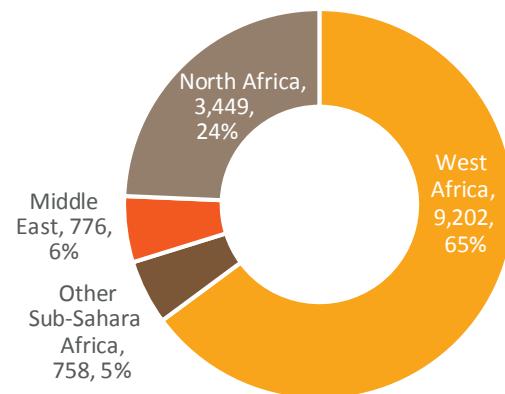
Sea arrivals in Greece, through the Eastern Mediterranean route, have different citizenship profiles, however. Most of these smuggled migrants are from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and other Middle Eastern countries (85 per cent); reflecting the relative geographical proximity of the key origins and destinations.

**FIG. 10: Irregular arrivals by sea to Italy, by area of citizenship, 2016-June 2017**



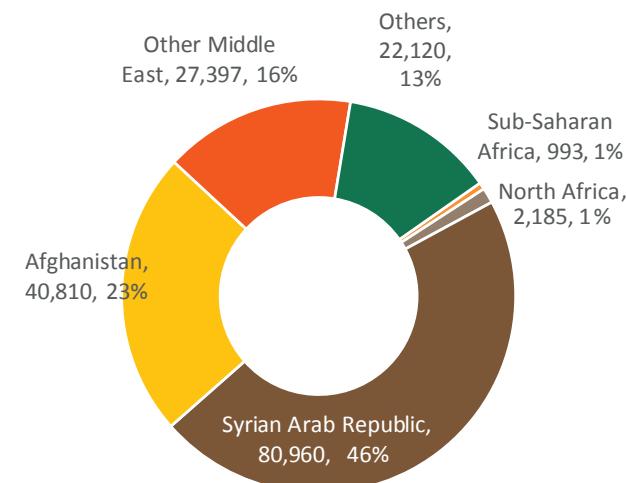
Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 11: Irregular arrivals by sea to Spain, by area of citizenship, 2016-June 2017**



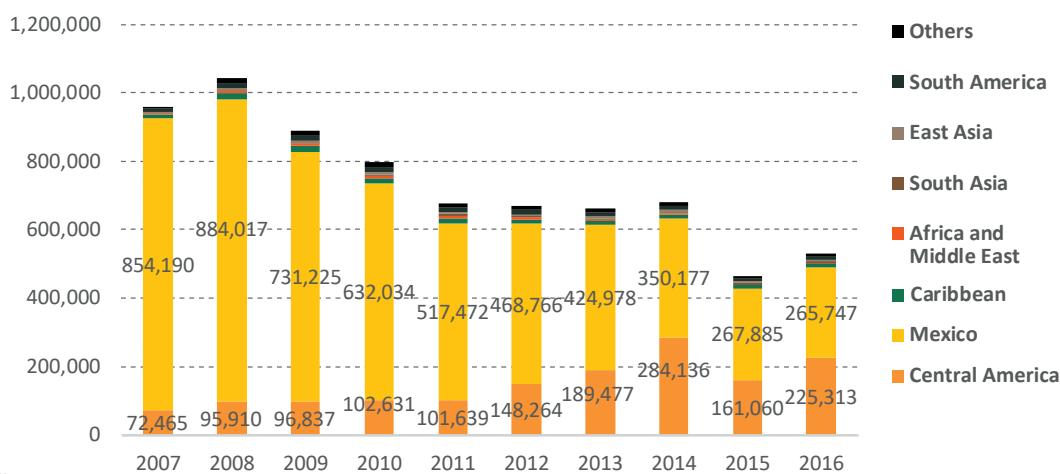
Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 12: Irregular arrivals by sea in Greece, by area of citizenship, 2016-June 2017**



Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 13:** Trend in the number of foreigners apprehended in immigration enforcement actions in the United States, total and by citizenship, 2007-2016\*



\* Fiscal years.

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

### North America as destination

North America – in particular, the United States of America – is another significant destination area for smuggled migrants. Most of the smuggling into the United States takes place across the country's southern border with Mexico and primarily concerns citizens of Mexico and the Central American countries.

In addition to the smuggling by land, migrants are also smuggled into North America via air routes, sometimes in combination with overland legs. These routes can be complex and involve one or more transit countries. It is very difficult to quantify air smuggling flows. However, previous UNODC research has uncovered smuggling routes that were at least partially undertaken by air that brought migrants from a range of South and South-West Asian countries to North America,<sup>62</sup> and it is likely that migrants from many other countries are smuggled along similar trajectories.

### Southern Africa as destination

There is a sizable flow of migrants and refugees who are seeking protection in Southern African countries, most notably South Africa. Most are Africans – nearly 80 per cent – and most use smugglers for at least part of their journey.<sup>63</sup> While citizens of countries in Southern Africa comprised the largest share of new applicants for asylum in South Africa in 2015, there were also large shares of applicants from other African subregions. Moreover, 21 per cent of the new asylum applicants that year were Asians; mainly citizens of Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. There are some indications that South Africa is becoming less attractive as a destination, whereas some other

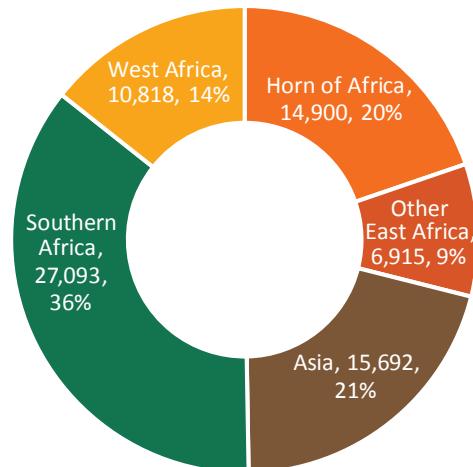
Southern African countries like Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Botswana might be increasingly viewed as alternative destinations.<sup>64</sup>

### Smuggled migrants' sex and age

Smuggled migrants are typically young males travelling alone. Some smuggling flows include larger shares of female migrants, family units or unaccompanied migrants.

Adult men comprise a clear majority of the migrants smuggled along the Northern route from Central America to the United States. Women make up between 20-25 per cent of all detected irregular migrants along this route.<sup>65</sup> Similar values are recorded in other parts of the world as well. For example, males account for 80 per cent and

**FIG. 14:** Newly registered asylum seekers in South Africa by region of origin, 2015



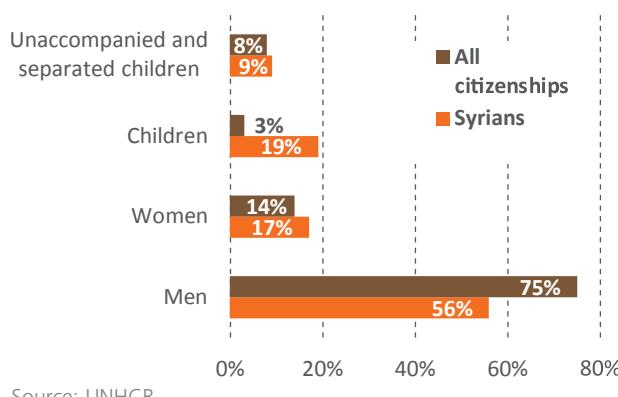
Source: UNHCR.

adults for 83 per cent of migrants smuggled from the Horn of Africa along the route to Yemen.<sup>66</sup>

The age profile of smuggled migrants appears to vary according to the citizenship of origin, although young men are strongly represented in all areas. In Africa, most of the migrants who are smuggled from the Horn of Africa to South Africa, for example, are young men between the ages of 18 and 35.<sup>67</sup> Some older migrants are recorded among Asian migrants smuggled to different parts of the world. East Asian migrants smuggled to Europe and North America are mostly male, typically adults between 20 and 50 years of age.<sup>68</sup> South Asian smuggled migrants are also predominantly men, aged between 18 and 30.<sup>69</sup>

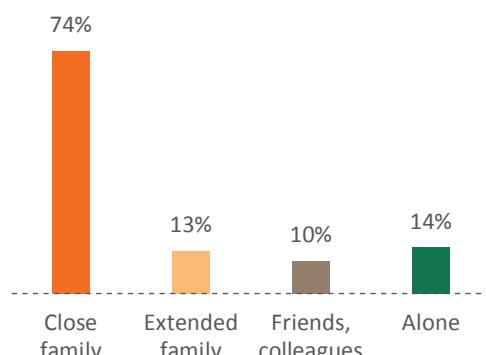
In Asia, Malaysia is a destination for smuggled migrants. Most of them are male, but there are also large shares of women from neighbouring countries.<sup>70</sup>

**FIG. 15: Comparison of the profiles of Syrians and persons with all citizenships travelling along the Central Mediterranean route, 2015**



Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 16: Shares of Syrians who arrived in Greece in January 2016 who reported having travelled with others or alone\***



\* The exact question in the survey was: "Who are you travelling with?". More than one answer possible.

Source: UNHCR.

Moreover, contrary to the main patterns recorded around the world, Syrian citizens are typically smuggled in family units. This reflects the fact that many Syrians are fleeing armed conflict and want to keep the family together as they seek protection.

Afghan migrants and refugees are smuggled both as individuals and in family units. Those smuggled individually are mainly young men who intend to settle in the destination country and then facilitate the migration of other relatives, but recent sources point to an increasing number of Afghan families on the move. Single females travelling alone remain an exception among Afghan smuggled migrants.<sup>71</sup>

A significant and growing number of unaccompanied minors - mostly boys - are also smuggled to Europe.<sup>72</sup> In 2016, nearly 34,000 unaccompanied and separated children arrived in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Spain. Most of them arrived in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route, having travelled from the Horn of Africa or West Africa. Of those who arrived in Greece or Bulgaria, most were from South-West Asia. More than 35 per cent of the total unaccompanied minors who arrived in Italy in 2015 came from the Horn of Africa. Most of these migrants tend to see Italy as a transit country on their way towards other parts of Europe,<sup>73</sup> which suggests that they are likely to become involved in secondary smuggling within the European Union.

Unaccompanied minors in Europe and elsewhere tend to be boys aged between 14 and 18. Sometimes they travel to be joined by family members already in Europe, other times they are sent ahead, as 'pioneers' of the family.<sup>74</sup> The presence of a large number of unaccompanied minors is also recorded along the Northern route from Central America to the United States, although the trend appears to be declining, according to statistics from the United States Customs and Border Protection.

### Motivation to migrate and reasons to use a smuggler

Each smuggled migrant has an individual story that is difficult to fit neatly into categories. Profiling these stories can oversimplify migrants' motivations, but can also help to understand key motivations behind the persistent high demand for smuggling services.

A distinction is often made between those who migrate with the primary motive of improving their economic perspective, so-called 'economic migrants', and those who escape persecution and conflict, refugees. While in some cases it is possible to draw a clear line between these two

profiles, in other cases, the desire to migrate stems from a combination of different political, security and/or socio-economic needs where migration is perceived as a viable path to live in *larger freedom* from fear and poverty.<sup>75</sup>

Both economic migrants and refugees may make use of smuggling services to plan or carry out their journey. The reasons for making use of a smuggler are different from those motivating a person to move from the community of origin. Migrants and refugees typically use a smuggler when facing obstacles to migrate.

The case of Syrian refugees is explicative. Syrians are generally eligible for international protection but do not have legal and safe channels to enter the EU territory. Many of the interviewed Syrians who had been smuggled into the European Union reported that they had applied for a visa at different European embassies in the Middle East before deciding to refer to a smuggler. Nevertheless - as pointed out by one of the respondents - the money they are supposed to have in their bank accounts in order to be issued a Schengen visa is equivalent to the fee they need to pay smugglers to arrange the sea crossing for themselves and their family members.<sup>76</sup>

During the pre-conflict years and the first period of the armed conflict, Syrians faced visa restrictions only to enter the European Union. Typically, they could move to neighbouring countries without visas. For this reason, Syrians used smugglers only at the borders between Turkey and Greece, while land or air journeys to Turkey typically occurred regularly. Recent increased travel restrictions and risks connected to the war, however, seem to be behind the increased numbers of Syrians who use smugglers to reach the southern coast of Turkey from the northern coast of the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>77</sup>

West African migrants typically look for smuggling services only to cross the borders into North Africa, and the smuggling business flourishes in the hubs close to these borders.<sup>78</sup> These migrants arrange the travel to the smuggling hubs in Niger or Mali on their own, while they typically use smugglers to enter Libya or Algeria. Whereas, the movement of West African citizens within the ECOWAS free movement area does not require the use of smuggling services, apart from those areas where the free movement is not adequately implemented.<sup>79</sup>

Similar considerations apply for South America and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) no visa arrangement. This seems to have reduced the demand for migrant smuggling for most South Americans moving within the region.<sup>80</sup>

Legal migration options may be insufficient to address the demand for smuggling services. In some cases, would-be migrants and refugees can access legal channels for migration, but they are discouraged by the time required to obtain the requisite permissions. When it takes months or even years to make use of a legal pathway, migrants and refugees may prefer to resort to the services of smugglers, offering them immediate transport to their intended destination. Cost might also be a factor. Obtaining a passport and a visa can be expensive and might involve costly travel to the capital. Moreover, some may not be in possession of a valid birth certificate, which makes it very difficult to obtain a passport.

Legal migration restrictions and expense considerations are not the only reasons why some migrants choose to use smugglers. In some cases, migrants and refugees are attracted to travel by smugglers' proactive recruitment and misinformation. Smugglers' propaganda appears to be particularly effective in encouraging many to leave and to do so by using the smuggler's services.<sup>81</sup> Smugglers also promote the perception that irregular migration is cheaper than regular migration.<sup>82</sup> Another reason why some choose smuggler services is that they might believe that smuggled migrants more readily find better jobs and wages.<sup>83</sup> As will be presented later, active recruitment and marketing are key activities for smugglers to create demand and broaden their clientele.

## 2.2 Risks for migrants – a deadly crime

From a legal point of view, smuggling of migrants is a criminal offence that relates to facilitating the passage of irregular migrants across an international border for profit. Migrant smuggling is a crime preying on people's dreams of a better life. But the most serious crime committed during smuggling of migrants may not be the smuggling itself. In all smuggling routes, the lives of migrants are often under threat. While in some cases, people who facilitate border crossing are harmless to the migrants, some smugglers are unscrupulous in their pursuit of profit.

As reported in more detail in the regional chapters of this report, along some smuggling routes, smugglers are directly involved in mass killings. In and around some smuggling hubs and departure areas for maritime routes, systematic torture of migrants, extortion, and various forms of exploitation have also been widely reported. This makes smuggling of migrants a deadly criminal business.

## Risks of death: migrants put on precarious path

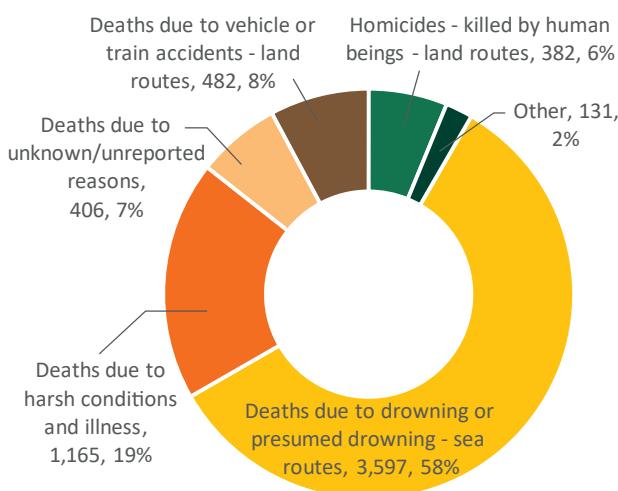
Dangerous transportation modes along with difficult terrain and unfavourable weather are key factors contributing to the high human costs of smuggling. Substandard vehicles and vessels as well as risky travel arrangements are reported along most smuggling routes. Smugglers may force migrants to use overcrowded, cramped or faulty transportation, often without sufficient fuel, safety equipment or water. These decisions illustrate the smugglers' disregard for the health and well-being of migrants.

The International Organization for Migration monitors migrant fatalities worldwide; generating records of fatalities by geographical location and cause of death. According to this data, most migrant deaths are due to drowning while attempting to cross the Mediterranean. Out of a total 8,189 recorded deaths in 2016, 3,832 (46 per cent) took place in the Mediterranean.<sup>84</sup> While this data can give a general sense of where most migrant fatalities seem to occur, IOM indicates that the data only represent a minimum estimate of the total number of fatalities, as many deaths remain unrecorded.<sup>85</sup>

Among the different routes for smuggling by sea, the Mediterranean routes are the most deadly, with more than 10,000 migrant fatalities since 2014. The Central Mediterranean route accounted for 91 per cent of the deaths recorded in the Mediterranean in 2017, and 89 per cent of those recorded in 2016 (see figure 18).

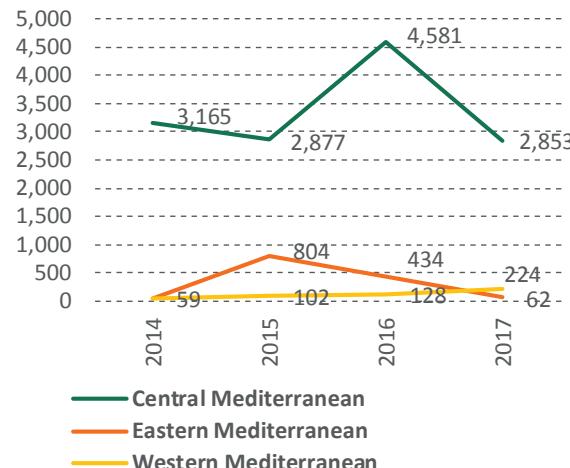
Two key reasons can explain why there are more deaths

**FIG. 17: Number of migrant fatalities recorded by IOM globally, by cause of death, 2017 (n=6,163)**



Source: UNODC elaboration of IOM data.

**FIG. 18: Trend in the number of deaths recorded along the three Mediterranean migrant smuggling routes, 2014- 2017**



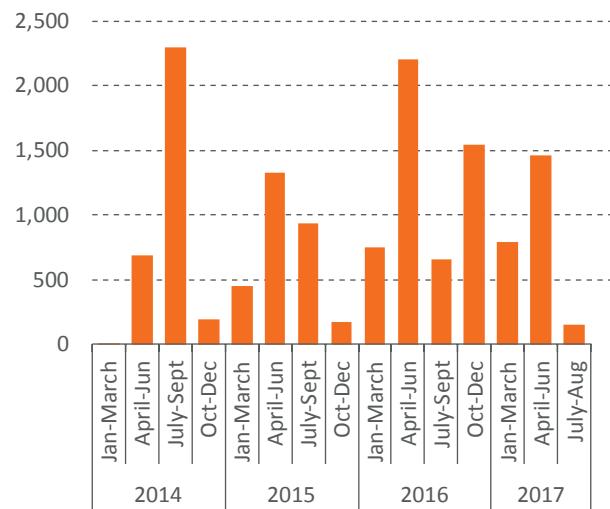
Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

along this route than others. For one, this is a very long and busy smuggling route; a large number of migrants are smuggled along the Central Mediterranean route, which covers an area that is larger than for many other widely used sea routes. A typical journey along this route may be 300 kilometers long, compared to some 30 kilometers between the Turkish coast and some Greek islands, or the northern coast of Morocco and Spain. This means that there is a large number of people who are exposed for a long time to the risks of the high seas.

The second reason is the ruthless behaviour of smugglers active along this route. With scant regard for migrant safety, they arrange travels in often unseaworthy, crowded and inadequate vessels during seasons when weather conditions are bad. In general, the summer months - June to August - are safer for attempting the Mediterranean Sea crossing, as the sea is quieter. During these months, on average, some 2-3 per cent of the migrants attempting to use the Central Mediterranean route have lost their lives. However, since 2015, many migrants have started to board vessels in early spring or late autumn. As a consequence, more fatalities have been recorded over the last three years. Springtime crossings have resulted in a peak of 7-8 per cent of the migrants dying while attempting to cross from North Africa to Italy.

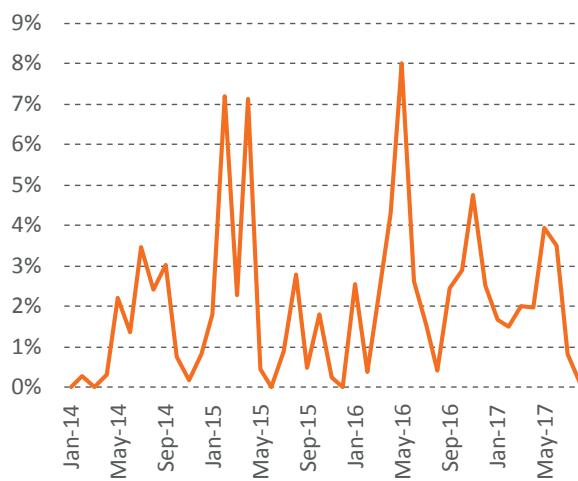
Drowning is a constant risk for migrants and refugees smuggled not only in the Mediterranean sea, but also in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea,<sup>86</sup> in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.<sup>87</sup> The unscrupulousness of smugglers is evident on these routes as well, as there have been

**FIG. 19:** Trend in the number of deaths recorded along the Central Mediterranean route per quarter, 2014–March 2016



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

**FIG. 20:** Trend in share of deaths to irregular arrivals along the Central Mediterranean route per month, January 2014–August 2017



Source: UNODC Elaboration of IOM Missing Migrants Project and UNHCR data.

reports of smugglers who encourage sea departures during the monsoon season, use substandard vessels and incompetent crew, and who even abandon boats en route.

Sea crossings are generally described by migrants and refugees as horrific experiences. In addition to the common issues of unseaworthy vessels and overcrowding, there is often insufficient food and water and lifejackets are usually not distributed.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, smuggled migrants often have little information about the journey.<sup>89</sup> It is very

common that vessels run out of fuel, have engine problems, lose their way at sea or fill up with water.<sup>90</sup>

In some instances, smugglers deliberately kill or endanger the lives of migrants. There are reports of migrants having been pushed out of boats to avoid interception by enforcement authorities. Moreover, migrants may be pushed overboard tens or hundreds of meters from the shores to permit smugglers to avoid detection by land-based authorities. For migrants who are unable to swim, this practice can prove fatal.<sup>91</sup>

A well-known practice used by smugglers is to sabotage vessels to force rescue interventions by coast guards once the vessels are in the sea areas of competence of destination countries. According to international conventions,<sup>n</sup> coast guards have a duty to intervene to rescue migrants who are at risk in the sea and bring them to safety on shore. Many episodes are recorded of inflatable vessels that have been intentionally punctured, and wooden vessels set on fire, resulting in migrant deaths.<sup>92</sup>

Dangerous travel conditions are also reported along land smuggling routes. Here, a common smuggling method involves concealing migrants in lorries transporting goods. People smuggled in these conditions are confined in a very small space without ventilation. Deaths have been recorded along many, if not all, land routes reported in this global study.

Challenging weather and terrain conditions are significant

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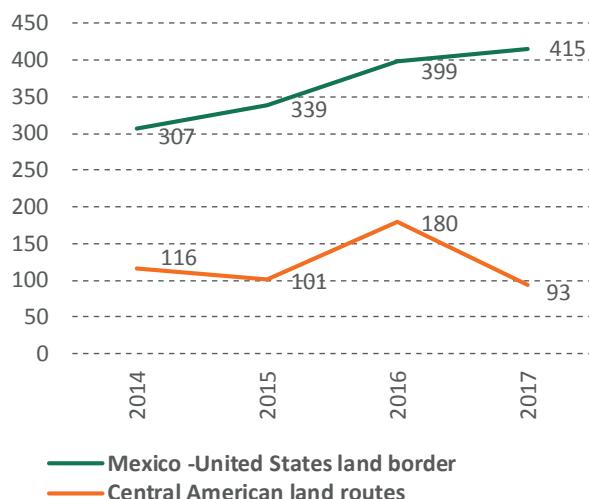
n The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS Convention) imposes an obligation on every coastal State "...promote the establishment, operation and maintenance of an adequate and effective search and rescue service regarding safety on and over the sea and, where circumstances so require, by way of mutual regional arrangements co-operate with neighbouring States for this purpose Party" (Art. 98 (2)).

The 1974 International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS Convention) requires State Parties "...to ensure that necessary arrangements are made for distress communication and co-ordination in their area of responsibility and for the rescue of persons in distress at sea around its coasts. These arrangements shall include the establishment, operation and maintenance of such search and rescue facilities as are deemed practicable and necessary..."

The 1979 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR Convention) obliges State Parties to "... ensure that assistance be provided to any person in distress at sea ... regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found" (Chapter 2.1.10).

Amendments to the SOLAS (regulation 33) and SAR Conventions (Chapter 3.1.9) aim at maintaining the integrity of the SAR services, by ensuring that people in distress at sea are assisted while minimizing the inconvenience for the assisting ship. They require the Contracting States/Parties to co-ordinate and co-operate to ensure that masters of ships providing assistance by embarking persons in distress at sea are released from their obligations with minimum further deviation from the ship's intended voyage; and arrange disembarkation as soon as reasonably practicable. They also oblige masters who have embarked persons in distress at sea, to treat them with humanity, within the capabilities of the ship.

**FIG. 21: Number of recorded deaths along main Central and North American land smuggling routes, 2014- 2017**



Source: IOM.

causes of deaths along many overland smuggling passages, from jungles to snowy mountains or deserts. The need to avoid detection may compel smugglers to move migrants across more dangerous terrain where the likelihood of death tends to increase.

One of the most dangerous land smuggling passages is heavily used by migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who move towards North Africa or Europe. In addition to the harshness of overland travel across the semi-arid Sahel and the Sahara desert, smugglers' carelessness with the health and lives of migrants makes the journey even more risky. Smuggled migrants are regularly transported across the desert in overloaded trucks or pick-ups, often at high speed and with insufficient food and water. Trucks and pick-ups may break down, and passengers who fall ill are reportedly often abandoned by the smugglers in the desert.<sup>93</sup>

### Risks of violence and crime: migrants and predators

Throughout their journeys, smuggled migrants are often vulnerable to violence and robbery. Predatory behavior by smugglers or criminal gangs active along smuggling routes is frequently observed. According to one somewhat dated study, about 65 per cent of the Somalis interviewed along the smuggling route to Southern Africa reported having been beaten up or robbed at least once during their journey to South Africa.<sup>94</sup> Similar risks have been recorded along nearly all routes discussed in this report.<sup>95</sup>

A frequently reported form of violence - which may ultimately result in the death of the smuggled migrant - is

extortion for ransom. This practice has been documented along many different smuggling routes. In Africa, it occurs on the route from the Horn of Africa to North Africa,<sup>96</sup> to the Middle East,<sup>97</sup> as well as along routes leading out of West Africa, often carried out by armed groups operating in the parts of the Sahel that are crossed by migrant smuggling routes.<sup>98</sup> Similar risks are also present along routes in the Americas,<sup>99</sup> and along routes from South-West Asia to Europe.<sup>100</sup> In some cases, migrants are held hostage for ransom by the smugglers themselves, however, more frequently, smugglers hand over or sell migrants and refugees to criminal groups upon crossing the border or arrival at major transit hubs.<sup>101</sup>

Massacres and mass graves have been revealed in border areas in some South-East Asian countries<sup>102</sup> and in the Americas.<sup>103</sup> In South-East Asia, smugglers reportedly organize camps where migrants are segregated while ransom money is extorted from their relatives. Extreme brutality and starvation may also be used to put further pressure on families to make the payments.

Female migrants are particularly targeted along many smuggling routes. Sexual violence has been widely documented; from Africa to Europe,<sup>104</sup> to South Africa<sup>105</sup> and to the Middle East.<sup>106</sup> Sexual violence - including rape of boys as well as girls - has been reported during smuggling within the European Union.<sup>107</sup> Sexual assaults of female migrants take place along some routes in the Americas as well. Similar criminal patterns have also been seen along some Asian routes.<sup>108</sup>

### Risk of human trafficking and exploitation

Smuggled migrants are at risk of exploitation both during their journey and after their arrival in the destination country. The irregular status that smuggled migrants often have in both transit and destination countries leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Not only do smugglers sometimes seek to take advantage of irregular migrants, but corrupt officials and local opportunists may also seek to exploit them. These situations can lead to abuse and human trafficking.

Smuggled migrants are also vulnerable to being trafficked and exploited for forced labour or sexual exploitation, along the route or at destination. A 2015-2016 survey among migrants travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route indicated that some 7 per cent of the respondents had experienced at least one trafficking or exploitative practice during the journey.<sup>109</sup>

During their journeys, which are often long, smuggled migrants may run out of money to pay for the next

smuggling passage. Their urgent need for financial resources can make them vulnerable to being tricked into exploitative situations. Those who have paid for the entire smuggling trip up front – as one package from origin to destination – are also at risk of being exploited at destination, however. Unaccompanied minors and young migrants, in particular, often feel the pressure of paying back the investment made by their families to pay the smugglers for their journey, and this pressure might lead them to working in exploitative conditions. In some cases, these children are also victims of sexual exploitation or involved in illegal activities such as selling drugs.<sup>110</sup> Smuggled migrants may also be forced to transport illicit drugs or participate in the recruitment and smuggling of other migrants, as has been observed for smuggled migrants who have contracted debt to travel to the European Union.<sup>111</sup>

Migrants may also be tricked into human trafficking at the early stages of their journey. They can be made to believe that they are engaging smugglers who will facilitate their journey, but instead, they become victims of trafficking in persons. Human traffickers in origin countries may offer a smuggling package to a desirable destination for a certain fee. The package is said to include land, sea or air transportation, sometimes making use of counterfeit documents or other means. The targeted person accepts the smuggling package, with the idea of paying it back by working at destination. Once at destination, however, the victim is informed that the debt has drastically increased and can only be repaid by working under exploitative conditions. What in the eyes of the migrant was smuggling of migrants was actually human trafficking from the very beginning.

### Governments' roles in protecting the rights of smuggled migrants

Smuggled migrants constantly face threats of violence, exploitation and even death along their journeys and at destination. Smugglers or other criminals are mostly responsible for the human costs of migrant smuggling.

Article 16 of the United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air<sup>o</sup> requests States Parties to protect and assist smuggled migrants. Risks of death, exploitation, torture or other form of victimization are present along nearly all routes and governments have a responsibility to take measures to address these risks in territories under their jurisdiction.<sup>p</sup>

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<sup>o</sup> For full text, see: <https://www.unodc.org/documents/treaties/UNTOC/Publications/TOC%20Convention/TOCebook-e.pdf>.

<sup>p</sup> Art. 16(1), UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol states “In

According to the Protocol, smuggled migrants should not be liable for criminal prosecution, and if in detention, the detaining authorities should comply with their obligations under international law.<sup>q</sup> However, some migrants that have been smuggled or are in the process of being smuggled have been subject to arrest and detention by authorities in origin, transit and destination countries; often occurring without legal guarantees. Victims of illegal detention have included refugees, victims of trafficking in persons and others in need of international protection.<sup>112</sup>

In some cases, corrupt officials seeking easy profits have carried out such detention in cooperation with smugglers. There is evidence that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have been locked up in detention centers, suffered various forms of abuse and sometimes torture.<sup>113</sup>

While some countries are responsible for illegal detention, authorities in some countries of transit or destination are responsible for ‘push-backs’ of smuggled migrants, which risk violating the principle of *non-refoulement*. This principle was originally stated in article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and reiterated in article 19(1) of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol. The principle states the right of a refugee not to be expelled or returned in “any manner whatsoever” to the frontiers of territories where his or her life or freedom would be threatened due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion or affiliation with a particular social group. General ‘push-backs’ at borders by authorities in destination countries risk infringing on this principle.

Similarly, collective expulsions and returns of asylum seekers and refugees to their countries of origin, or deportation to third countries where their life and security might be at risk, also violate this principle. Such violations have been recorded along some routes to Europe,<sup>114</sup> as well as in other routes considered in this Global Study.<sup>115</sup>

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implementing this Protocol, each State Party shall take, consistent with its obligations under international law, all appropriate measures, including legislation if necessary, to preserve and protect the rights of persons [...] accorded under applicable international law, in particular the right to life and the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”

<sup>q</sup> Article 5 and 16 (5) of the UN Smuggling of Migrants Protocol.

### 3. THE SMUGGLERS

#### Main emerging characteristics for smugglers

- The profiles of smugglers vary. In some cases, smuggling involves unconnected or loosely connected individuals who profit modestly from smuggling services. The livelihood of these individuals may depend on the smuggling market that exists in their communities. In other cases, smuggling is carried out by members of sophisticated and often unscrupulous organizations which may make large profits from the smuggling, and/or from the extortion and exploitation of migrants.
- Smugglers recruit and publicize their services. Smuggling fees and services fluctuate according to, *inter alia*, the safety of the smuggling methods, the distance involved, the difficulty of border crossings and the perceived wealth of migrants.
- Attracting and selling smuggling services require building trust with migrants. Therefore, smugglers particularly those in intermediary or recruiting roles - often have the same citizenship as the migrants they smuggle.
- Smuggling is often easier if the smugglers control the territory where they operate. As a consequence, smugglers who are active at a particular border crossing are normally from that territory.
- Smuggling methods range from more creative, sophisticated, safe and expensive to cheap, dangerous and simple ways to attempt entry in destination countries.
- Smuggling can be carried out by full-time ‘professionals’ working in organizations or by individuals on an ad hoc basis.
- Smuggling organizations differ in terms of their level of integration. Most smuggling networks are loosely connected, based on fluid contacts.
- With some exceptions, smuggling organizations are generally not systematically involved in other major transnational organized crime activities.
- Smuggling organizations are involved in a range of corrupt practices.

#### 3.1 What does smuggling involve: selling and organizing

Successful smugglers are normally very knowledgeable on the best ways to profit from migrants’ desires to reach a particular destination country. They may be proactive in creating demand for the smuggling services that they offer. They often misinform aspiring migrants about the prospects for successful entry and the ease of the journey, and create false expectations about life at destination. They may also adopt strategic marketing techniques and adapt their fees to migrants’ demand in order to maximize revenues. That said, smuggling services are also traded without deception, like other services. Along some routes, smugglers need to establish trust and credibility. To mitigate risks, potential new migrants often seek advice from those who were smuggled before. Satisfied clients create a reputation that attracts new clients for smugglers.

#### Marketing and recruitment

Proactive recruitment of migrants by smugglers is a pattern observed along nearly all routes. Smugglers (often in ‘broker’ roles) are crucial in creating aspirations and generating demand for their services through deception and manipulation. Smugglers in recruiting roles often operate in different villages and towns, sometimes targeting

youth.<sup>116</sup> Several factors seem to motivate migrants’ decisions to use smuggling services, including the perception that circumventing legal requirements is cheaper than regular migration options, or that smuggled migrants may find better jobs.<sup>117</sup> Along some smuggling routes, migrants could reach their desired destination simply by crossing the border, but even so, many pay smugglers who peddle the lie that border crossings are not possible without assistance.

This does not mean that decisions to migrate are always influenced by smugglers. People often decide to migrate for many different reasons, and they simply try to gather information on the best way to do it. Smugglers often advertise their services in places where migrants may be found, such as railway stations, cafes, bazaars and other meeting places.

In smuggling hubs, smugglers advertise their services openly,<sup>118</sup> sometimes by displaying photos from destination countries with grateful clients showing off their sporty cars and new clothes.<sup>119</sup> Some cases involve intermediaries who advertise smuggling services and refer potential migrants to a particular smuggler. They may receive payments from both the smuggler and the migrant for this service.<sup>120</sup>

Smugglers publicize their services to reach people who have decided to migrate as well as to entice those who have not necessarily been considering it. As modern enterprises, smugglers also advertise their services through various social media channels.

Smugglers are usually found by word of mouth through extended networks. Smugglers in intermediary roles often belong to the migrants' community: they are friends, relatives, community members or returnees who are trusted by the would-be migrants. Diasporas also play an important role in providing information on where to go to get

in touch with smugglers and in facilitating contact with them. Diaspora communities also provide recommendations and 'blacklists' of smugglers<sup>121</sup>.

#### Prices and payment methods: meeting demand

Smuggling fees change significantly according to a range of factors including distance, region, mode of transportation, border controls, difficulty of the border crossing and other factors. Smugglers operate much like legal entrepreneurs and charge different fees for different services. Usually, the higher the price, the higher the probability of a

### Smuggling of migrants and social media

Social media networks and channels are used in various ways in the context of migrant smuggling. One common usage is where various social media serve as 'consumer forums'. In a business where there is a considerable gap between the information that is shared with migrants and reality, migrants often try to reduce this gap by using social media tools to research the smuggler and the journey they are planning to undertake.

In order to organize journeys, the internet is used to share recommendations (or negative reviews) of migrant smugglers as well as information about routes and prices.<sup>a</sup> Syrians, in particular, make extensive use of technology and social networks, such as Facebook, Viber, Skype and WhatsApp, to share their insights.<sup>b</sup> The use of such tools has also been documented in South Asia, for the selection of smugglers,<sup>c</sup> and in Africa.<sup>d</sup>

In destination countries, smuggled migrants publish feedback about smugglers and their services; exposing cases where smugglers failed, cheated or treated migrants badly. Migrants and refugees also comment on their experiences in the receiving countries as well as administrative procedures to stay in the country.

Social media channels are also used to promote smuggling services. This is often done by posting ads on Facebook or other fora normally used by migrants to exchange views and experiences. In their posts, smugglers present their offers, often by inserting attractive images. They underline payment modalities; for instance, payment after the delivery of the required visa. They may also ask potential clients to contact them directly via a range of messaging services, some of which also offer the advantage of anonymity.

Different 'travel packages' can be found, from cruises to flights. It is common to advertise 'guaranteed visa' for destination countries, as well as passports or any other travel documents.

In selling their services, smugglers often deceive migrants and channel irregular migration movements towards or away from certain transit and destination countries.<sup>e</sup> In some Facebook pages, smugglers pretend to work for NGOs or fake European Union agencies tasked with organizing the safe passage to Europe by sea.<sup>f</sup> Smugglers targeting Afghan migrants have also been found to pose as 'legal advisors' for asylum on social media.<sup>g</sup>

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- a European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Case Study 1: Syria/Lebanon – Egypt - Italy*, 2015.
- b European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, *A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Final Report*, September 2015.
- c Donini, A., Monsutti, A. and Scalettaris, G., *Afghans on the Move: Seeking Protection and Refuge in Europe*, Global Migration Research Paper No. 17, The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Global Migration Centre, 2016: 13-14.
- d Mhub (North Africa Mixed Migration Task Force), *Conditions and risks of mixed migration in North East Africa*, November 2015: 44.
- e European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, *A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Final Report*, September 2015.
- f Toaldo, M., *Migrations through and from Libya: a Mediterranean challenge*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, May 2015.
- g United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *From a refugee perspective: Discourse of Arabic speaking and Afghan refugees and migrants on social media from March to December 2016*, April 2017: 22.

successful smuggling service. At the same time, a steep price does not guarantee a safe and successful smuggling passage, despite the smuggler's promises.

One example of how smugglers use different prices for different services can be found along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The price for the journey from Turkey's coasts to any of the Greek islands ranges from €900 up to €7,000.<sup>122</sup>

Fluctuations in prices are not only related to the comfort and safety of the means of transportation. Prices also often change according to the season, and tend to be cheaper when the trip is more dangerous.<sup>123</sup> Prices may also reflect the outcome of negotiations between migrants and smugglers. Such negotiations - over prices, but also conditions, security issues, routes and vehicles - may to some extent depend on the migrant's bargaining power vis à vis the smuggler.<sup>124</sup>

The services offered vary along the different smuggling routes. On the Eastern Mediterranean route, for example - unlike the Central Mediterranean one – the smuggling fee usually includes 'guaranteed delivery'. Buying a smuggling package entails several attempts; in case the crossing fails, the migrant is entitled to travel again for free until the destination is reached.<sup>125</sup> A similar service is occasionally offered by smugglers facilitating movements from India to Europe.<sup>126</sup>

In South-East Asia, smuggling services may also include job placement in the destination country.<sup>127</sup> Even if job placement is not included, the smuggling fee paid by migrants typically covers not only the cost of crossing the border, but also accommodation and transportation to the employer.

In addition, the smuggling fee may differ according to the sex and citizenship of the migrants.<sup>128</sup> This price differentiation could be related to the higher or lower demand for the services by certain nationalities, as well as the migrants' perceived purchasing power. For example, Syrian citizens are often charged high fees, as they are perceived to be wealthier than people of many other nationalities seeking to make their way to Europe along the same routes.<sup>129</sup>

Smugglers may request that migrants pay up front for border crossings. More often, however, migrants pay in different stages along the route, with an initial payment before the crossing, and final payment when the destination is reached. Payment up front increases the vulnerability of migrants during the travel since the smuggler has already been paid and has little incentive to treat migrants properly and make safe travel arrangements.

While payments after the border crossing mitigate the risks as it is in the interest of the smuggler that migrants arrive safely at destination.

In those cases where the smuggling fee covers one single border crossing, payments are either made up front or more often in two instalments; one before departure and one upon arrival. This is how smugglers operate along the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa, for instance. Upon an initial payment, smugglers lead migrants across the border, and once on the other side, the migrant pays the final instalment.<sup>130</sup>

However, smugglers do not always travel with migrants across the border. On the Eastern Mediterranean route, for example, some migrants pay half of the fee in advance. The balance is paid by relatives or friends once written or oral confirmation and pictures of the migrant in the country of destination are returned as proof of safe arrival.<sup>131</sup>

In general, the longer the smuggling route, the more sophisticated the payment method. One of the most used methods along long smuggling routes is *hawala*. This system involves relatives, friends or trustworthy acquaintances in the country of origin. Before leaving their country, migrants or their relatives give the money to a trustworthy person, a guarantor or *hawaladar*. During the journey, the fee is transferred by the guarantor to the smuggling organizer once the migrant has arrived at destination. In cases where multiple payments have been agreed, the migrant contacts the *hawaladar* at various points of the journey to request the release of money to smugglers once each leg of the travel is safely completed.<sup>132</sup>

The *hawala* system is widely used by migrants who are smuggled from South-West Asia along the Eastern Mediterranean route.<sup>133</sup> Migrants smuggled from East Africa towards Europe in an organized smuggling undertaking also often rely on the *hawala* system.<sup>134</sup>

When the *hawala* system is not used, transfers from destination countries are often arranged through commercial money transfer agencies. In these cases, money is deposited with an agency and protected by a security code. Once the migrant confirms his or her safe arrival in the intermediary or final destination, the money is released to the smuggler through disclosure of the security code.

Other forms of payment may be used in other regions of origin. Nevertheless, the schemes resemble those described above, with payments disclosed at different stages of the journey, according to the progress of the smuggling process.

**TABLE 3:** Selected smuggling fees reported in recent studies

SMUGGLING PASSAGE OR ROUTE	TYPE OF SMUGGLING	REPORTED COSTS	SOURCES:
Eritrea – Sudan/Ethiopia-Libya/Egypt	Land route	Around US\$4,000	The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, <i>Integrated responses to human smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Europe</i> , May 2017: 20.
Somalia (Somaliland)-Sudan-Libya/Egypt	Land route	From around US\$2,000 to 3,500	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Altai Consulting, <i>Mixed migration: Libya at the cross-roads</i> , November 2013. The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, <i>Integrated responses to human smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Europe</i> , May 2017: 20.
Horn of Africa to Southern Africa	Mainly land route (possible sea route deviations)	Around US\$3,000-3,500	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, <i>Smuggled south. An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa with specific focus on protection risks, human smuggling and trafficking</i> , RMMS briefing paper 3, March 2017: 16
Agadez (Niger)-Libyan coast	Land route	Around US\$2,000-3,000	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, <i>Migrant smuggling in the Horn of Africa &amp; Yemen: the political economy and protection risks</i> , June 2013: 30
Agadez (Niger)-Sabha (south-west Libya)	Land route	Around US\$100-300	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Altai Consulting, <i>Mixed migration: Libya at the cross-roads</i> , November 2013: 35.
Turkey coastline – Greek islands	Sea route	From around US\$1000 up to 8000	European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, <i>A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries</i> , Final Report, September 2015: 43.
Malta to Italy (EU secondary movement)	Sea route	US\$1,100	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, <i>Abused &amp; abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen</i> , October 2014.
France to United Kingdom(EU secondary movement)	Sea or land route	US\$5,000 to 7,500	United Nations Children's Fund, "Neither safe nor sound": <i>Sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse engulfing the lives of children in the camps of Calais and Dunkirk</i> , press release, 16 June 2016.
Libya-Italy	Sea route	From around US\$500 up to 2,500	European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, <i>A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries</i> , Final Report, September 2015.
Ethiopia-Bossaso (Somalia) -Saudi Arabia	Land-sea-land route	Around US\$900	Research and Evidence Facility, <i>Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen</i> , EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window), 25 July 2017: 41
Ethiopia-Obock (Djibouti) -Saudi Arabia	Land-sea-land route	Around US\$850	Research and Evidence Facility, <i>Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen</i> , EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window), 25 July 2017: 41.
Bossaso (Somalia) -Yemen	Sea route	Around US\$120-150	Research and Evidence Facility, <i>Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen</i> , EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window), 25 July 2017: 41.
Obock (Djibouti) -Yemen	Sea route	Around US\$60-200	Research and Evidence Facility, <i>Migration between the Horn of Africa and Yemen: A Study of Puntland, Djibouti and Yemen</i> , EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window), 25 July 2017: 41.

SMUGGLING PASSAGE OR ROUTE	TYPE OF SMUGGLING	REPORTED COSTS	SOURCES:
Nepal/India to the United States	Air route	From around US\$27,000 up to 47,000	Verité, <i>Labor brokerage and trafficking of Nepali migrant workers</i> , 2012: 79. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant smuggling in Asia, Country Profiles: South Asia</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, August 2015 (restricted distribution): 38.
India to Europe (Schengen Area)	Air route	From around US\$15,000 up to 30,000	International Centre for Migration Policy Development, <i>Yearbook on Illegal Migration, Human Smuggling and Trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe</i> , 2011: 192, 250. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant smuggling in Asia, Country Profiles: South Asia</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, August 2015 (restricted distribution): 32
Afghanistan- Western Europe	Air route	Around US\$10,000-15,000	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Comparative Research on Financial Flows within Migrant Smuggling from Asia to Europe</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 2013: 22.
Afghanistan to Western Europe	Land route	Around US\$10,000	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35.
Pakistan – Western Europe	Land route	From around US\$3,000 up to 8,000	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35.
Pakistan – Western Europe	Air route	From around US\$12,000 up to 18,000	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35.
Viet Nam-Western Europe	Air and land route	From around US\$7,000 up to 15,000	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, <i>Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges</i> , UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35, 71.
Central America , across Mexican border to Texas (United States)	Land route	From around US\$4,000 up to 15,000	EMIF SUR, 2018 El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social, Consejo Nacional de Población, Unidad de Política Migratoria.
Mexico to the United States	Land route	Range around US\$5,000	Mexico Migration Project, <i>Border Crossing Costs 1975-2013</i> , MMP 161, University of Princeton, 2017.
Turkey coastline – Greek islands	Sea route	From around US\$1000 up to 8000	European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, <i>A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Final Report</i> , September 2015: 43.
Malta to Italy (EU secondary movement)	Sea route	US\$1,100	Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, <i>Abused &amp; abducted: the plight of female migrants from the Horn of Africa in Yemen</i> , October 2014.
France to United Kingdom(EU secondary movement)	Sea or land route	US\$5,000 to 7,500	United Nations Children's Fund, "Neither safe nor sound": <i>Sexual exploitation, trafficking and abuse engulfing the lives of children in the camps of Calais and Dunkirk</i> , press release, 16 June 2016.

## Different ways to organize migrant smuggling

When developing a business model for their operations, smugglers need to plan and make decisions on several aspects. They need to build their business around the needs arising from people's aspiration to migrate. Those who wish to leave their countries may want to travel to a faraway country or just to a neighbouring country. They may need facilitation for the whole trip or only for some parts of the travel. Some have more money to spend than others, and some can spend more time en route. Smugglers also need to build their reputation so that their services are used by those who need them.

There are also other aspects to be considered in order to organize successful smuggling operations. For example, some borders are more difficult to cross depending on the geographical conditions, season, level of controls and conditions in the receiving country. In responding to all these needs, smugglers use different business models. The descriptions below do not comprise an exhaustive list, and are intended as indications of how smuggling operations are typically carried out. An individual smuggled migrant's trajectory may include travel segments organized in several different ways.

Often, the key decisions regarding the organization of smuggling are driven largely by the service suppliers, that is, the smugglers. However, in cases where those seeking to be smuggled are in a strong position to negotiate with the smuggler – usually because they have available financial resources and/or there are many competing smugglers operating from the point of departure – they may also have a strong influence on decisions regarding the travel.

### Comprehensive package

The comprehensive package model is suitable for reaching faraway destinations in a short time. The whole travel from origin to destination is organized, including all transportation and border crossings. The selection of routes and methods of travel and decisions on how to organize irregular border crossings are usually made by the smugglers. There are no long waiting times at the borders. This model requires that smugglers have a good reputation in order to build trust among those considering to make use of their services. Comprehensive packages can be advertised through different media. Smugglers need to have good organizational skills and efficient networks to arrange the different border crossings, bribe officials and secure delivery to the desired destination; all skills possessed by organized crime groups. The price of such packages is often rather high.

### Hub as a supermarket

In this business model, migrants can obtain all services from the smuggling hub which is often located close to the departure or transit points. They can also be found at some refugee camps to respond to the needs of those who would like to continue their travels. In some hubs, migrants are actively recruited to use the competing smuggling services. Migrants can travel to the hub either by themselves or they can use the services of local smugglers. In some cases, migrants are transported to the hub to continue their travel with the help of local smugglers.

### Geographical monopoly

When smugglers have geographical control of an area, they can offer their local knowledge to arrange secure smuggling operations or they can allow or restrict movements in the area under their control. Territorial control can cover the geographical area along the smuggling route or in the departure, arrival or other border areas. Smugglers in this model can constitute a professional core group surrounded by a loose and flexible network. 'Professional' smugglers may hire employees to deal directly with clients or contract services of amateurs. They may also buy vehicles to transport migrants and refugees and arrange border crossings. Sometimes, certain ethnic groups control territories and smuggling that takes place there.

### Travel agency

Migrants can be offered travel and related services by a loosely organized network of smugglers. The network includes opportunistic individual smugglers who are informally organized and who interact with each other in

a flexible manner. These networks can include different professionals such as agents and taxi, bus and lorry drivers who operate as smuggling managers with leadership of a chief smuggler to move people from origin to destination. Smuggling managers may work with a number of chief smugglers carrying out specific tasks such as guiding, transporting or accommodating migrants. Chief smugglers take care of the overall arrangements and can assist with hands-on tasks such as paying bribes and arranging guides for the migrants. Sometimes, the chief smuggler operates from abroad. In some cases, chief smugglers run travel agencies as a cover for their smuggling business. Migrants can be smuggled in groups or individually.

### 'Hop on hop off' along the smuggling route

In this model, smuggling services are offered along the route based on the ad-hoc need and funding situation of the migrant. The smuggling route consists of several independent legs which may or may not need the facilitation of smugglers. Migrants may cover these legs in different ways like walking, by overland, sea or air transportation by themselves or with the facilitation of different smugglers. Between different legs, migrants may need breaks in order to work to pay for the next part of the journey, wait for suitable smugglers or for a different season or improved weather conditions. In some cases, these pauses present an opportunity for the smugglers to exploit migrants.

### Opportunistic smuggling

This model is built around casual, temporary and ad-hoc operations carried out by smugglers who supplement other sources of income through migrant smuggling or get involved in it when opportunities arise. Smuggling networks – if they exist – are loosely connected, informal and not strictly hierarchical. Different individuals and groups form flexible chains, where members can easily be replaced with little or no disruption to the network's activities. The services offered by smugglers often depend on the wealth of the migrants. In some cases, smugglers also offer services other than smuggling and can act as job brokers or offer accommodation.

### From one leg to another

This model is based on connected legs along the route. Migrants can travel from one leg to another using different methods – some involving smuggling, some not. At the end of the smuggling leg, smugglers hand over the migrants to the next smuggler who arranges the next leg of the journey. Smugglers can also provide temporary accommodation where migrants can wait for suitable conditions for the next journey. The smuggling business can be small scale, part-time and opportunistic when smugglers are not organized but they may be somewhat connected, forming a loose network. Smugglers may also pay bribes to cross the border, to prevent officials reporting on detections or to prevent action against employers of irregular migrants.

## 3.2 What does smuggling require

### Territorial control and the trust of migrants

The control of territory is an important factor for success in the smuggling business. The citizenship profiles of smugglers show that most of the smugglers who operate at borders are normally citizens of the country of departure. Smugglers active at departure points for sea smuggling are typically citizens of the countries where these ports are located.<sup>135</sup>

Most of the overland legs along some African routes are facilitated by smugglers who are citizens of the countries where they operate.<sup>136</sup> Once the route takes migrants across different jurisdictions, operations are transferred to

smugglers who have territorial control of the area they are crossing. In Eastern Sudan, for example, the Rashaida tribe appears to be involved in the smuggling of migrants of any nationality crossing the territory that they control.<sup>137</sup> Other groups, often nomadic, control smuggling passages in other parts of Africa that they have historically dominated.<sup>138</sup> Similar patterns can also be seen elsewhere, for example, in different border passages in the Americas,<sup>139</sup> or in the area between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran where smugglers often have strong ethno-linguistic ties with local communities and originate from the border regions.<sup>140</sup>

When it comes to smugglers in intermediary or coordinating roles, their work is not so strongly connected to

the territory, but to the smuggled migrants. In Libya, for example, the smugglers who arrange the boat travel along the Central Mediterranean route are usually Libyans. But smuggler ‘brokers’ from different African countries are often involved in organizing the travel – in Libya, working with Libyan smugglers - for their fellow citizens wanting to be smuggled to Europe<sup>141</sup>.

The role of migrant diasporas in smuggling is evident along many routes. For example, Somali neighbourhoods in some major African capitals serve as main smuggling hubs along the routes from the Horn of Africa to Europe,<sup>142</sup> and various South and South-West Asian communities function similarly for some of the key smuggling routes to West Asia and Europe.<sup>143</sup>

The role of ethno-linguistic affinities between migrants and smugglers and smuggling ‘brokers’ could be linked to ‘the human factor’ and the importance of trust for successful smuggling ventures. Migrants may find it easier to trust people from the same community to pay often hefty fees and embark on an unknown venture.

Trust is also the key reason why along different routes, smugglers working as intermediaries are often friends, relatives, community members or returnees who are well-reputed in the communities of origin.<sup>144</sup> In some cases, smugglers are not only reported to be respected figures locally, but they may also live among their clientele and promote their record of managing successful smuggling operations.<sup>145</sup>

### **The role of information in the smuggling business**

Information is key to the smuggling business. On the one hand, misinformation provided to migrants increases the demand for smuggling services. Information given by smugglers to migrants is often unrealistically optimistic regarding the outcome of their smuggling operations. In some circumstances, migrants may buy services that they would not have bought had they had the right information on the risks of the journey and circumstances in destination countries.

On the other hand, accurate knowledge about the most successful ways to access destination countries is the cornerstone of smuggling operations. Smugglers are usually not only informed about geography and possible land, sea or air passages, but also about national legislation, visa regimes, migration policies, border control, enforcement efforts and other aspects that can be leveraged in order to make profits. For instance, smugglers are aware that along certain routes, claiming specific citizenships increase the

likelihood for migrants to get access to or protection in their desired country of destination.<sup>146</sup>

In cases where migrants – smuggled or not - are apprehended during irregular border crossings, the response of the authorities often depends on the citizenship of migrants. Some citizenships are immediately returned, some may be easily considered for refugee status, while others may not be subject to immediate expulsion due to the lack of bilateral agreements with origin countries and are likely to be left free to move within the destination country.<sup>147</sup> On some sea passages, smugglers may provide phone numbers of national authorities so that migrants can call them to be rescued, if being apprehended is one of the strategies to maximise the likelihood for the migrant to be able to stay in the destination country.

The smugglers’ ability to access and use information is crucial when it comes to smuggling by air.<sup>148</sup> As they are aware of visa restrictions and policies in different countries, smugglers often make use of transit airports of convenience. They select transit airports depending on the final destination and migrants’ citizenships. Smugglers then organize for migrants to fly to a transit airport, and from there onwards to a final destination. The first point of transit may involve a regular crossing, and it is only with the second flight that the migration may become irregular<sup>149</sup>. In such a scheme, legitimate travel documents are used for the first leg of the journey, while a falsified or fraudulently obtained visa is used for the second leg, in the hope that security is less strict because the flight arrives from a trusted origin<sup>150</sup>. Alternatively, the migrant might be asked to destroy the travel documents and deliberately miss the onward flight to the stated destination. At the transit airport, the migrant then meets with a member of the smuggling network in the international lounge. Falsified or fraudulently obtained documents as well as a new ticket and boarding pass are then provided for the onward travel to the intended destination.<sup>151</sup>

Smugglers may also select arrival airports not only on the basis of visa requirements, but also considering the proximity to the migrant’s desired destination. From these airports, they smuggle migrants along land or sea routes to their final destination.<sup>152</sup>

### **Corruption and fraudulent travel documentation**

Some forms of migrant smuggling are carried out by involving local officers to grant safe passage and impunity. Corruption is a common method used to smuggle migrants across an international border. Corrupt practices have been reported along nearly all smuggling routes con-

sidered in this study. Whether these practices involve small amounts of cash paid directly to border guards or larger amounts for higher-ranking officers in the diplomatic corps depends on the resources available and the smugglers' capacity to reach out to officers in different institutions.

Along most African routes, it appears that those passing through official border posts often need to pay a bribe to border guards, even if travel documents are exhibited.<sup>153</sup> Similar practices have been reported along Central American routes towards North America,<sup>154</sup> in the European Union<sup>155</sup> and in some parts of Asia.<sup>156</sup> At airports, immigration officers or airline staff may be paid to close their eyes while inspecting travel documents.<sup>157</sup>

At more senior levels, smuggling could involve visa-issuing authorities and immigration directors who engage in corrupt practices. The replacement of a bio-data page in a passport, for instance, requires the assistance of someone with access to official procedures and equipment. Perhaps more frequently, however, corruption comes into play for the issuance of genuine documents without satisfying the legal requirements, or on fraudulent grounds. Smugglers may obtain a falsified birth certificate, for instance, which can then be used to obtain a 'genuine' passport.<sup>158</sup>

Some smuggling networks are particularly sophisticated and creative in their efforts to obtain regular visas through fraudulent means. This can include the creation of fictitious companies and phantom branches in destination countries, arrangement of sham conferences or dance groups, or creation of fake bank accounts to demonstrate the financial means required to obtain a legitimate visa.<sup>159</sup> In these cases, visa applications may be supported by other counterfeit documents including flight tickets, boarding passes, residence permits, birth certificates, sponsorship letters or other documents to show that the identity of the visa applicant is identical to the one in their passport.<sup>160</sup> The organization of sham marriages to grant someone legal access on fraudulent premises has also been reported.<sup>161</sup> For smuggling purposes, travel documents such as passports and visas have been counterfeited, falsified, stolen, obtained by fraud or corruption, used by someone other than the rightful owner, or even created from scratch out of fantasy.<sup>162</sup>

### Ruthlessness

If smugglers cannot access authorities or travel documents, they may sell dangerous passages which often involve sea crossings. One of the risks faced by migrants who are smuggled along maritime routes is connected to some smugglers' practice of sabotaging migrant vessels to force rescue at sea. Rescuing people in distress at sea is an obli-

gation under the international law of the sea. Smugglers sometimes take advantage of this basic humanitarian and legal principle by exposing migrants to the imminent risk of drowning.<sup>163</sup> Migrants smuggled on board boats may be given a satellite phone to call coast guards for help.<sup>164</sup> The plan is that migrants provide coast guards with information about their location, so that the migrants can be located, approached and rescued. The migrants should then be transported to the closest safe harbour, which is normally the planned destination.<sup>165</sup>

This strategy is very risky and not always successful. Migrants may not be able to state their exact location in a timely manner. Moreover, moving hundreds of panicking people from a sinking vessel to a coast guard boat is a difficult task. Weather is another crucial factor in these circumstances. From the smugglers' point of view, this method offers a key advantage: they avoid the risk of arrest by authorities in countries of destination. Along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, the boat driver is often a migrant - usually chosen some time before departure - who may have been offered to travel for free.<sup>166</sup>

This smuggling technique implies the likely loss of the vessel. The boats usually sink or are seized by authorities in destination countries.<sup>167</sup> This is often not the case for smuggling across the Red or Arabian seas, where the risk of being arrested at destination is limited, and the scarcity of resources compels smugglers to use the same vessels for several journeys.<sup>168</sup>

Certain sea routes require more sophisticated planning and organizing, and thus greater capacity within the smuggling network. To cover longer distances, smugglers may use the so-called 'mother ship' strategy. On departure, migrants are stowed in a large 'mother ship', which may make several stops en route to collect more passengers. Close to the destination shore, migrants are transferred to smaller boats while the 'mother ship' returns to port.<sup>169</sup>

### 3.3 Who operates the migrant smuggling: amateurs and professionals

A range of different actors are involved in the smuggling of migrants: 'professional' smugglers working in organized groups, amateur smugglers working independently, former smuggled migrants and travel agents, to mention some. Amateur smugglers are ordinary men and women of varying ages and occupations who provide smuggling services. These smugglers usually provide transportation or work as guides through ad-hoc arrangements. They are normally involved in smuggling via land borders, where migrants are hidden in trucks and cars or guided to the border on

foot along remote paths. They are called *malyatsha* in Southern Africa,<sup>170</sup> *coyotes* or *polleros* in the Americas,<sup>171</sup> or generally ‘passeurs’ or ‘taxi drivers’.

Amateur smugglers who function as transport operators and guides do not necessarily offer smuggling services on their own, but could work as employees for well-organized ‘professional’ smugglers or in groups that connect migrants to other amateur smugglers. In some cases, these individual guides and drivers are engaged by different professional smugglers. When working in groups, the amateurs often perform specific tasks and may work together seasonally or sporadically.<sup>172</sup>

Members of local communities along migrant smuggling routes may also be involved in smuggling. Indigenous communities in some Andean countries, for example,<sup>173</sup> or villagers in some coastal areas along the Red Sea appear to be involved in migrant smuggling.<sup>174</sup> Certain communities along African smuggling routes have also created a livelihood around the smuggling of migrants.

### **Smugglers working together: a loose form of transnational organized crime**

Professional smugglers are at the core of the organized smuggling groups that operate in many parts of the world. Smuggling organizations run the gamut from simple, one border operations to complex schemes capable of transferring migrants across continents and multiple borders. The larger smuggling rings need a range of smugglers operating at different phases of the journey, such as recruiters, intermediaries, brokers, accommodation managers, drivers, guides and others. When smuggling is carried out by organized groups, all these roles are part of the same organization or within easy reach. The profile of smugglers tends to change according to the person’s role in the smuggling process.

Along many routes, the smuggling is not limited to the facilitation of an irregular border crossing, but also to the preparation and follow-up phases. Some of the routes are planned in multiple stages with different actors operating in origin, transit and destination countries. This does not necessarily mean that these actors are part of a structured organization, responding to the same hierarchy. Along many smuggling routes, smuggler brokers refer ‘their’ migrants to other local smugglers for particular border crossings. In some cases, smugglers ‘outsource’ parts of the process, passing migrants from one local smuggler to the next.<sup>175</sup> In these cases, it is more accurate to speak about ‘smuggling networks’. This indicates the existence of systematic contacts based on business relations, but not a hierarchical structure.

The levels of integration within smuggling networks vary in different parts of the world. Along most routes, smuggling is carried out by loose associations of individuals, including a wide network of opportunists who operate on a small scale, usually without ties to major organized crime groups. Such networks tend to operate on a very local level. Members of these networks may work as guides, agents, taxi, bus and lorry drivers, connecting migrants with other facilitators at other locations, or transporting them along segments of the route.<sup>176</sup>

Along major routes, such as the Eastern Mediterranean or the route from the Horn of Africa to Europe different organizations are active. In some cases, it is also possible to find more sophisticated and highly professional organizations. In North Africa, much of the smuggling industry seem to be based on more hierarchical organizational structures than those observed in other regions.<sup>177</sup> South-West and East Asian smuggling networks tend to make use of managers in origin countries, as well as members in transit countries, to maintain connections with international networks and coordinate a network of local smuggler agents.<sup>178</sup> These are generally well-established and have an internal division of labour.<sup>179</sup>

### **Connections with other organized criminal activities and armed groups**

Linkages between smuggling networks and other criminal markets appear to be exceptions rather than the rule. While there is a clear connection between smuggling of migrants and corruption at many levels along most routes, the available literature does not suggest frequent relations or collaboration between those carrying out migrant smuggling and other forms of organized crime.

As a general pattern, it appears that migrant smugglers do not systematically engage in trafficking in firearms, illicit drugs or other ‘major’ illicit trafficking activities. There are some exceptions in different parts of the world, namely in West Africa, Afghanistan,<sup>180</sup> Central Asia<sup>181</sup> and Central America along the northward route towards the United States.<sup>182</sup> In the latter case, there is little evidence of a nexus or convergence among the different actors.<sup>183</sup>

In some areas within the Sahel in Africa, smuggling networks and other criminal groups appear to have systematic contacts. Many illegal trades may cross this territory, including the transportation of smuggled migrants.<sup>184</sup>

In other areas, including parts of West Asia and Central and North America, powerful and structured criminal organizations are ‘taxing’ migrant smugglers to cross the areas under their control. Payment of this ‘tax’ is meant to

## The roles of women in migrant smuggling

Although the literature on migrant smuggling is growing, researchers have to this date paid limited attention to the roles of women in the market. A recent study commissioned by UNODC analysed a set of case briefs of nearly 100 criminal cases of migrant smuggling or facilitation of irregular migration from 20 different countries in order to shed light on the involvement of women.<sup>a</sup> While the sample is not representative of all the women who participate in smuggling, the study generated some interesting findings.

Smuggling operations often involve specific tasks carried out by different smugglers who work individually, but who are loosely connected among themselves working towards a common goal. The study found that women perform tasks often similar to those handled by men. They recruit migrants, carry out logistical tasks such as purchasing tickets or renting locations that serve as ‘safe houses’ prior to the migrants’ arrival, obtain fraudulent documents and collect smuggling fees.

But some smuggling tasks were performed mostly by women. For example, women tend to be more frequently involved in the provision of room and board as well as caring for sick or vulnerable migrants (including children and elderly people). Women are less often behind the wheel of motor vehicles or working as guides; yet they may accompany male smugglers during transits, posing as companions so that their vehicles avoid unwanted attention from law enforcement.

Women tend to be the lesser visible actors in smuggling investigations. One explanation may be that most smuggling cases in which women participate are small scale; in this sample, women most often worked independently, transporting individual or small groups of migrants, which is likely to attract little attention from the authorities (women were less often involved in cases involving large smuggling operations –in this sample, 20 or more migrants). After solo operations, the second most common form of organized smuggling in which women participate involved working in pairs. In a finding that mirrors a pattern also seen for trafficking in persons,<sup>b</sup> women often worked alongside their intimate partners, or were mothers or daughters of male co-defendants. At least fifteen cases involved women who worked alongside their intimate partners. Two cases involved mothers who travelled with their sons as they committed the smuggling offense, and one included a daughter-father duo. While two of the cases included women who were unaware of their co-defendant’s intentions, and at least two other involved women who had worked with their male partners out of coercion or fear, the rest of the cases showed no evidence of women being forced to engage in smuggling activities.

While most women participate in smuggling seeking financial returns, 30 per cent of those in the sample were convicted for facilitating the irregular migration of friends and family members for no financial or other material benefit. The study revealed that while the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol calls for this practice not to be criminalized, many jurisdictions still consider it a crime. This appears to disproportionately impact women, who tend to be more likely than men to engage in the facilitation of irregular migration (including their own) with the goal of becoming reunited with family members while fleeing situations of risk and imminent danger or as a result of migration law restrictions. Clearly more research into women’s roles in migrant smuggling is needed. This initial analysis identified several possible areas to address the gap.

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a The cases were retrieved from the UNODC Case Law database on the smuggling of migrants, part of the SHERLOC online portal (available at: [www.unodc.org/cld/v3/sherloc/](http://www.unodc.org/cld/v3/sherloc/)).

b See ‘Intimate and/or close family relationships and trafficking in persons offending,’ in UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2014* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.14.V.10), p. 28.

guarantee migrants a safe passage. In some cases, however, smugglers may sell migrants to these criminal groups who may then extort ransoms from migrants’ families.<sup>185</sup> Illicit drug cartels may impose taxes on each migrant traveling along the American routes to the United States. Failure to pay has resulted in torture and even killings.<sup>186</sup>

The situation in Libya appears to be unique, given the historic role of this country in the smuggling of migrants

in combination with its unstable political situation and insecurity. Contacts or cooperation between smuggling networks and militia groups in Libya have been reported, and some of the armed groups in that country are allegedly involved in different types of criminal activity, including migrant smuggling.<sup>187</sup>

There are indications that some groups involved in the smuggling of migrants are also involved in drug trafficking.

One of the key routes for cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe passes through West Africa.<sup>188</sup> Along the internal African routes leading to North Africa, both cocaine and migrants may be smuggled to the Mediterranean shores and eventually to Europe.<sup>189</sup>

### The profile of smugglers

The smugglers' profiles vary according to route. As a general pattern, the citizenship and sometimes also ethnic profile of the smugglers is linked either to the territory where they are operating, or to the profiles of the migrants that they are smuggling. Smugglers in organizing roles are typically of the same nationality as migrants, while smugglers operating at border crossings are normally linked to the territory.

As far as the gender profiles of smugglers, the literature suggests that – as for most crimes – a large majority of migrant smugglers are men. Women smugglers may be involved in the recruitment of migrants, and they may receive and/or escort migrants to their temporary accommodation between different stages of the route. Women also carry out 'support' functions, such as caring for children, preparing food and arranging for 'safe houses'.<sup>190</sup>

On certain smuggling routes or for some modus operandi, women appear to play more prominent roles. In South-West Asia, for example, some sources note that women are involved in the smuggling of some migrants by air as they are less likely to attract the attention of authorities.<sup>191</sup> Ethiopian women were also reportedly part of smuggling operations from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa a few years ago. Still, also along this route, the typical smuggler is a man aged from 18 to 40 of Ethiopian or Somali origin.<sup>192</sup>

In terms of age, different studies indicate that the average age of smugglers typically ranges between 30–35 years.<sup>193</sup> There are some exceptions, however. For instance, along the border between the United States and Mexico, some teenagers have reportedly been participating in migrant smuggling. Their roles have been relatively minor, however; usually they have served as lookouts or guides.<sup>194</sup>

### From smuggled migrant to migrant smuggler

In addition to their ethnicity, gender and age profiles, another emerging pattern is the smugglers' life experiences. Often smugglers are former migrants who, successfully or not, were smuggled along the same route on which they later operate. In some cases, they are returnees or have chosen to settle in countries they transited along a smuggling route.

Most smugglers active in the city of Agadez, Niger are

former migrants who have established themselves there after returning from North Africa. They are able to convince newly arrived migrants with their knowledge of the route ahead and the connections needed to cross the Sahara,<sup>195</sup> and can therefore be effective recruiters. This pattern has been found along many other smuggling routes as well, such as from West Asia towards Europe<sup>196</sup> or some routes directed towards Southern Africa.<sup>197</sup> A related pattern relates to the role of smuggled migrants who are still on their way to their intended final destination, but work as smugglers (often in recruiting or intermediary roles) to finance their own journey.<sup>198</sup>

Another commonly reported smuggler profile is that of the 'legal' travel agent. In some areas, smugglers have been found to run travel agencies as a cover for their smuggling operations.<sup>199</sup> The role of travel agents appears to be particularly significant for migrant smuggling by air. Travel agents may blend regular travelers with smuggled migrants to disguise the crime.<sup>200</sup> In other cases, smugglers may genuinely consider their travel businesses to be legal, and they may see themselves as providers of humanitarian services, helping people to flee and reach safety.<sup>201</sup>

## 4. THE NUMBER OF MIGRANTS SMUGGLED - NOT RECORDED, AND DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE

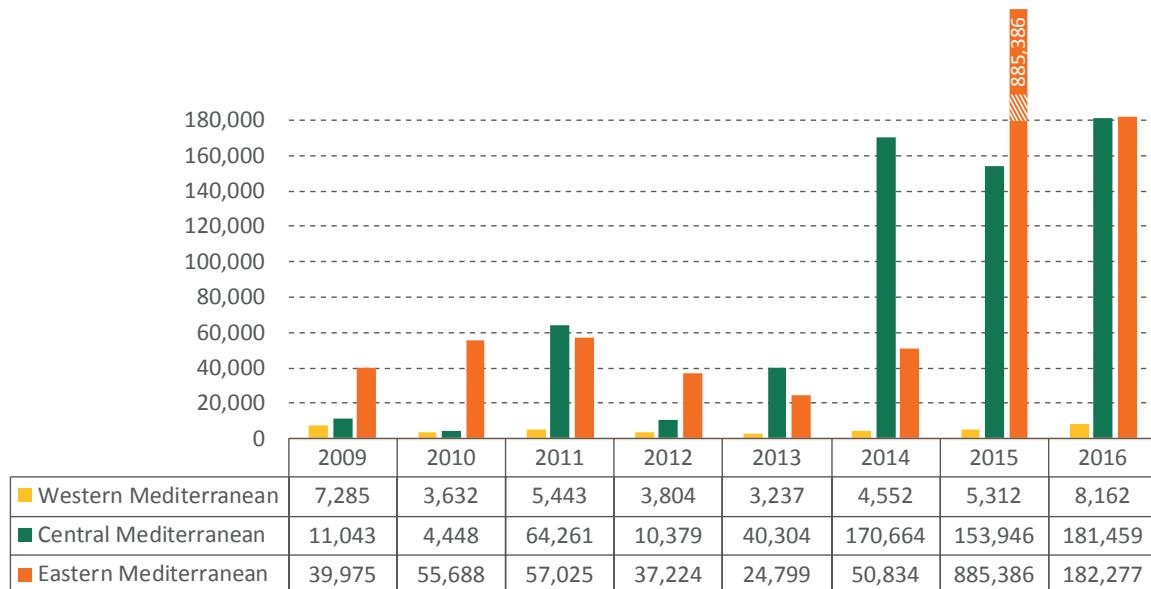
Measuring an illegal phenomenon is always a difficult exercise. National authorities normally record only those criminal events that come to the attention of the criminal justice system. Social research methods, such as population surveys, can be used to measure certain criminal activities beyond what is officially detected.

For the offence of migrant smuggling, national authorities may record the number and profile of offenders (smugglers) but do not generally record the number of migrants smuggled. In relation to migrants, official statistics normally record clandestine and irregular entries officially detected at borders or inland. But these data usually do not specify how many of the irregular entries were facilitated by a smuggler.

The numbers of irregular entries officially recorded, however, can serve as a proxy for the number of smuggled migrants if there is evidence that the vast majority of those crossing the border irregularly make use of smuggling services and are detected by the authorities. This is the case for some smuggled migrants along certain routes, but not always.

On certain routes, smuggled migrants try to avoid detec-

**FIG. 22: Detections of illegal border crossings\* along the three Mediterranean routes, 2009-2016**



\*As defined by Frontex. Many proceed to lodge asylum applications.

Source: Frontex/ Spanish Ministry of Interior

tion and are not counted in the official records of irregular entries. In other cases, official records of irregular entries may include migrants that did not make use of smuggler services to cross the borders.

Some circumstances help to understand if certain indicators can be used as a proxy to estimate the number of smuggled migrants. Irregular entries related to journeys that are long or dangerous such as sea crossings or involve harsh environmental conditions such as deserts or mountains are likely to approximate the number of smuggled migrants, as these crossing require specialized services. The use of fraudulent travel documents in border crossings is an indicator that migrants have used smuggling services. Also, in some cases corruption could be used as an indicator of smuggling when it is large-scale and involves senior officials.

In general, there is no single source that can determine the scale of migrant smuggling. It can only be assessed by triangulating different available information. Smuggling of migrants is also very dynamic and at a certain point in time it is only possible to depict a snapshot of the smuggling situation in that specific period.

There is no general rule as to what information to use to estimate the magnitude of the migrant smuggling crime. Each route can be assessed based on the information available, and the type of smuggling operations being carried

out along the route. Given the current status of knowledge, for many of the known smuggling routes, it is simply not possible to generate a reliable estimate of the magnitude of the smuggling activity.

#### 4.1 Smuggling of migrants into Europe

Officially detected illegal border crossings is a good proxy indicator to estimate the size of the Mediterranean flows because irregular border crossings by sea are likely to require facilitation by smugglers.<sup>202</sup>

In 2015, an exceptionally large number of smuggled migrants – more than 880,000 - were recorded along the Eastern Mediterranean route. In 2016, about 180,000 entries were recorded along this route. The numbers recorded along the Central Mediterranean route ranged between 154,000 and 182,000 for the 2014-2016 period.

Arrivals along the Western Mediterranean route to Spain, including those directed to the Canary Islands, have ranged between 5,000 and 10,000 migrants and refugees per year since the beginning of this decade.<sup>r</sup>

Overall, it appears that about 370,000 migrants were

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r These numbers do not include the smuggling activity via land to the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla. It cannot be estimated how many of the irregular migrants who cross the borders to these cities make use of a smuggler and how many irregular migrants are undetected.

smuggled by sea into the European Union in 2016. Based on these figures, a conservative estimate of the smuggling business along the three smuggling routes for the year 2016 ranges between US\$320 million and US\$550 million.<sup>s</sup>

It is more difficult to assess the magnitude of migrant smuggling along the EU land borders. The number of detections of irregular entries is very low (1,350 detected in 2016 through the EU Eastern borders), which would seem to indicate that these smuggling flows are limited, compared to the sea smuggling routes. However, it appears that smuggled migrants making use of these land routes avoid detection, and thus these figures only represent a small share of the number of migrants smuggled into the EU across these borders. In addition, it is unclear how many of these irregular entries are facilitated by smugglers. Similar considerations are to be made regarding smuggling into the European Union from the countries of the Western Balkans. In 2016, about 10,000 citizens of countries in the Western Balkans were detected crossing European Union borders irregularly, and in this case, it is not possible to estimate how many passed through and avoided detection, and how many were smuggled.

Migrants are also smuggled to major airports in Europe using fraudulent documents. While this method does require smuggler activity, many migrants who are smuggled are probably going undetected. About 4,400 people were detected at EU airports with false travel documents in 2016. It is not possible to estimate how many others managed to cross the border and avoid detection, and thus, how large the total smuggling business behind this smuggling flow is.

## 4.2 Smuggling of migrants across African borders

Many of those smuggled along the Central and Western Mediterranean routes into the European Union were first smuggled into North Africa from other parts of the African continent. In this regard, the two most relevant smuggling routes are those from the Horn of Africa and from

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<sup>s</sup> According to some conservative estimates, the smuggling fee to cross to Italy from Libya fluctuates between US\$700 and \$1,000 per migrant (International Organization for Migration, *IOM Monitors Italy Arrivals During Busy Smuggling Week in Mediterranean*, online briefing, February 2015). In 2016, the smuggling activity along this route would range between US\$127 million and 181.5 million. In the same year, the passage along the Eastern Mediterranean route involved smuggling fees between US\$1,000 and 2,000. For 2016, the revenues for smugglers along this route could range between US\$182 million and 364 million. In 2016, the fee recorded to reach the Spanish mainland shores ranged around US\$1,000. For this route, the smugglers' revenues could range around US\$8 million.

West Africa to North Africa. Not all migrants arriving in North Africa continue their journey to Europe; on the contrary, many remain in North Africa.

Various estimates for the years 2014 and 2015 suggest that the number of migrants smuggled within the Horn of Africa, and from there to Sudan, may be more than 100,000 per year.<sup>203</sup> It is unclear how many of them continue their journey to Libya or Egypt. In 2014 and in 2015, the number of migrants and refugees that arrived in Europe from the Horn of Africa ranged between 40,000 and 50,000 per year. Therefore, it appears that a large segment of those moving from the Horn of Africa may settle for some time along the route or in North Africa.

The smuggling flow along this route seems to have decreased drastically due to increasing obstacles and unrest along key passages. The number of migrants passing from Sudan to Libya through the southern border district of Kufra (Libya), seems to have decreased from 10,000-12,000 per month to a few hundred per month since 2013.<sup>204</sup> Recent European figures confirm the reduction. The number of smuggled migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa and Sudan arriving in Europe has decreased from above 60,000 in 2015, to 37,500 in 2016 and less than 10,000 recorded in the first half of 2017.<sup>205</sup>

Depending on the point of departure, citizenship and smuggling method, smuggling fees to reach different parts of the Horn of Africa and from here to Sudan, reportedly range between US\$200 to a few thousands. Smuggling fees to cover the journey from Khartoum to Libya or Egypt range around US\$1,500.<sup>206</sup> Smuggling income for smuggling within the Horn of Africa, and from there to North Africa could range between US\$300 million and 500 million per year.<sup>t</sup>

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<sup>t</sup> Different field studies report smuggling fees ranging around US\$250-500 from Somaliland to Ethiopia (International Organization for Migration MENA Regional Office and Altai Consulting, *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, June 2015: 35). This suggests that the business around this flow could range between US\$750,000 and US\$18 million. In 2016, the smuggling passage from Eritrea to Sudan or Ethiopia reportedly involved very high fees (US\$3,000-5,000), meaning that these flows may generate revenues ranging from US\$230 to 380 million (The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (2017b), *Integrated responses to human smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Europe*, May 2017: 20). The smuggling fees reported to cross from Ethiopia to Sudan range around US\$500-800. This generates revenues ranging from US\$ 9 million to US\$ 29 million only for Ethiopian migrants and refugees (International Organization for Migration MENA Regional Office and Altai Consulting, *Migration Trends Across the Mediterranean: Connecting the Dots*, June 2015: 34). The smuggling fee to cover the passage from Khartoum to the south-eastern part of Libya ranges around US\$1,500. There is no available information to estimate these smuggling flows, however 40,000 and 60,000 migrants and refugees have reached Italy from the Horn of Africa and Sudan respectively in 2014 and 2015. This means that the revenues for smugglers for this passage could be estimated at US\$60-90 million at a minimum. This

As for the land routes from West Africa to North Africa, according to field studies, in 2016, more than 330,000 individuals transited through Niger.<sup>207</sup> In 2016, IOM started tracking the movement of irregular migrants in Mali. This data suggests that about 4,000 migrants were smuggled out of Mali to North Africa every month in 2016, or 48,000 per year if the rate was constant.<sup>208</sup> These numbers suggest that in 2016 the number of migrants smuggled from West Africa to North Africa might have been around 380,000.

Some West African migrants settle in North Africa, while others continue to Europe. According to official statistics, the number of West African migrants who reached Italy via the Central Mediterranean route was 100,000 in 2016. A few thousand reached Spain along the Western Mediterranean route. Thus, as for the smuggling flow from the Horn of Africa, a large share of those leaving West Africa remain in North Africa (around 280,000 in 2016), at least for some time.

Smuggling fees change according to the final destination in North Africa. The cost for crossing into Libya from Niger ranges around US\$200-300. However, to reach the North African coasts from West Africa migrants typically pay US\$2,000-3,000. Assuming that these figures are accurate, migrant smuggling from West Africa to North Africa could generate between US\$760 million and 1.1 billion per year.

The flows towards Southern Africa – primarily South Africa - are complex and particularly difficult to estimate. These flows include some migrants who have certainly been smuggled from the Horn of Africa (reportedly in the range of some 15,000 per year)<sup>u</sup> and from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. As for the other African routes, a number of migrants who have been smuggled from the Horn of Africa towards South Africa may settle in transit countries. As a consequence, smuggled migrants recorded in South Africa represent only a portion of those moving from the Horn of Africa. Smuggling fees for land routes from the Horn of Africa to South Africa range around US\$3,000. Some migrants are also smuggled by air, which usually involves higher fees. Based on these estimates, the income from smuggling of migrants into South Africa would range around US\$45 million.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>u</sup> is a conservative figure, as it does not consider those who remained in Libya or moved to other North African countries.

<sup>v</sup> In 2009, IOM estimated that up to 20,000 Somali and Ethiopian male migrants were smuggled from the Horn of Africa to South Africa every year. Similarly, the total number of people from the Horn of Africa applying for asylum in South Africa in 2015 ranges around 15,000. These should be considered minimum estimates.

Smuggling flows from other African countries are also directed to South Africa. The number of irregular migrants from countries in Central and other Southern African countries could range around 15,000 per year.<sup>v</sup> However, a number of migrants arriving in South Africa may not apply for asylum, and migrants with certain citizenships may not be smuggled, especially those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>210</sup> The fees paid to smugglers for simply crossing the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa for citizens of neighbouring countries are around US\$50.<sup>211</sup> Overall, smuggling flows from these other African countries may produce revenues of about US\$ 500,000 per year.

Another significant smuggling route runs from the Horn of Africa to Yemen by sea. Based on a large number of field interviews, RMMS estimated a conservative figure of 275,338 migrants smuggled between 2011 and 2013 along this route.<sup>212</sup> This would account for nearly 100,000 migrants smuggled per year. The same study estimated that 73 per cent were smuggled across the Red Sea, and the remaining 27 per cent across the Arabian Sea.<sup>213</sup> In 2016, RMMS recorded 117,107 migrant and refugee arrivals in Yemen along this route, confirming the scale of this smuggling flow.<sup>214</sup>

The smuggling fees to cross the Arabian Sea range around US\$130-150 per person, whereas the Red Sea crossing costs between US\$60-200.<sup>215</sup> On the basis of these figures, the sea crossing from the Horn of Africa to Yemen may generate fees ranging between US\$9-22 million per year.<sup>w</sup>

### 4.3 Smuggling of migrants to North America

As for most other parts of the world, there is no official data concerning migrant smuggling along the northward route from Central America to Mexico and the United States of America.

Based on apprehension statistics and qualitative information, some recent studies have estimated that about 392,000 Central American migrants were smuggled to Mexico and onwards to the United States in 2014, and 377,000 in 2015. Only 11 per cent managed to reach their final destination in the United States, while most

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<sup>v</sup> Number of new applications for asylum per year in South Africa according to UNHCR.

<sup>w</sup> This should be intended as a conservative estimate. It does not take into account the revenues for smugglers made from smuggling across land borders from Ethiopia and Somalia to the departure points at the coasts. It is unclear how many of these migrants use the services of a smuggler to reach the points of departure for the sea crossing.

(56 per cent) were intercepted and recorded by United States border authorities, and 33 per cent were detected and recorded by the Mexican authorities.<sup>216</sup> The number of smuggled Central American migrants seems to have increased over the last few years; reaching a peak in 2014.

This trend is to some extent reflected in official statistics from the United States, as well as from Mexican data. In Mexico, the total number of detections involving Central American migrants increased from 61,000 in 2010 to 132,000 in 2015 and 151,000 in 2016. In 2016, the number of Central Americans decreased, and at the same time, the number of detected migrants from Caribbean countries increased.<sup>217</sup>

Studies indicate that the smuggling fees from Central America to the United States are approximately US\$7,000 per person.<sup>218</sup> As a consequence, the business around the smuggling of Central American migrants to Mexico and from there to the United States, may range around US\$2 billion per year.<sup>x</sup>

To generate a rough estimate of the number of Mexican citizens smuggled into the United States across the land border, the detection rate calculated for Central Americans intercepted by United States law enforcement authorities can be applied to Mexican migrants attempting to cross the same border. There is no reason to believe that Mexicans are more or less likely to be detected than Central American irregular migrants. Using this approach, it is estimated that about 376,000 (2014) and 300,000 (2015) Mexican migrants were smuggled or attempted to be smuggled into the United States. Considering that they all paid a smuggling fee of around US\$5,000, the smuggling activity would generate incomes ranging around US\$ 1.9 billion per year during these two years.<sup>y</sup>

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x According to the estimates, one third of those Central American migrants and refugees are smuggled into Mexico but are intercepted by the Mexican authorities and do not manage to get to the United States borders. It is assumed that they do not pay the entire fee to enter the United States, but only the fee to get into Mexico. This results in about 130,000 migrants paying around US\$2,000, for a total of US\$260 million in 2014. Those who manage to get to the US, even if intercepted by the US border authorities should range around 260,000 migrants paying the entire fee (US\$7,000) resulting in about US\$1.82 billion.

y Differently from Central Americans, the Mexican authorities do not apprehend Mexican citizens. This means the detection rate recorded for Central Americans, 89 per cent (56 by US authorities and 33 by Mexican authorities) will be reduced and estimated to 85 per cent for the Mexican citizens. The US authorities detected and recorded about 350,000 Mexican irregular migrants in 2014 and 270,000 in 2015. According to field studies, almost all the Mexicans attempting to cross the US-Mexican borders irregularly are using the services of a smuggler. According to the Mexican Migration Project latest household surveys (2014, 2015 and 2016) the share is ranging around 94 per cent. It should be noted that, based on these surveys, the Mexican Migration Project estimated the probability of interception to be about 20 per cent. If this rate were applied, the number of smuggled

Other smuggled migrants are also detected at the southern land border of the United States. Applying the same detection rate used for Central Americans, it appears that about 14,000-18,000 migrants from the Caribbean were smuggled into Mexico and, from there, were smuggled or attempted to be smuggled to the United States every year (in the years 2014 and 2015). The revenues from this smuggling activity could range around US\$ 100 million to 120 million per year.<sup>z</sup>

In addition, it is estimated that some 20,000 migrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East were smuggled into Mexico and, from there, were smuggled or attempted to be smuggled to the United States every year from the southern border (in the years 2014 and 2015). The estimated income generated from this smuggling activity could range around US\$300 million per year.<sup>aa</sup> For the same years, it could be estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 South American migrants were smuggled annually into Mexico and, from there, attempted to be smuggled to the United States across the southern border. This flow may generate revenues of about US\$105 million and 140 million per year.<sup>ab</sup>

Including all the routes described above, smuggling into Mexico and the United States of America involve more than 800,000 smuggled migrants per year, with a business that – according to these conservative estimates - is estimated at around US\$4 billion per year.

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migrants and the smuggling business would result in much higher estimates. This has to be considered a conservative estimate. (<http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu/results/008apprehension-en.aspx>).

z About 10,000 migrants from countries in the Caribbean were apprehended at the US south-west border in 2014, and 8,000 in 2015. Applying the same detection rate used for Central American migrants, these represent about 56 per cent of those who were smuggled into Mexico to reach the US. There is no information about the smuggling fees along this route. It can be assumed that to enter Mexico and from there to the United States, these migrants and refugees pay, at a minimum, a fee similar to Central American migrants smuggled to the US, around US\$7,000.

aa About 12,000 migrants and refugees from Asia, Africa and the Middle East were apprehended by the US authorities in 2014, and 10,000 in 2015. As calculated for the other nationalities, these figures represent about 56 per cent of those who were smuggled into Mexico to reach the US. Smuggling fees to reach the US for Asian migrants range around US\$15,000.

ab About 12,000 migrants and refugees from South America were apprehended by the US authorities in 2014, and 8,000 in 2015. Also here, it is estimated that these apprehensions represent about 56 per cent of those who were smuggled into Mexico to reach the US. There is no information about the smuggling fees along this route. It can be assumed that to enter Mexico and from there to the United States, these migrants and refugees pay, at a minimum, a fee similar to Central American migrants smuggled to the US, around US\$7,000.

## 4.4 Smuggling of migrants within and out of Asia

Estimates on the magnitude of migrant smuggling from the countries in the Mekong subregion to Thailand were produced by UNODC in 2013, in reference to the year 2010. According to these estimates, more than 660,000 irregular migrants enter Thailand each year from neighbouring countries and, based on field research, more than 80 per cent of them use the assistance of smugglers. This indicates that about 550,000 migrants are smuggled from these countries into Thailand each year. Different migrants typically pay different smuggling fees and, based on the same study, in 2010, about US\$192 million was generated by migrant smuggling from these three countries into Thailand.<sup>219</sup>

Another lucrative smuggling route leads migrants and refugees from South-West Asia to Turkey. Some of these migrants continue their journey towards Western Europe along the Eastern Mediterranean route and some settle in Turkey. The route is used to smuggle South-West Asians, mainly migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to a lesser extent Iraq. Some are already part of the total estimated number of migrants smuggled into Europe along the Eastern Mediterranean route. However, the smuggling fees for the legs of the journey from origin countries to Turkey were not considered so a separate estimation is needed to understand the total value of the smuggling business in the region.

Among those who arrived in Greece from Turkey in 2016, more than 44,000 were Afghan citizens.<sup>220</sup> According to field surveys,<sup>221</sup> it appears that the vast majority of Afghans smuggled into Europe are smuggled along the route into Turkey all the way from Afghanistan and to a lesser extent from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Considering that about 1 per cent of Afghans who arrived in Greece had been living in Turkey it is reasonable to estimate that about 43,500 Afghans were smuggled into Turkey en route to Greece in 2016.

Those who reached Turkey but did not manage to continue to Greece should also be added to these numbers. These could be estimated at least in the range of 36,000 for the year 2016.<sup>ac</sup> Adding up those who were registered

in Greece and those registered in Turkey, at least 80,000 Afghans were smuggled into Turkey in 2016. This is a conservative estimate as it is likely that some Afghan migrants and refugees may have decided not to apply for asylum in one of these two countries.

Considering the most conservative figures, the fee for the whole land journey from Afghanistan to Turkey ranges around US\$ 2,500.<sup>ad</sup> Similar fees can be assumed for the (at least) 13,700 Pakistani migrants who followed the same smuggling route.<sup>ae</sup> According to the available literature, irregular migrants and refugees from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq are likely to recruit a smuggler to enter Turkey. It is estimated that at least 52,500 Iraqis and 16,200 Iranians were smuggled to Turkey in 2016; some to stay there, some to move to Europe.<sup>af</sup> It is conservatively estimated that, in 2016 about 162,000 migrants and refugees were smuggled along the South-West Asian land route to Turkey. This smuggling activity generated fees of, at least, US\$300 million.

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is a conservative estimate as it is likely some Afghan migrants and refugees may have decided not to apply for asylum in one of these two countries.

ad Estimates of smuggling fees vary from US\$4,000 (Majidi, N. and Danziger, R., 'Afghanistan', in McAuliffe, M. and Laczko, F. (eds.), *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: a global review of the emerging evidence base*, International Organization for Migration, pp. 161-186, 2016: 169) to US\$10,000 (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Migrant Smuggling in Asia: Current Trends and Related Challenges*, UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, April 2015: 34-35). Considering the sea passage Turkey – Greece would cost about US\$1,500, a minimal fee of US\$2,500 to be smuggled from Afghanistan to Turkey can be estimated. The business around smuggling of migrants from Afghanistan to Turkey would generate income around US\$612 million for 2016. Considering a conservative figure of US\$4,000 to get to Greece, and considering that only the sea passage Turkey – Greece would cost about US\$1,500, the rest is paid to cover the South-West Asia land smuggling route. The business generated by smuggling Afghan citizens to Turkey via land route may have ranged around US\$200 million in 2016.

ae According to field studies the smuggling fee for the land journey from Pakistan to Greece is around US\$4,000 (Raghavan, R. and Jayasuriya, D, *People smuggling field insights report – Pakistan*, Red Elephant Research, 2016.). Considering that, according to the Greek authorities, about 13,460 Pakistani migrants and refugees arrived in Greece in 2016, the vast majority of them smuggled and officially recorded, and the few who applied for asylum in Turkey in 2016 (about 200 in six months) the business around the smuggling flow from Pakistan to Turkey may have been worth around US\$34 million in 2016.

af According to the Greek authorities, about 28,500 Iraqis and more than 6,170 Iranians arrived in the Greek islands via Turkey in 2016. As for the Afghans, on the basis of the asylum applications recorded during the first six months of 2016, it could be estimated that about 24,000 Iraqis and about 10,000 Iranians have been smuggled to Turkey and remained there in the course of 2016. It is calculated that Iraqis pay a fee of US\$500, while Iranians may pay US\$2,500 to get to Turkey. In 2016, the business around the smuggling flow from Iraq to Turkey may have been worth around US\$26.2 million, and from the Islamic Republic of Iran to Turkey around US\$40.5 million.

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ac In 2015, following the EU-Turkey agreement, the government of Turkey increased law enforcement operations to limit the flow to Greece. It is reasonable to think that Afghan migrants, once in Turkey, had no better option than applying for asylum there. According to UNHCR statistics, more than 18,000 Afghans made new applications for asylum only during the first six months of 2016, resulting in about 36,000 Afghans applying for asylum in Turkey in 2016. This

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## CHAPTER II REGIONAL OVERVIEWS

### PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN AFRICA

Migrant smuggling has been documented along at least five major and several smaller routes in Africa. The first three major routes originate from the same subregion, namely the Horn of Africa. Movements within that subregion are mainly irregular as there are limited options for regular movement.<sup>1</sup> Smugglers facilitate many of these irregular movements. The northward route connects the Horn of Africa via land to North Africa. Upon arrival in North Africa, some of the migrants smuggled along this route continue to Europe along the Central Mediterranean route. The eastward route connects the Horn of Africa to Yemen, crossing the Red Sea or the Arabian Sea. Many of these migrants are then smuggled north to Saudi Arabia or further afield. The southward route heads primarily overland to Southern Africa.

There are also sizable migrant smuggling routes from West and Central Africa to South Africa and neighbouring countries, and from West Africa to North Africa. While many of the latter migrants move seasonally or stay in North Africa, some also join the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. There are also some smaller, though still substantial flows of migrant smuggling in Africa. For example, migrants are smuggled by sea from Madagascar and the Comoros to the French island of Mayotte, in the Indian Ocean. Moreover, migrant smuggling by air – for example, from South Asia via various African airports to Europe, Australia or the United States of America – has also been documented.

In the last few years, smuggling from the Horn of Africa towards Southern Africa appears to have declined somewhat. Smuggling along the eastward route to Yemen is at a high level, though trends started to decline in late 2016. Flows from the Horn of Africa towards North Africa were particularly large in 2015 but have been declining since then.

The available information for many of these flows is scattered and anecdotal, and there is very little specific migrant smuggling data. Smugglers seem to operate at most borders along the overland African routes. Migrants and refugees resort to their services for a number of reasons, including border restrictions, misinformation about available legal migration pathways, and the hardships of the journey. Migrant smuggling organizations operating in

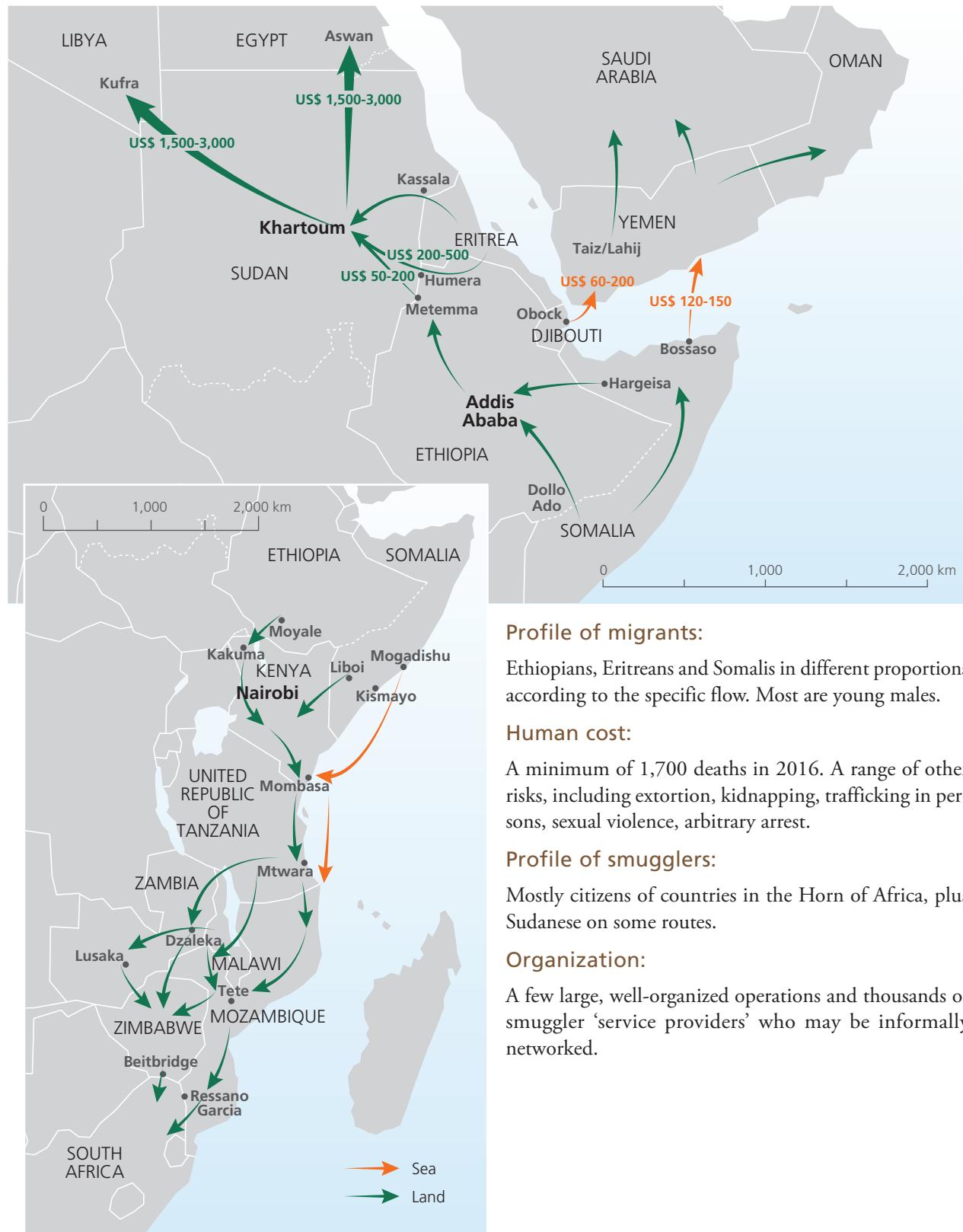
Africa range from highly structured networks with several contact points along the route to local smugglers living in border areas.

The year 2015 saw a large outflow of migrants and refugees along the northward route from the Horn of Africa to North Africa. The numbers of citizens of countries in the Horn of Africa arriving in Europe on the Central Mediterranean route decreased in 2016. Arrivals in Egypt, however, appear to be high, with the trend in the number of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa increasing.

With regard to the eastward route, arrivals in Yemen were record high in 2016, with some 117,000 arrivals.<sup>2</sup> The high level appears to be continuing into 2017. Uniquely, this route also has a significant flow moving in the opposite direction, from Yemen into the Horn of Africa.

The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the migration routes heading to Southern Africa is even more difficult to estimate. Migrants and refugees are certainly smuggled from the Horn of Africa and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa to South Africa. The number of newly arrived asylum seekers in South Africa has declined sharply since 2010, but not all migrants apply for asylum, and some migrants and refugees may not be smuggled. A recent estimate of the number of irregular arrivals from the Horn of Africa in South Africa is 13,400-14,050 persons per year, most of whom are smuggled at least for some parts of the journey.<sup>3</sup>

## THE HORN OF AFRICA



### Profile of migrants:

Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis in different proportions according to the specific flow. Most are young males.

### Human cost:

A minimum of 1,700 deaths in 2016. A range of other risks, including extortion, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest.

### Profile of smugglers:

Mostly citizens of countries in the Horn of Africa, plus Sudanese on some routes.

### Organization:

A few large, well-organized operations and thousands of smuggler ‘service providers’ who may be informally networked.

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

## The northward route: from the Horn of Africa to North Africa

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The northward route departs from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, passes through Khartoum, Sudan and arrives in Libya or Egypt. Most migrants from the Horn of Africa choose the land route via Addis Ababa to Khartoum, but some also travel via Nairobi and South Sudan.<sup>4</sup> Large cities along this route play the role of major smuggling hubs. The area around Metemma, on the border between Ethiopia and Sudan, is a hub where many migrants make arrangements for travel to Khartoum, or even all the way to Italy.<sup>5</sup> Once they have arrived in North Africa, many migrants and refugees continue their journeys along the Central Mediterranean route.

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the northward route

The number of migrants who were smuggled from the Horn of Africa to North Africa (and then to Europe) was large in 2015, but decreased in 2016. Frontex reported that more than 50,000 migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa were smuggled to Europe via the Central Mediterranean route in 2015. This decreased to less than 30,000 in 2016.<sup>6</sup>

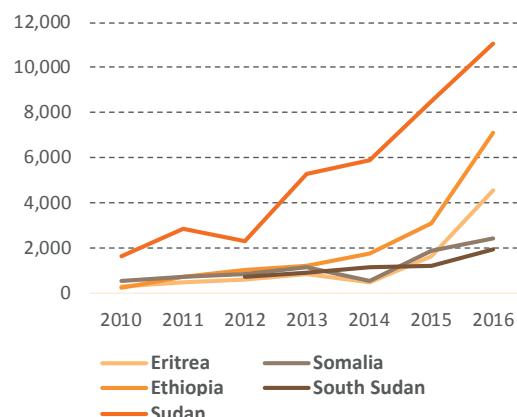
Looking more specifically at the countries concerned, the available information is scattered and in some cases dated. Much of the information is published by UNHCR, which may focus on specific populations such as refugees and asylum seekers. This means that the estimates represent the minimum size of migrant smuggling flows.

For the Eritrea-Sudan crossing, a minimum of 1,350 people per month crossed the border near Kassala from Eritrea to Sudan and registered with UNHCR in 2015.<sup>7</sup> This border crossing is generally facilitated by smugglers, although a few also attempt the passage on their own.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to assess the dimension of the smuggling flow from Eritrea to Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> Virtually all Eritreans migrating irregularly to Ethiopia reportedly do so with the assistance of smugglers.<sup>10</sup> Flows of Eritreans, or persons claiming to be Eritreans, might have decreased, as suggested by the substantially declining trend for such arrivals in Italy in 2016 and 2017.<sup>11</sup>

In 2013, UNHCR estimated that between 18,000 and 36,000 Ethiopian migrants and refugees crossed into Sudan through Metemma.<sup>12</sup> Many Ethiopians legally cross the border into Sudan with a temporary visa and engage

**FIG. 23: Number of newly registered asylum seekers in Egypt from countries in the broader Horn of Africa region, 2010-2016**



Source: UNHCR.

migrant smugglers only in Khartoum to facilitate the onward journey.<sup>13</sup>

In Egypt, the total number of refugees, asylum seekers and returned refugees has remained largely constant at some 250,000-260,000 over the 2013-2016 period.<sup>14</sup> Most are refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic. But UNHCR statistics suggest an increased flow of citizens of countries in the broader Horn of Africa region, particularly Sudan, in recent years. Although there are no data about migrant smuggling to Egypt, the available information about travel arrangements across the Sahara suggest that almost all asylum seekers from those countries have their entire journey or part of it facilitated by smugglers.<sup>15</sup>

Libya was an important destination and transit country for smuggled migrants from the Horn of Africa, but recently, this flow has drastically diminished. Before the deterioration of the security situation in Kufra district in Libya in 2012, the Kufra governor estimated the flows from Sudan into the district at 10,000-12,000 people per month, whereas in 2013, a significant reduction of the flow was recorded and only 300-1,000 migrants were estimated to enter Libya from Sudan per month.<sup>16</sup> Although many of these arrivals may not apply for asylum, data on asylum applications in Libya also reflect the decreasing flow from countries in the Horn of Africa into Libya. The number of new asylum seekers in Libya from these countries peaked in 2013 at almost 4,000, mainly Eritreans (or people claiming to be Eritreans) and Somalis. These applications then decreased sharply, and in 2016, the only significant figures were some 430 new asylum applications by Sudanese citizens.<sup>17</sup>

## The profile of the smuggled migrants

The mixed migration flow<sup>a</sup> departing from the Horn of Africa and heading northward mainly involves Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis. Along the way, people from Sudan and South Sudan also join the flow. Once they arrive in North Africa, many apply for international protection. Excluding Syrians – who mainly travel along other routes - Sudanese, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis appear to be among the main citizenships of asylum seekers registered with UNHCR in Egypt and Libya.<sup>18</sup>

The vast majority of migrants moving from the Horn of Africa are males between the ages of 20 and 35.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, several sources attest to a growing presence of unaccompanied minors, especially Eritrean and Ethiopian.<sup>20</sup>

Some Palestinians are also smuggled to Egypt; many of them through underground tunnels. Once in Egypt, they join the flow heading to Europe along the Central Mediterranean route.<sup>21</sup>

## The smugglers' profile and organization

Migrant smugglers operating along this route seem to include a few highly organized groups, having the capacity to manage sophisticated transnational smuggling operations, and thousands of low-level and community actors providing smuggling services locally.<sup>22</sup> Some of the high-level smuggling networks from the Horn of Africa seem to have increased their influence along the smuggling route in recent years.<sup>23</sup>

In the eastern part of Sudan, migrant smuggling is dominated by the Rashaida, a group of Bedouin camel pastoralists, although other local groups also appear to have become increasingly active in the business in the past few years.<sup>24</sup> In North Africa, recent research has indicated that smuggling has become increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few well-organized criminal networks with substantial logistical and financial capacities.<sup>25</sup>

## The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Eritreans smuggled to Sudan cross the border clandestinely on foot or in a pick-up truck.<sup>26</sup> There is evidence of smugglers providing false Ethiopian passports to Eritreans and Somalis.<sup>27</sup> In late 2016, smuggling fees for the route between Asmara and Sudan or Ethiopia ranged between US\$3,000 and 5,000; almost as much as for the rest of the journey to Europe.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Understood to be complex population movements including refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants and other migrants.

Ethiopians can generally obtain a one-month visa upon arrival to Sudan, and therefore do not need smugglers to enter the country.<sup>29</sup> However, Eritreans and Somalis do need visas and may therefore engage the services of smugglers. When facilitated by smugglers, the journey from Ethiopia to Sudan takes between three and six days.<sup>30</sup> As of late 2016 the smuggling fee for the journey from Ethiopia to Khartoum via Metemma in north-western Ethiopia ranged between US\$50 and 200, whereas the journey via Humera, a border town further north, cost between US\$200 and 500, depending on the final destination.<sup>31</sup>

Once in Sudan, most migrants continue to Khartoum. They are taken to Khartoum by bus, preferably at night, wearing traditional Sudanese clothes in order not to be detected. The trip from Kassala in far eastern Sudan to Khartoum reportedly costs between US\$100 and 300.<sup>32</sup>

Sudanese smugglers operating in Khartoum or in Omdurman, just across the river from Khartoum, typically smuggle migrants towards Libya. Close to the border, they are handed over to other smugglers who drive them across the border. In 2016, the price for the journey from Khartoum to Libya or Egypt ranged between US\$1,500 and 3,000.<sup>33</sup>

Some migrants also head from Khartoum to Aswan, Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Use of counterfeit Sudanese passports reportedly occurs as it is easier for Sudanese citizens to enter Egypt. From Aswan, migrants contact smugglers in order to be transported to a 'safe house' (temporary accommodation managed by smugglers) near Alexandria, from where they can board boats towards Italy.<sup>35</sup> According to Frontex, in 2017, the migrant smuggling flow from the Horn of Africa to Europe via Egypt virtually stopped.<sup>36</sup>

Along this route, there are numerous checkpoints and smugglers frequently offer bribes in order to pass through.<sup>37</sup>

## The human cost

Smugglers make migrants travel between the Horn of Africa and North Africa in dangerous circumstances. There have been several cases of migrants falling off the vehicles they are travelling in, resulting in deaths or severe injuries. Some migrants also die from starvation or dehydration. Passages offered by smugglers are never entirely safe; sometimes the vehicle breaks down, runs out of fuel or the driver gets lost.<sup>38</sup> According to the IOM Missing Migrant Project, in 2016, 230 migrants lost their lives or went missing moving across the Horn of Africa (this includes all routes affecting the Horn of Africa) and 1,279 in North Africa.<sup>39</sup>

Exploitation and coercion of migrants, sometimes resulting in trafficking in persons, is also widely documented along the northward route. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is commonly reported.<sup>40</sup> Migrants are at risk of kidnapping for ransom; particularly in the remote areas along this route.<sup>41</sup> Some research has found that such kidnapping is particularly prevalent in North Africa; often with Somali victims.<sup>42</sup>

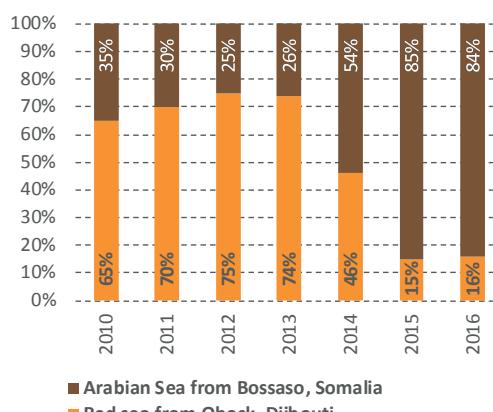
In Libya, migrants may be subject to arbitrary arrest and detention at the hands of the authorities under Government control as well as militia groups.<sup>43</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has described the conditions for detained irregular migrants as ‘horrific,’ with detainees held in unsanitary conditions without sufficient food and drink, and often having to endure torture, exploitation and extortion, among other violations. Many women migrants have reportedly been raped and suffered other sexual violence by smugglers and guards.<sup>44</sup>

### The eastward route: from the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula

#### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Located within relative proximity to Somalia and Ethiopia, Yemen is a pathway to the affluent countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council.<sup>45</sup> Obock in Djibouti and Bossaso in the Puntland area of Somalia are key coastal departure points for the sea crossing to Yemen. Until 2013, Djibouti was the major transit country, but this changed in 2014, when the route across the Arabian sea departing from Bossaso became the most widely used among migrants from the Horn of Africa heading to Yemen.<sup>46</sup> For migrants head-

**FIG. 24: Shares of recorded migrant arrivals by sea in Yemen, by route, 2010-2016**



Source: RMMS.

ing north through Somalia, the capital Mogadishu, as well as the large towns of Beledweyne and Galkayo are important centers. For Ethiopians, the border towns just across the border into Somalia and en route to Bossaso, serve as hubs where smugglers with connections to smuggling networks can be readily found.<sup>47</sup>

In Yemen, most migrants – having departed from Bossaso – arrive in the governorate of Hadramout, in the eastern part of the country. Many also arrive in the neighbouring Shabwa governorate. Those departing from Obock arrive in either Taiz or Lahji governorates in Yemen’s south-west.<sup>48</sup>

#### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the eastward route

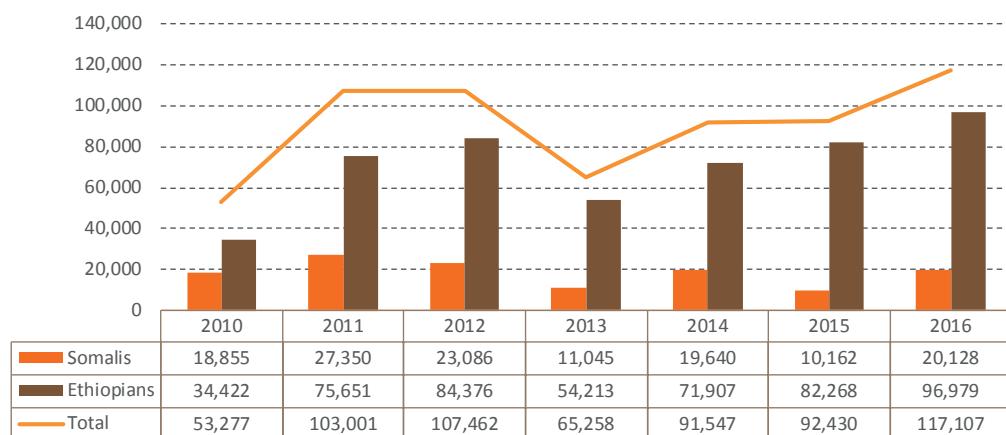
In 2016, 117,107 migrants and refugees arrived in Yemen along the eastward route departing from the Horn of Africa, the highest number recorded since monitoring started in 2006.<sup>49</sup> The increase is believed to stem from a combination of factors, including the weakening of Yemen’s central government and border control mechanisms and the political instability in some origin countries.<sup>50</sup> The high level of arrivals seems to have continued in 2017, with reports that some 55,000 migrants left the Horn of Africa for Yemen between January and early August.<sup>51</sup>

As for most sea crossings, virtually all migrants and refugees crossing the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea on their way to the Arabian Peninsula have their journey facilitated by smugglers. One recent study found that the scale and scope of smuggling along this route has increased since 2015. The overland travel through Somalia used to be undertaken by migrants independently, but this has changed, and migrants use smuggling services also for this part of their journey.<sup>52</sup> Travel from the arrival points along Yemen’s shores to Saudi Arabia often involves smuggling as well.<sup>53</sup>

Uniquely, there is also a considerable reverse flow between these countries. There were reportedly more than 114,000 arrivals in Yemen from the Horn of Africa, and nearly 87,000 arrivals in the opposite direction over the March 2015 – April 2016 period, perhaps due to the escalation of conflict in Yemen.<sup>54</sup> Most arrived in Djibouti and Somalia. In Djibouti, more than half of the approximately 35,000 arrivals were citizens of Yemen, and most of the rest, from Djibouti. Of the 32,000 arrivals in Somalia, nearly all were Somalis.<sup>55</sup>

#### The profile of the smuggled migrants

The migration flow from the Horn of Africa to Yemen is composed of Ethiopians and Somalis. Since 2009, Ethio-

**FIG. 25:** Number of arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, 2010-2016

Source: RMMS and UNHCR.

pians have been the main group travelling along this route and their presence has increased over the years. In 2016, Ethiopians constituted 83 per cent of arrivals from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, and Somalis 17 per cent.<sup>56</sup>

Most of the people moving towards Yemen are men; often young, single and with little education. Recent research has estimated the share of female migrants at some 20-30 per cent of the total.<sup>57</sup> While most of the Ethiopian migrants come from poor families with very limited access to disposable income, among Somalis, the picture is more mixed, with some poor migrants but also some that are better off.<sup>58</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, a sizeable number of undocumented migrants are Yemeni. In Oman, however, the number of Yemeni arrivals is much lower.

#### The smugglers' profile and organization

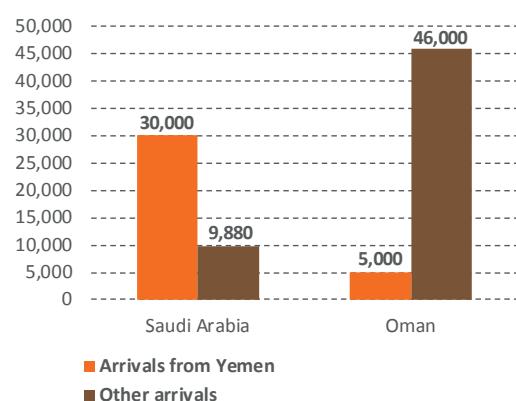
Smugglers operating along this route generally share the same citizenship (and often ethnicity) of their clients, but Somali smugglers are the only ones who can provide a safe overland passage to the port city of Bossaso. At Bossaso port, most of the boatmen are Somali.<sup>59</sup> Migrant smuggling is also the main economic activity for the communities living around the key departure points, with locals escorting Ethiopian and Somali migrants as they cross from one country into the other.<sup>60</sup>

In different areas along this route, some members of the local authorities, including embassy personnel, border guards and police, seem to be complicit in irregular migration and migrant smuggling and may accept bribes to facilitate the movement of people across borders, according to research carried out a few years back.<sup>61</sup> Some villagers in the coastal area along the Red Sea also appear to

be involved in migrant smuggling, sometimes in collusion with the army.<sup>62</sup>

#### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

For Ethiopians – many of the migrants along this route – the first link in the smuggling process are often smugglers who reside in their neighbourhood. These smugglers – referred to as ‘brokers’ – often play crucial roles in creating aspirations and generating demand for their services through deception and manipulation.<sup>63</sup> Research conducted in southern Ethiopia in 2008 found a strong correlation between the desire to migrate and the presence of smugglers in an area. In communities without smuggler ‘brokers’, people generally had little aspiration to migrate, as opposed to the situation in areas where ‘brokers’ were present.<sup>64</sup>

**FIG. 26:** Number of undocumented migrant arrivals from Yemen in Saudi Arabia and Oman and other arrivals, 2016

Source: UNHCR.

Most Ethiopians undertake much of their travel by foot,<sup>65</sup> but those who can afford smuggling services are transported from the border areas to Obock in containers and trucks. A wide network of small-scale smugglers organize transport from different parts of Ethiopia to the country's borders, including the Ethiopia-Djibouti border.<sup>66</sup> Somalis heading to Djibouti are more likely to travel by vehicle.<sup>67</sup> Some head to Ali Addeh refugee camp, where migrant smugglers reportedly operate.<sup>68</sup>

With regard to the Bossaso route, Somalis who arrive there are generally directed to one of the several teashops where smugglers can be found to arrange for their onward trip to Yemen.<sup>69</sup> The boatmen often have connections with Yemeni smugglers who operate along the coast. The boats' crews usually call the members of the smuggling network in Yemen some time before arrival so that the smugglers arrive on time to receive them.<sup>70</sup>

There is a perception among migrants that the Arabian Sea crossing from Bossaso is cheaper than the journey from Obock across the Red Sea. However, according to interviews with migrants and smugglers carried out in early 2017<sup>b</sup>, the average prices for the two journeys are similar, at US\$892 for a journey from Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia via Bossaso, and \$855 for the same journey via Obock. The price for only the sea journey from Bossaso appears to be quite stable, ranging from \$120-150. The price for only the sea journey from Obock, however, is far more flexible, ranging from \$60-200, with the actual price paid dependant upon the migrants' perceived economic resources. For both routes, the most expensive leg of the journey by far is that from Yemen to Saudi Arabia, at an average price of \$500-550.<sup>71</sup>

Once in Yemen, most Somalis apply for asylum, as they are recognized as refugees on a *prima facie* basis by the Yemeni government.<sup>72</sup> Most of the Ethiopian migrants, however, quickly head northwards, away from the coast. Some want to settle in Saudi Arabia, others head to other Gulf states, or even further afield.

The crossing from Yemen into Saudi Arabia is extremely difficult due to the 1,800-kilometre border fence.<sup>73</sup> Some migrants try to cross into Saudi Arabia on their own, others with the help of smugglers. The smugglers may take migrants all the way to a destination in Saudi Arabia or leave them at the border. In the first case, migrants cross

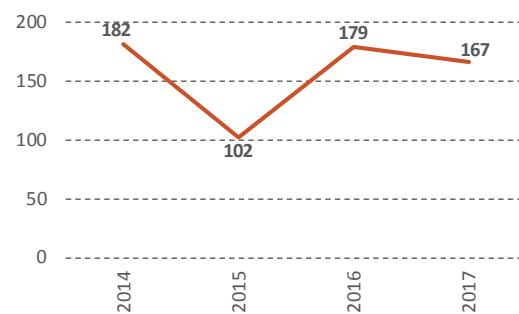
<sup>b</sup> The researchers interviewed 60 migrants in Puntland, Somalia, 60 in Djibouti and 41 in Yemen as well as 4 smugglers/traffickers in Puntland, Somalia, 4 in Djibouti and 1 in Yemen. Additionally, the interviewed more than 100 'key informants' from communities as well as local and state authorities, international organizations and NGOs.

the border by car with the smugglers, with the migrant women wearing clothes typically worn by Saudi women (abaya and niqab) to pass as locals.<sup>74</sup>

### The human cost

As for any maritime route, drowning is a constant risk for migrants smuggled across the Red Sea or the Arabian Sea. Some also die of exposure to the elements, dehydration or suffocation, if stowed below deck.<sup>75</sup> In August 2017, up to 50 smuggled migrants were deliberately drowned by smugglers off the coast of Yemen, reportedly because the smugglers saw possible coast guard officials and feared apprehension.<sup>76</sup> While the number of casualties – dramatically high in 2007, with some 1,400 fatalities<sup>77</sup> – has considerably decreased, the year-on-year trend has fluctuated. There are reasons to believe that deaths may go unreported along this route.<sup>78</sup>

**FIG. 27: Number of migrant deaths in the Horn of Africa, 2014-2017**



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

However, the sea voyage is not the only risky part of this route. Migrants smuggled across the Horn of Africa are crowded in container-trucks, sometimes resulting in cases of death by suffocation, dehydration or starvation.<sup>79</sup> During their land journey to the embarkation point, migrants may face robbery, extortion, physical and sexual assault at the hands of criminal gangs and smugglers. Upon arrival in Yemen, smuggled migrants may be kidnapped or abducted by organized criminal groups.<sup>80</sup>

### The southward route: from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa

#### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The most widely used route for irregular and smuggled migrants from the Horn of Africa travelling towards South Africa is via Kenya-the United Republic of Tanzania-Zambia-Zimbabwe and then into South Africa.<sup>81</sup> Almost all

of the migrants – regardless of route – use smugglers for at least some part of their journey.<sup>82</sup> Most migrants smuggled along the southward route intend to reach South Africa. However, the increased labour opportunities – particularly in the mining, manufacturing and agricultural sectors – in other parts of Southern Africa, including Zambia, Botswana, Malawi and Mozambique, might be leading to enhanced flows towards these countries.<sup>83</sup>

Some neighborhoods in major towns along this route are home to many smugglers, and it is possible to procure fraudulent documents there.<sup>84</sup> Smugglers make use of refugee camps, including Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya, Dzaleka transit camp in Malawi, and Tongogara camp and Nyamapanda reception centre in Zimbabwe to make contacts with migrants.<sup>85</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the southward route

According to recent estimates, 13,400-14,050 migrants from the Horn of Africa – primarily Ethiopia and Somalia – irregularly enter South Africa every year.<sup>86</sup> This represents a decline from the 2008/2009 estimate of 17,000-20,000.<sup>87</sup> Considering that some migrants stop on the way and never reach South Africa, the number of those leaving the Horn of Africa and travelling southward is probably higher. Moreover, the multitude of routes and absence of any specific crossing points where numbers can be recorded makes magnitude estimates particularly difficult.<sup>88</sup>

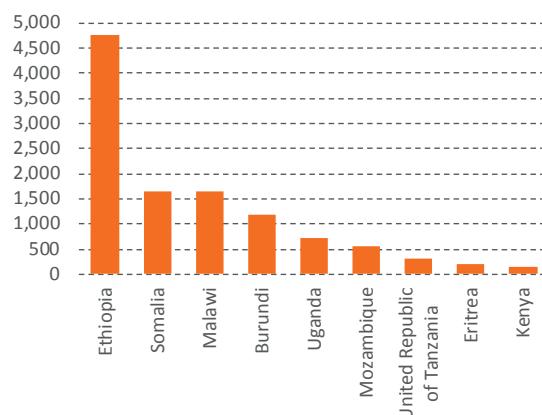
Data on asylum applications may be useful in estimating the number of smuggled migrants and refugees. Irregular migrants, most of whom are smuggled at least for part of their journey along this route, generally apply for asylum upon arrival in South Africa as that is the only way to enter the country and receive permission to stay. According to UNHCR statistics, the number of newly registered asylum seekers in South Africa decreased from some 180,000 in 2010 to some 35,000 in 2016.<sup>89</sup>

### The profile of the smuggled migrants

The vast majority (80 per cent) of the migrants smuggled along this route are Ethiopians, and the rest are mainly Somalis.<sup>90</sup> Some citizens of South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries, especially in the Great Lakes region, also join the flow, usually in Kenya or the United Republic of Tanzania.<sup>91</sup> The flow includes a significant number of refugees who move from their first country of asylum. This is often the case for Somali refugees.<sup>92</sup>

Asylum statistics also show that Ethiopia has consistently

**FIG. 28:** Number of new applications for asylum in South Africa by citizens of countries in the Horn of Africa and Eastern Africa, 2016



Source: UNHCR.

been the main country of citizenship among asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa in South Africa over the past few years, followed by Somalia. The number of Eritrean asylum seekers remains very limited, which confirms that Eritreans prefer the northward and eastward routes. In Eastern Africa, Malawi is the main country of origin of asylum-seekers in South Africa.

In addition to the African asylum seekers, some Asians also apply for asylum in South Africa. In 2016, according to UNHCR data, most were from Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. It is not known to what extent these journeys were facilitated by smugglers.

Most migrants smuggled to South Africa from the Horn of Africa are young men, between the ages of 18 and 35. The share of females might be higher among Somalis than Ethiopians.<sup>93</sup> In 2014, IOM noted that the number of unaccompanied children in mixed migration flows from the Horn of Africa appeared to be increasing.<sup>94</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Smuggling along this route tends to be informally organized in relatively loose networks involving many opportunistic individual smugglers, such as agents and drivers, who interact with each other in a flexible manner.<sup>95</sup> The chief smugglers rely on ‘smuggling managers’ to move people from one location to another. ‘Smuggling managers’ are flexible and may work with a number of smugglers carrying out specific tasks such as guiding, transporting or accommodating migrants.<sup>96</sup> There appear to be no large, multinational smuggling organizations operating along the entire route, although in some countries, organized criminals may be getting involved.<sup>97</sup>

The ‘typical’ smuggler on this route is an 18 to 40-year-old man. However, some women have also taken part in smuggling rings. Somali smugglers usually work with fellow clansmen throughout the network.<sup>98</sup> Smugglers may live in or visit home villages in Ethiopia and Somalia and/or destination areas and take charge of a specific group of migrants. They make all the arrangements with their associates along the route, and assist with various local issues that need a hands-on approach, such as paying bribes and arranging guides for the migrants.<sup>99</sup>

Smugglers operating along this route may call themselves “travel agents” and do not necessarily perceive their activities to be illegal. Sometimes they even see themselves as providers of humanitarian services, helping people in need to flee and reach a safer place.<sup>100</sup>

### **The smugglers’ modus operandi and travel arrangements**

Most smuggled migrants along this route travel by bus, truck and/or car, usually combined with stretches of walking. In a survey of nearly 400 migrants who had travelled along this route, bus was the most frequently reported means of transport; reported by 40 per cent of the respondents. Airplane travel was reported by 10 per cent, while 1 per cent stated that they had travelled by boat.<sup>101</sup>

Some have their journey facilitated by smugglers from the very beginning. There are smugglers in Ethiopia, for example, who specifically operate the southern route into Kenya.<sup>102</sup> Others make it to Nairobi alone, and search for a smuggler there to take them southward to South Africa or another country. From Kenya, migrants are smuggled to the United Republic of Tanzania, and from there, some proceed to Zambia, with the rest continuing either to Malawi or Mozambique.

Zimbabwe is the last transit country before South Africa. The vast majority of irregular and smuggled migrants enter South Africa via the Beitbridge border post. A few also cross into South Africa from Mozambique through the border town of Ressano Garcia.

The average duration of the journey from the Horn of Africa to South Africa is 48 days or just under 7 weeks.<sup>103</sup> The price for this journey seems to have increased. While in 2009, reported payments ranged between US\$1,000 and 3,000,<sup>104</sup> in 2015-2016, the average price was US\$3,372.<sup>105</sup> Based on these smuggling fees, as well as their estimate of 13,400 – 14,050 smuggled migrants per year, RMMS estimated that the illicit migrant smuggling economy on this route is worth at least US\$47 million per annum.<sup>106</sup>

### **The human cost**

There is no systematic data on deaths and disappearances along the southward route, but interviews with migrants and government officials show that casualties are not uncommon.<sup>107</sup> During the long journey from the Horn of Africa to South Africa smugglers rarely take into consideration the basic survival needs of their clients, such as food, water and shelter.<sup>108</sup> Some passages may also be more dangerous than others; for example, the crossing of Lake Malawi, where in June 2012 a boat carrying 49 migrants sank, causing the death of all passengers.<sup>109</sup>

Smuggled migrants are also exposed to violence and different types of crime along this route. For instance, smugglers rarely engaged in extortion of migrants’ family and friends in 2008-2009. This practice is now more commonly reported, often while the smugglers detain the migrant.<sup>110</sup> Forced to travel on small paths away from main roads to avoid detection, migrants smuggled into Kenya can be easily attacked and robbed by gangs.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in the border area between South Africa and Zimbabwe migrants are routinely subjected to mistreatment, muggings and rape by criminal gangs.<sup>112</sup>

In many countries along the route, many migrants are detained and held in prisons or detention centres for prolonged periods. According to research from 2015, 68 per cent of migrants on this route said that either they themselves or someone in their group had been detained or imprisoned by the police during their journey.<sup>113</sup>

### **Other migrant smuggling routes in, through or affecting the Horn of Africa**

There are reports that a new route has emerged between the Horn of Africa and Europe. Young people from Somalia are undertaking this journey via Yemen. Their route takes them from Bossaso across the Arabian Sea to the south coast of Yemen, from where they travel to the Yemeni western coast and cross the Red Sea to Sudan. From Sudan they travel overland into Libya, where they join the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. Some Ethiopians may also be using this route. The magnitude of this route is uncertain, but estimates in the range of a few hundred per month have been reported.<sup>114</sup>

Air or sea travel among migrants from the Horn of Africa who intend to reach South Africa may be increasing. Recent research showed that some Somalis were bypassing Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania on the way to South Africa in 2015, with most travelling by air or sea to Mozambique, whereas in previous years, nearly all passed through Kenya and Tanzania.<sup>115</sup>

Some migrants also use countries in Southern Africa as transit points for flying to Europe, the United States of America or Australia.<sup>116</sup> From South Africa, migrants might leave on direct flights to Europe or North America or use more convoluted routes, for example passing through Latin America, where immigration laws may be less restrictive.<sup>117</sup> A technique often used by smugglers operating on transoceanic air routes from South Africa involves the fabrication of false conferences or international workshops with official letterheads and appropriate documentation to enable numerous ‘delegates’ to fly in and then immediately slip underground. In 2009, it was reported that some educational institutions cooperated with smugglers by offering fictitious ‘scholarships’ or special study positions in destination countries.<sup>118</sup>

## FROM CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA INTO SOUTH AFRICA

### Profile of migrants:

Mainly Zimbabweans; in recent years, also many citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### Human cost:

From Zimbabwe to South Africa, the major risk is crossing the Limpopo river, where migrants regularly drown or are killed by hippos. Also risks of robbery, violence and extortion.

### Profile of smugglers:

Mostly men from South Africa or Zimbabwe. Sometimes also fellow migrants, and for longer-distance routes, such as from South Asia, also smugglers from those countries.

### Organization:

From Zimbabwe to South Africa, both ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ smugglers operate.

## CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

South Africa not only attracts migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa, but is also a major destination of mixed migration flows from Central and Southern Africa. Neighbouring countries - particularly Zimbabwe - are significant countries of origin for migrants and refugees. South Africa has long offered refuge to people fleeing violence in the Great Lakes region, as well as work opportunities to economic migrants from Central and West Africa.<sup>119</sup>

Although South Africa is the main destination of mixed migration flows from Central and Southern Africa heading south, it appears that countries such as Malawi,

Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia are increasingly being viewed as alternative destinations.<sup>120</sup> However, the limited literature about migrant smuggling in the region focuses almost exclusively on flows directed to South Africa, and there is hardly any information available on other irregular migration and migrant smuggling routes. This gap is reflected in the present chapter, which will mainly focus on smuggling of migrants to South Africa through the Zimbabwean border.

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The towns of Beitbridge and Musina, on the Zimbabwean and South African side of the border respectively, are used to cross into South Africa via Zimbabwe. These towns also serve as temporary bases for onward travel.<sup>121</sup> From Zimbabwe, migrants and refugees enter South Africa either by passing through Beitbridge border post, or by crossing the border elsewhere to avoid detection. Migrant smuggling is documented along both routes.<sup>122</sup>

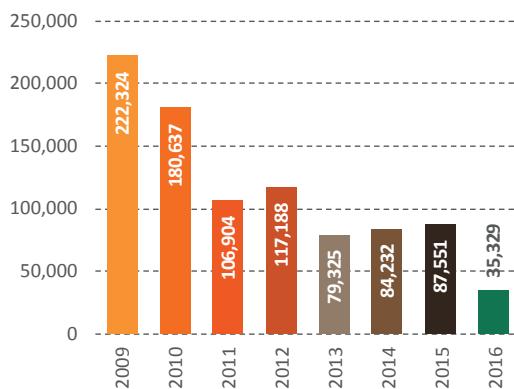
Migrants could regularly enter South Africa through Beitbridge border post by submitting an application for asylum at the border. But few choose this option, and the number of migrants and refugees who enter South Africa away from the official crossing is very high. One possible explanation is that the presence of security officials at the border post acts as a deterrent, especially for people escaping political persecution. Another is that migrants simply do not know that they could enter South Africa from the official border post by expressing their wish to apply for asylum, and smugglers may prefer not to inform them about this option.<sup>123</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling in Central and Southern Africa

The scant available literature only provides occasional estimates of the smuggling flow into South Africa through the Zimbabwean border. According to a survey conducted by the Forced Migration Studies Programme at the University of the Witwatersrand in 2007-2008, for instance, the vast majority (76 per cent) of those who entered South Africa through a land border did so through the Zimbabwe-South Africa border, and 22 per cent of those relied on smugglers.<sup>124</sup>

Data on asylum applications may provide a rough indication of the size and composition of this flow. According to UNHCR data, in 2016, more than 35,000 people applied for asylum in South Africa, which is a considerable decrease from the peak year of 2009, when more than 200,000 asylum applications were lodged.

**FIG. 29:** Trend in the number of new applications for asylum in South Africa, 2009-2016



Source: UNHCR.

### The profile of the smuggled migrants

Out of the more than 35,000 applications for asylum registered in South Africa in 2016, Zimbabwe (7,964) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5,293) were the two most frequent origin countries. Zimbabwean nationals comprise nearly all asylum seekers from Southern Africa. Citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have constituted the biggest group of asylum seekers from Central Africa over the past few years.

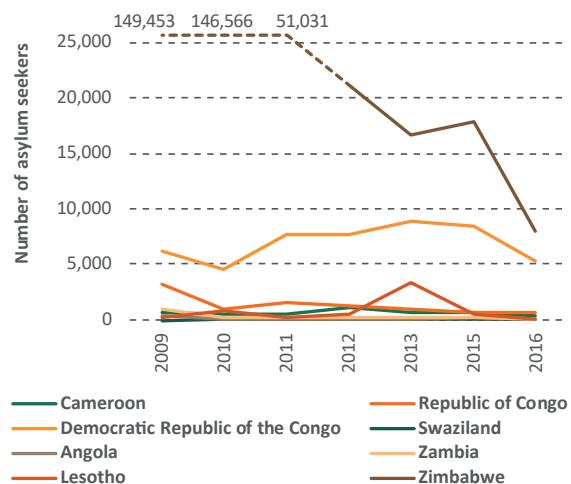
There is scant information regarding the age and gender of smuggled migrants in this region. Migrant populations from the Democratic Republic of the Congo tend to comprise more women, children and elderly people - often travelling in family units - than migrant groups from the Horn of Africa. There is also evidence suggesting that unaccompanied minors are undertaking this journey.<sup>125</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Research from 2008-2009 showed that smuggling organizations operating along the routes to South Africa often include a tight and trust-based core around which loose and flexible relations develop. Professional smugglers constitute the core of the smuggling networks. They are usually men from South Africa or Zimbabwe who have been living in the border area for several years. Professional smugglers hire employees to deal directly with clients, sometimes contract services of amateurs, buy cars to transport migrants and refugees and arrange for permits for their clients.<sup>126</sup>

Amateur smugglers are generally Zimbabwean and some are themselves undocumented.<sup>127</sup> These smugglers usually provide transportation from Beitbridge to Musina. Some also offer transportation to Johannesburg through ad hoc

**FIG. 30:** Number of asylum seekers in South Africa from the main countries of origin in Central and Southern Africa, 2009-2016



Source: UNHCR

arrangements with transport operators. Depending on the service offered, prices vary between US\$10 and 50 per person. Amateurs appear to be more likely to use coercive means such as threats of violence than 'professional' smugglers.<sup>128</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Lack of information about South Africa's asylum and immigration policies, as well as rumours spread by smugglers, encourage migrants and refugees to resort to the services of smugglers and pay to start the asylum procedure.<sup>129</sup> Asylum seekers could legally enter South Africa and file an application for asylum at the border, but few people know about this option. More than two thirds of the asylum seekers interviewed at refugee reception offices in South Africa in 2008-2009 were unaware of this procedure when they left their countries of origin.<sup>130</sup>

As far as Zimbabwean migrants are concerned, legal pathways to South Africa may in principle be available, but they may not be accessible because of the costs associated with the need to travel to large cities to obtain documentation. Many Zimbabwean migrants enter South Africa irregularly; often with the help of smugglers.<sup>131</sup>

It appears that most Congolese migrants and refugees do not use smugglers, or if they do, they use them only to be smuggled from Zimbabwe into South Africa. Congolese generally travel on foot on their own, and frequently use commercial transportation such as buses and minibuses. They transit through a combination of the countries of Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda, the United Republic of

Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe on their way to South Africa.<sup>132</sup>

Undocumented migrants may also travel with so-called *malayitsha*, taxi drivers operating in Beitbridge. Migrants travelling with *malayitsha* generally enter South Africa through the bush. *Malayitsha* employ individuals called *impisi* ("hyena") who help migrants to cross the Limpopo river and walk through the bush. Migrants also have to pass three lines of barbed wire and cross the fence either through pre-made cuts or using keys at the various points where there are gates.<sup>133</sup>

Most of the respondents interviewed by IOM in 2007–2008 paid either up to US\$20 or more than US\$60 for the smuggling services. Few respondents paid mid-range fees.<sup>134</sup> More recent price information is not available.

### The human cost

There is no specific data about casualties along this route. According to the IOM Missing Migrant Project, 136 migrants and refugees lost their lives along the migration routes crossing Sub-Saharan Africa between January and July of 2017, whereas in all of 2016, 92 people died.<sup>135</sup> Not all of those deaths occurred along the South Africa-Zimbabwe route.

The crossing of the Limpopo river, which separates Zimbabwe and South Africa, can be dangerous. While crossing the river, migrants occasionally drown or are killed by hippos and crocodiles. Migrants smuggled across Limpopo river are also at risk of being ambushed by criminal groups known as *guma guma* (or amaguma-guma), well-known for their methods of extortion. These groups also engage in migrant smuggling.<sup>136</sup>

## Other migrant smuggling routes in Central and Southern Africa

There is a considerable migrant smuggling flow directed towards Mayotte, an insular department and region of France located in the Indian Ocean between Mozambique and Madagascar. The key departure point is the islands of Comoros, and to a lesser extent Madagascar. Enjoying much higher standards of living and public services than the other islands of the archipelago, Mayotte attracts thousands of migrants every year, making migrant smuggling a very profitable business.

Depending on the time of year, landings happen either on the tiny island of Mtsamboro in the north, or further south on the main island. In 2010, 342 vessels were intercepted carrying a total of 7,089 migrants, for which 523 smugglers were arrested. Irregular migrants to Mayotte

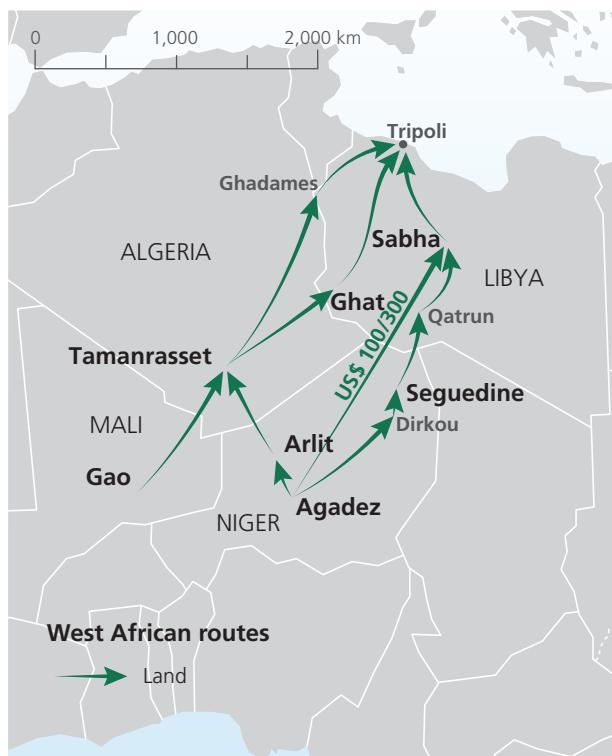
come from Comoros, but also from Madagascar, the United Republic of Tanzania and as far away as Iraq.<sup>137</sup>

The travel from Comoros to Mayotte is arranged and facilitated by local smugglers; generally fishermen, who board their clients on tiny fishing boats, known as *kwassa kwassa*. The smuggling routes heading to Mayotte are well-known for being risky. Several incidents involving multiple fatalities have been reported in recent years.<sup>138</sup>

The authorities of Madagascar report smuggling of migrants out of the country. This smuggling activity is directed mainly to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, as well as to other countries in the Middle East. This smuggling flow makes use of the Comoros, Seychelles or Mauritius as transits to the final destinations.<sup>139</sup>

Some South Asians also seek to migrate to South Africa. In 2013, IOM reported a change in the demographics of mixed migration flows passing through Mozambique, with a new trend of South Asians travelling in trucks from the United Republic of Tanzania.<sup>140</sup> South African police sources have also reported that well-established criminal networks are smuggling migrants into the country from South Asia. Often migrants from these countries are sponsored by members of their community already resident in South Africa and are compelled to work to pay off their debt.<sup>141</sup> UNHCR data on new asylum applications shows that 2015 was a peak year, with more than 15,000 applications from South Asian citizens. In 2016, however, these numbers dropped to less than half of those figures.

## FROM WEST AFRICA TO NORTH AFRICA



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Intraregional flows make up the vast majority of the migration flows in West Africa, and according to the European Commission, migration to Europe constitutes a small portion of the migration phenomenon in this region.<sup>142</sup> Most West African states<sup>c</sup> belong to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In principle, the ECOWAS region is an area of free movement. According to the 1979 Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, ECOWAS nationals should be able to move freely within the region with a valid travel document and an international health certificate.<sup>d</sup>

The free movement of persons within the ECOWAS region is sometimes rather difficult. Domestic laws in some Member States still contravene the 1979 Protocol. Moreover, limited access to ECOWAS travel documents, lack of information among citizens and risks at border crossing points may affect the implementation of the free

### Profile of migrants:

Mostly young men from most West African countries, with proportions of citizenships depending on the geographic area.

### Human cost:

At a minimum, nearly 500 deaths per year in the Sahara desert in Niger and Algeria only. The number is likely to be far higher. Significant risk of kidnapping for ransom and trafficking in persons.

### Profile of smugglers:

Once in Mali or Niger, where the irregular travel often starts, local, nomadic ethnic groups, including Tuareg and Touhou, are often involved.

### Organization:

Different smugglers in major hubs operate at different border crossings in a flexible and opportunistic manner. In Libya, it appears that much smuggling activity is well organized.

movement area.<sup>143</sup> Travel documents may be expensive or difficult to obtain, and some border crossings are still subject to informal 'taxes' by border officials. As a result, a large number of the border crossings are undertaken irregularly, simply by avoiding the official border crossing points.<sup>144</sup>

The level of irregularity involved in the travel seems to increase the further north migrants go. In northern Niger and in northern Mali, there are no commercial bus services, and the desert terrain is inhospitable. This means that migrants have to rely on local assistance for mobility. Libya, which is a destination for many West African migrants, as well as a transit point for those intending to join the Central Mediterranean route to Europe, is not an ECOWAS member and does not have bilateral visa-free agreements with any countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, most migrants going to Libya use a smuggler.<sup>145</sup>

Although most ECOWAS citizens without travel documents simply avoid official border posts, some make the journey with the assistance of smugglers. Non-ECOWAS citizens also rely on the help of smugglers to move within the region.<sup>146</sup> Migrant smuggling is also widely docu-

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c Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal and Togo.

d The full text of the Protocol is available at: <http://documentation.ecowas.int/>.

mented along the routes connecting Niger and Mali to Libya, Algeria and Morocco. Even those who cross the ECOWAS region in a regular manner often continue their journey north irregularly and with the assistance of smugglers. Given the irregular nature and hardship of the journey across the Sahara, it can be assumed that all migrants and refugees using this route rely on the services of smugglers.<sup>147</sup>

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Regardless of where in West Africa they start their journey, most migrants and refugees heading north pass through Mali and/or Niger. Travel from West Africa to the cities of Agadez, Niger and Gao, Mali is generally of a licit nature and often undertaken by commercial bus travel.<sup>148</sup>

Mali is a transit country for migrants heading to Niger or Algeria, and more recently, to Mauritania and from there, to Morocco. Gao, in north-east Mali, is an important city for migrants smuggled to Algeria and migrants continuing to Niger. From Gao, migrants are smuggled north across the Algerian border and to Tamanrasset.<sup>149</sup> Migrants and refugees passing through Algeria continue either to Libya or – to a lesser extent – to Morocco.<sup>150</sup>

Niger is a key transit point for migrants and refugees from all over West Africa travelling to North Africa en route to Europe. Agadez is the main city in Niger, where migrants can find smugglers to continue their journey to Libya or Algeria.<sup>151</sup> Recent field research by UNODC has indicated that smuggling routes are diversifying and that some routes now bypass Agadez.<sup>152</sup>

From Agadez, there are two main routes heading north. The more commonly used smuggling route, to Libya, passes through north-eastern Niger en route to Sabha. This transit point in west-central Libya is about halfway between the border with Niger and the Mediterranean coast. The journey across the Sahara desert is generally facilitated by smugglers.<sup>153</sup> The route to Algeria passes through Arlit en route to Tamanrasset in Algeria. Malians tend to take this route because they do not need a visa to enter Algeria, but due to the hardship of the journey they still rely on smugglers.<sup>154</sup>

The Algerian authorities report that there are four major routes crossing their country from south to north. Two routes depart from the borders with Mali, crossing the border in one of several small villages, departing from Nedjma, Oued Akafoua or Tin Amezi to Tamanrasset and then north to Illizi, Ouargla and El Oued to the coast. Two other routes depart from the borders with Niger to

Samaka Louni Oued Sabine, or alternatively Azerzi, or Amsel to Tamanrasset.

Although most migrants transiting through Tamanrasset head to Libya, some move northward instead. Those who intend to apply for asylum in Algeria tend to travel to Algiers, whereas the others move directly to Oujda, in Morocco, from where they could be smuggled onwards along the Western Mediterranean route.<sup>155</sup> According to the Algerian authorities, the passage from Algeria to Morocco starts from different villages along the Algerian coasts; Mostaganem, Tlemcen and others. From there, migrants from sub-Saharan Africa cross into Morocco, often to continue towards Europe.

Morocco also plays a crucial role in countering migrant smuggling along the West African routes. According to the Moroccan national authorities, along this route, the smuggling of migrants is managed by transnational networks connected with other forms of criminal organizations active in the Sahel and the Sahara. The potential demand for smuggling activity along this route is estimated at about 200,000 migrants per year by the Moroccan authorities. The smuggling corridors into Morocco are mainly along the eastern border of the country, where the authorities report having detected intense smuggling activity since the early 2000s.<sup>156</sup>

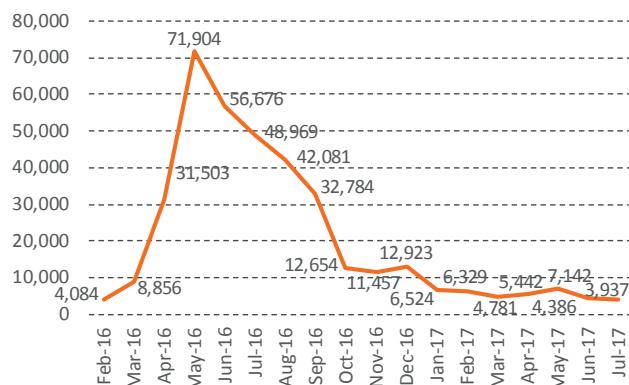
### The magnitude of migrant smuggling in West Africa

Most migrants and refugees from West Africa travel to Niger or Mali on their own, although non-ECOWAS citizens may resort to smugglers to obtain ECOWAS passports to be able to move freely within the region.<sup>157</sup> There are no available data that refer specifically to migrant smuggling along this route, but several sources provide data and estimates about the irregular migration flow transiting Niger and Mali on the way to Algeria and Libya. Considering that many of the migrants and refugees travelling northward transit through Niger or Mali and rely on smugglers to continue to North Africa, this information provides an indication of the magnitude of migrant smuggling in the region.

Since the beginning of 2016, the International Organization for Migration has been collecting data on irregular migrants transiting through Niger in its two flow monitoring points, in Arlit, from Agadez on the way to Algeria, and Séguédine, from Agadez on the way to Libya. In 2016, more than 330,000 individuals transited through Niger.<sup>158</sup>

Most migrants are smuggled towards Libya. In 2016, out of the total outgoing flow from Niger of nearly 334,000,

**FIG. 31:** Number of migrants in the outgoing flow from Niger per month, February 2016-July 2017

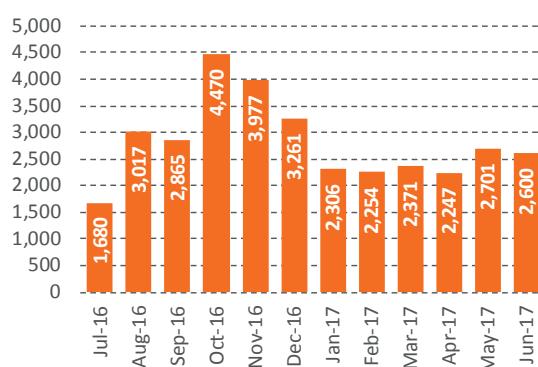


Source: IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) data.

some 89 per cent (298,000) were smuggled to Seguedine towards Libya, and the rest to Arlit, towards Algeria.<sup>159</sup> Data for the period January-July 2017 shows a significant reduction of the outbound flow, as well as a shift towards Arlit as a transit point. Of the approximately 38,500 migrants observed in these two monitoring points in the first seven months of 2017, more than 17,000 – 44 per cent – transited through Arlit.<sup>160</sup>

In the summer of 2016, IOM started tracking the movement of outgoing migrant flows in Mali. Most of these migrants continue north to Algeria, although some move on to Burkina Faso, Mauritania and/or Niger. During the year from 30 June 2016 – 30 June 2017, an average of nearly 100 migrants per day passed the Mali monitoring points. Of these, 40 per cent said they intended to go to Europe.<sup>161</sup>

**FIG. 32:** Number of migrants in the outgoing flow from Mali, July 2016-June 2017



Source: IOM.

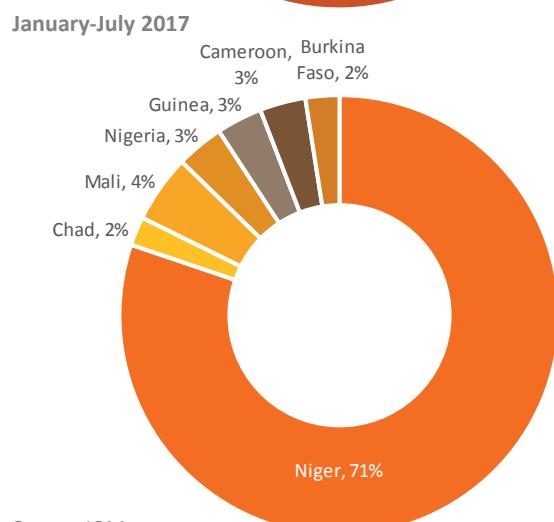
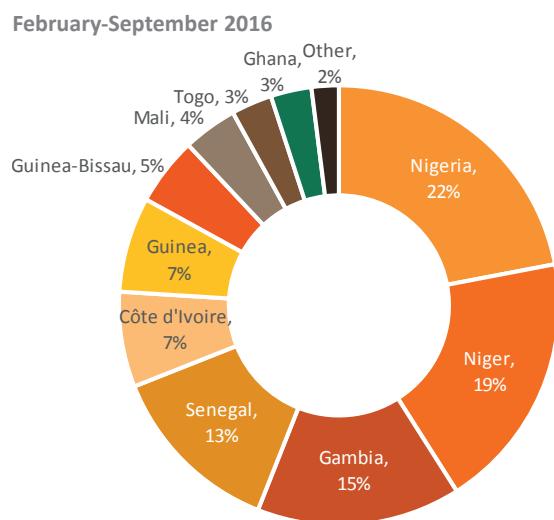
### The profile of the smuggled migrants

Most of the migrants comprising the outbound flows from Niger are West Africans. The citizenship profiles of migrants changed in 2017 in parallel with a considerable reduction in outflows, particularly through Seguedine towards Libya. This is a result of the fragmentation of routes and migrants' bypassing of Seguedine to avoid security controls. Between January and July 2017, nearly all of the migrants recorded at the Seguedine monitoring point were Nigerien.<sup>162</sup>

The citizenship profiles of outgoing flows from Mali differ from those observed in Niger. The most frequently registered citizenship of migrants travelling through Mali is Guinea, followed by Mali, Senegal and Gambia.

In the first few months of 2017 – as in previous years – the vast majority, some 96-97 per cent, of migrants on

**FIG. 33:** Shares of the main citizenships recorded in outgoing flows from Niger



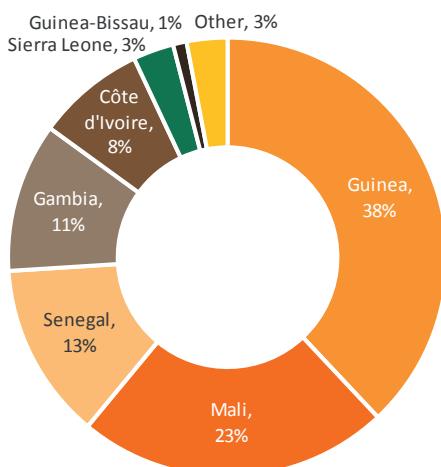
Source: IOM.

outbound routes from Niger and Mali were male.<sup>163</sup> Some of these shares are subject to considerable monthly fluctuations, however. In August 2016, for example, 20 per cent of the outgoing flows from Niger were comprised of women.<sup>164</sup> A small number of women travel from West Africa to Libya, generally making the journey to join their husbands who are already there. This has been observed among Malian and Nigerian women, in particular. Their husbands organized the journeys for them from afar, with a trusted chaperone or smuggler.<sup>165</sup>

Although most of the migrants are adults, the flows also include some minors. Between February 2016 and May 2017, some 10,500 minors were recorded in the incoming and outgoing flows in Niger. Some of these minors were unaccompanied.<sup>166</sup> In Mali, minors comprised 7 per cent of the migrants observed at IOM monitoring points between July 2016 and June 2017. Some sources noted a perceived increase in the numbers of unaccompanied minors from West Africa transiting through Niger in 2013, with children reportedly sent to Libya by their families to make money to send home. The majority of these minors had little intention to move on to Europe.<sup>167</sup>

Not all migrants travelling along the northward routes intend to settle in Libya, Morocco or Europe. Some, especially from Sahelian countries such as Mali, Niger and Chad, are seasonal migrants, moving to Libya every year just after the harvest and then returning home for the rainy season after months of work. The majority stay in rural and agricultural areas close to the border. Due to their relationships with local tribes that control the border, they can usually enter the country more easily than the typical irregular migrant.<sup>168</sup>

**FIG. 34: Shares of citizenships recorded in outgoing flows from Mali, July 2016-June 2017**



Source: IOM.

### The smugglers' profile and organization

For many migrants, the irregular part of their journey starts in Agadez, Niger, where migrant smuggling is a thriving and relatively well-organized activity. As soon as migrants get off the bus in Agadez, they are immediately approached by people offering them accommodation in the so-called 'ghettos' and onward transport to Libya.<sup>169</sup> These people, known as 'chasseurs', 'coxeurs' or 'rabatteurs' are recruiters working for 'ghetto bosses' who pay them a certain share of the profit per migrant. 'Ghetto bosses' are network leaders who own one or more ghetto compounds where migrants are housed, in addition to a number of vehicles. The travel arrangements and money transfers are made in the compounds.<sup>170</sup>

Men from Tuareg, Toubou and Arab nomadic groups are often responsible for providing transportation. They have been operating in the Sahara desert for generations, and since the tribal links extend across country borders, they can readily move people across the desert.<sup>171</sup> The Toubou have been reported to control the flows across Libya's southern border, while the Tuareg control the Algerian border region.<sup>172</sup> Most migrants choose routes through Libya rather than Algeria due to tighter border controls and more frequent arrests at the Algerian border, plus the shorter travel time to Libya.<sup>173</sup>

Frontex reported in 2016 that migrant smuggling networks in Libya are structured in strictly hierarchical criminal organizations.<sup>174</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

From Agadez, migrants heading to Libya continue to Dirkou, usually in pick-ups organized by smugglers. In Dirkou, they often have to wait a few days until they find a smuggler who can bring them further north, towards Libya.<sup>175</sup> Most migrants and refugees bypass the border post and travel through the desert to Libya with the mediation of smugglers. The further passage from Sabha to Tripoli is also facilitated by smugglers.<sup>176</sup>

With regard to smuggling prices, in 2013, the journey from Agadez to Sabha was reported to cost between US\$100 and 300.<sup>177</sup> UNODC field research in October 2017 found that prices have increased significantly, to some US\$550-850, mainly due to increased security checks and smugglers' need to avoid law enforcement and military.<sup>178</sup>

Some migrants also travel north from Agadez, to reach Algeria, usually in pick-up trucks. Most migrants cross the border clandestinely. Some then move on to the hub

of Tamanrasset, Algeria, with the help of another smuggler, where they may stay and work for some time until they have enough money to continue their journey.<sup>179</sup> From Tamanrasset to Libya all migrants resort to the services of smugglers; usually two or more for the whole route.<sup>180</sup>

With regard to the route connecting Mali to Algeria, most migrants use smugglers. Surveyed migrants in Libya have also reported that detentions take place at this particular border, with release only upon the payment of a certain amount of money.<sup>181</sup>

Along this route, some smugglers also operate a ‘black market’ for false UNHCR documents identifying holders as refugees in Algeria, as well as for forged Malian passports which are used to enter Algeria since Malians do not need a visa.<sup>182</sup> ‘Rental’ of a Malian passport costs €50 and a UNHCR document, €10. Once migrants are close to the Moroccan border, the networks will retrieve the documents so that they can be reused.<sup>183</sup>

Payments of bribes at border crossings have been reported along this route.<sup>184</sup>

### The human cost

Data from the IOM Missing Migrants Project shows that there were more than 100 reported incidents in Libya or Niger for the year 2016, with 485 people reported missing (presumed dead). However, testimonies of migrants who have journeyed through the Sahara suggest that the actual number of fatalities is much higher.<sup>185</sup>

The hardships and dangers of the overland journey across the Sahara desert are well-documented. Smuggled migrants and refugees are transported across the desert in overloaded trucks or pick-ups, often at high speed in order to minimise the risk of interception. Trucks and pick-ups may break down and migrants are frequently exposed to food and water shortages during the journey. Moreover, passengers who fall ill are reportedly abandoned by the smugglers in the desert in order not to infect the rest of the group.<sup>186</sup>

The journey of smuggled migrants across the Sahara is made even more dangerous by the presence of armed groups operating along this route. Some of these have attacked the cars of smugglers with the intention of kidnapping migrants for ransom.<sup>187</sup>

Migrant smuggling in West Africa is sometimes connected to human trafficking and the two crimes often occur along the same routes. Moreover, migrants smuggled within the region often run out of money to pay for the journey, and

this makes them vulnerable to trafficking for forced labour or sexual exploitation.<sup>188</sup>

### Other migrant smuggling routes

There are also several other routes that involve fewer migrants in, through or affecting West Africa. For example, migrant smuggling is documented between Chad and Libya; a route that might be increasingly used as routes divert away from Agadez and Niger.<sup>189</sup> Migrants and refugees usually travel from N'Djamena to Moussoro, and then onwards to Faya, by bus or by car. In Faya, they get in touch with smugglers transporting them into Qatrunk, Libya and finally to Sabha. In 2013, the magnitude of this flow was estimated at 100-200 migrants per month.<sup>190</sup>

The minor coastal route via Mauritania to Morocco is mainly used by Senegalese migrants as it is a much shorter alternative for them than crossing Mali, Niger and Algeria. Sometimes, people from Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire or Benin join as well. Migrant smuggling does not seem to be very prevalent along this route, though fake documents are reportedly used.<sup>191</sup>

There is also smuggling by air from West African countries. In 2014, the Africa-FRONTEX Intelligence Community identified new smuggling routes from West African airports to various EU destinations. Journeys were organized by smuggling networks that took care of all formalities, including travel documents, visas and flight tickets.<sup>192</sup> Migrant smuggling by air is also documented in Nigeria. These are complex operations involving several smugglers. Some are specialized in rapidly providing fraudulent Nigerian and foreign passports, whereas others take care of the visa. Yet another smuggler provides the migrant with a flight ticket to a destination country.<sup>193</sup>

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## THE AMERICAS

Northward – through Central America and Mexico to the United States



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

### Profile of migrants:

Northward: Mostly migrants from Central America and Mexico. Significant numbers of unaccompanied migrant children – mainly boys - from the main origin countries.

Southward: Migrants from the Caribbean; significant though far smaller numbers of a range of African and Asian smuggled migrants. Many smuggled women migrants.

### Human cost:

A variety of risks, including death, extortion, kidnapping, trafficking in persons, sexual violence, arbitrary arrest and incarceration, torture and environmental exposure.

### Profile of smugglers:

Throughout the continent, most smugglers operate on a small scale within their communities and abroad mainly by mobilizing personal connections. The vast majority has no criminal background. Large and violent criminal groups seem not to be involved in the actual smuggling, however benefiting from it by imposing a 'tax' on the migrants passage.

### Organization:

Thousands of small-scale, community-based smugglers who are informally networked and provide services locally,

and on occasion, partner with other smugglers or groups with contacts in other countries. On the northward route, in particular, also some larger smuggling organizations.

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN THE AMERICAS

As in most parts of the world, migrant smuggling routes in the Americas are flexible and subject to rapid and significant changes. Two predominant broad routes can nonetheless be discerned. The first is a relatively clear-cut northward route that connects flows from many locations in South and Central America, proceeds through Central American countries, leading into Mexico and finally to the United States of America (and Canada). The second is a multi-destination southward route into and within South America.

The northward route – with the United States as the final destination – tends to be travelled primarily by Central Americans and decreasing numbers of Mexican citizens.<sup>1</sup> Migrants along this route travel mostly by land and air, and to a lesser degree by sea. While in the past, individual migrants might have crossed the United States-Mexico border irregularly on their own, following the significant

build-up in security along the border, such crossings have largely disappeared. Migrants now routinely seek the assistance of smugglers.<sup>2</sup>

Southward migrant smuggling into and within South America takes place via land, air and sea. Within the framework of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) economic cooperation agreement, many South Americans can transit freely and obtain legal residence within any of the participating countries.<sup>a</sup> These privileges are not extended to newly arrived citizens from non-member countries, however. Many persons from the Caribbean enter South America irregularly; with or without facilitation.<sup>3</sup> Many of them intend to reach the United States, and use South America primarily as a transit area.<sup>b</sup> Arrivals from the Middle East, Africa and Asia have also led to the increased visibility of extra-continental<sup>c</sup> smuggled migrants.<sup>4</sup> Some of these extra-continental migrants may fly to a South American country, connect with smugglers and join the northward flow in order to reach the United States. Others stay in South America; some also apply for international protection.

While the exact number of migrants who travel irregularly across and into the Americas is unknown, it is believed that the majority travel with the assistance of smugglers at some point of their journeys. Some use smugglers along some travel segments, while others may afford to hire them for the entire trip in an attempt to avoid detection, violence and arrest. Along the northward route, it is estimated that between 200,000 and 400,000 Central American migrants are smuggled across Mexico every year en route to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

## THE NORTHWARD ROUTE: FROM CENTRAL AMERICA INTO MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Central America is the key origin area, as well as a transit area for smuggled migrants travelling northwards overland towards the United States. The South American migrants

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a As of November 2017, the countries for which free movement mechanisms are in force are Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. MERCOSUR, *Residir y Trabajar en el MERCOSUR*, available at: <http://www.mercosur.int/innovaportal/vl/6425/4/innova.front/residir-y-trabajar-en-el-mercosur>.

b In recent years, different South American countries, including Colombia, Peru and Brazil, are turning into countries of destination for smuggled migrants.

c Extra-continental smuggling refers to arrivals from outside the Americas.

who make use of this route have often travelled via Colombia or Ecuador, before reaching Central America by land (or air). There are specific areas in all major cities in Central America serving as smuggling hubs for citizens of these countries, many of whom travel from smaller communities in the interior to join others traveling from the cities.

A key smuggling hub in the journeys of Central Americans is the region along Mexico's borders with Guatemala and, to a lesser extent, Belize. Migrants contact smugglers and make arrangements for their journey in different cities on different sides of the borders.<sup>6</sup> The jungle-like settings that separate Mexico from Central America provide a porous territory that can be crossed on foot, by boat or by motor vehicle. Once in the Mexican cities of Tapachula or Tenosique in Chiapas state or Chetumal in Quintana Roo, migrants continue their way northwards through Mexico overland, often via Mexico City.

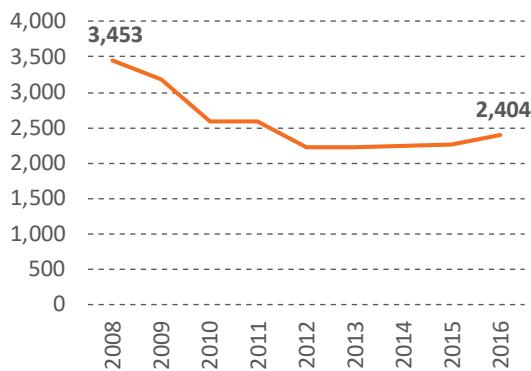
On the Mexican side of the United States - Mexico border there are multiple crossing points. The city of Tijuana – in Mexico's far north-western corner – has historically been a point of both regular and irregular crossings into the area around San Diego in California.<sup>7</sup> The area surrounding the city of Nogales in the Mexican state of Sonora (across the border from the identically named town in the state of Arizona in the United States) is known for the presence of rural communities occasionally providing support to the irregular border crossing.<sup>8</sup> The cities of Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas are also reported to be transit areas for smuggling organizations facilitating border crossings for Central and South American migrants into the United States.<sup>9</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the northward route

Migrant smuggling along the border between the United States and Mexico is an old phenomenon, and most migrants who attempted to cross this border irregularly hired smugglers as early as the 1970s. Survey data quoted in a study carried out for the US Office of Immigration Statistics in 2010 indicated that 95 per cent of first-time crossers used smugglers in 2006. Another survey quoted in the same study, covering the decade of the 2000s, showed that 80 to 93 per cent of irregular crossers used smugglers.<sup>10</sup>

One set of data that explicitly discusses migrant smuggling offenders is published by the United States Sentencing Commission, which compiles smuggling statistics for the determination of sentencing guidelines. In fiscal year 2016 (1 October 2015 – 30 September 2016), more than 2,400

**FIG. 35:** Trend in the number of sentenced migrant smuggling offenders, United States, 2008-2016\*



\* Fiscal years: FY 2016 ran from 1 October 2015-30 September 2016.  
Source: United States Sentencing Commission.

**TABLE 4:** Number of sentenced cases of migrant smuggling into the United States and number of persons smuggled per case, FY 2016

NUMBER OF SENTENCED CASES	REPORTED NUMBER OF SMUGGLED MIGRANTS PER CASE (RANGE)
1,244	1-5
958	6-24
135	25-99
65	100 or more

Source: United States Sentencing Commission.

migrant smuggling offenders<sup>d</sup> were sentenced, although the trend has declined since 2008. Most smuggling cases heard in court involved jurisdictions along the US-Mexico border. In fiscal year 2016, nearly half of the cases came from the Southern District of Texas alone, and 94 per cent of the cases were heard in courts in districts<sup>e</sup> situated along the border with Mexico.<sup>11</sup> When considering this data, it should be noted that sentenced offenders represent only a part of the total number of smugglers. Much smuggling goes undetected and many smugglers may also be charged with offences other than migrant smuggling.

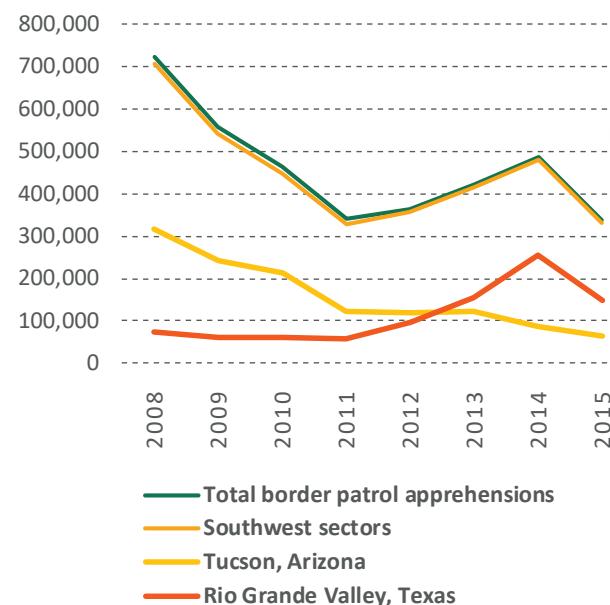
The data also contain information about the number of migrants smuggled per case, published in relatively broad

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d The offence is: 'Smuggling, transporting or harbouring an unlawful alien', with 'alien' referring to persons who are not citizens or nationals of the United States. See: <https://www.ussc.gov/research/quick-facts/alien-smuggling>.

e The top five court districts for sentencing migrant smugglers in FY 2016 were: Southern District of Texas (1,144 cases), Western District of Texas (432), District of Arizona (323), Southern District of California (273) and District of New Mexico (93).

**FIG. 36:** Trend in the number of apprehensions by the US Border Patrol: total, southwest sector and selected border crossing points, 2008-2015\*



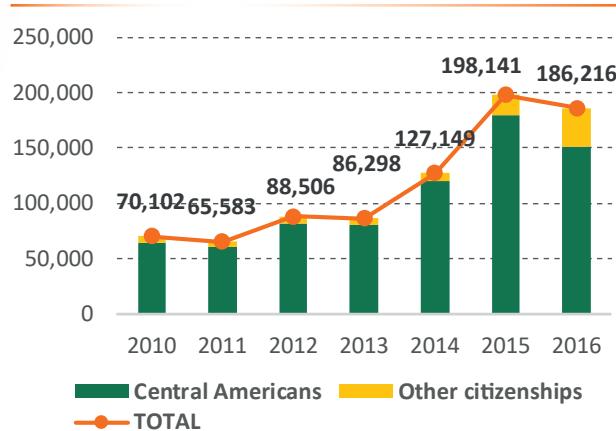
\* Fiscal years: FY 2015 ran from 1 October 2014-30 September 2015.  
Source: United States Department of Homeland Security.

ranges. Most of the cases involve a small number of smuggled migrants, although there are also some very large cases involving more than 100 migrants.

Another data set from the United States concerns irregular migrant apprehensions by the US Border Patrol. This data should be interpreted with caution as many migrants might be apprehended for reasons unrelated to migrant smuggling, and it is unknown how many of the apprehended migrants had been smuggled. The 2010s has seen an overall decline in the number of apprehensions at US borders, as well as a shift in the location of border crossings. Nowadays, most of the border crossings occur in Texas, and not in Arizona, which was the case a decade or so ago.

The authorities of Mexico also publish data on migrant detections. The number of detections by Mexican authorities has increased rapidly in recent years. The growth has been largely driven by enhanced enforcement and larger numbers of Central American migrants. The trend might be changing, however. In 2016, the number of Central Americans decreased, and at the same time, the number of detected migrants from Caribbean countries increased, in particular due to citizens of Haiti. More than 17,000 Haitian migrants were detected in Mexico in 2016 (up from fewer than 30 in 2013).

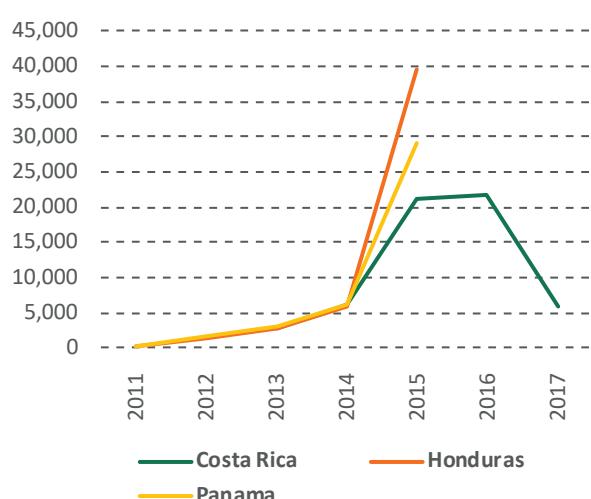
**FIG. 37:** Number of migrant detections by Mexico, 2010-2016



Source: Ministry of Interior, Mexico.

The growing risks connected to irregular crossings have also led many migrants traveling along the northward route to give up their hope of reaching the United States. Some instead settle in Mexico, where they have filed asylum claims in record numbers. Statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicate that from 2013 to 2016, yearly asylum applications in Mexico increased from 1,296 to 8,732. According to statistics from the Mexican government, by August 2017, the number of applications for asylum had almost surpassed those received in all of 2016.<sup>12</sup>

**FIG. 38:** Trend in the number of entries of irregular migrants, selected Central American countries, 2011-2017



Source for Panama and Honduras: Organization of American States/OM (citing national authorities in the countries concerned), *Irregular Migration flows within the Americas from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean*, 2016.

Source for Costa Rica: Direccion General de Migracion y Extranjeria.

Some Central American countries also collect data on irregular entries. This data do not necessarily include migrant smuggling activity, but can nonetheless give an indication of the magnitude of flows through these countries. There was a surge in the number of irregular entries in 2015; whereas for 2017, figures from Costa Rica suggest a reduction in such entries.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

Migrants from many locations across the Americas use the northward route to reach North America, and in particular, the United States. While Mexicans and Central Americans comprise the vast majority, they are also joined by some smuggled migrants from countries in South America, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

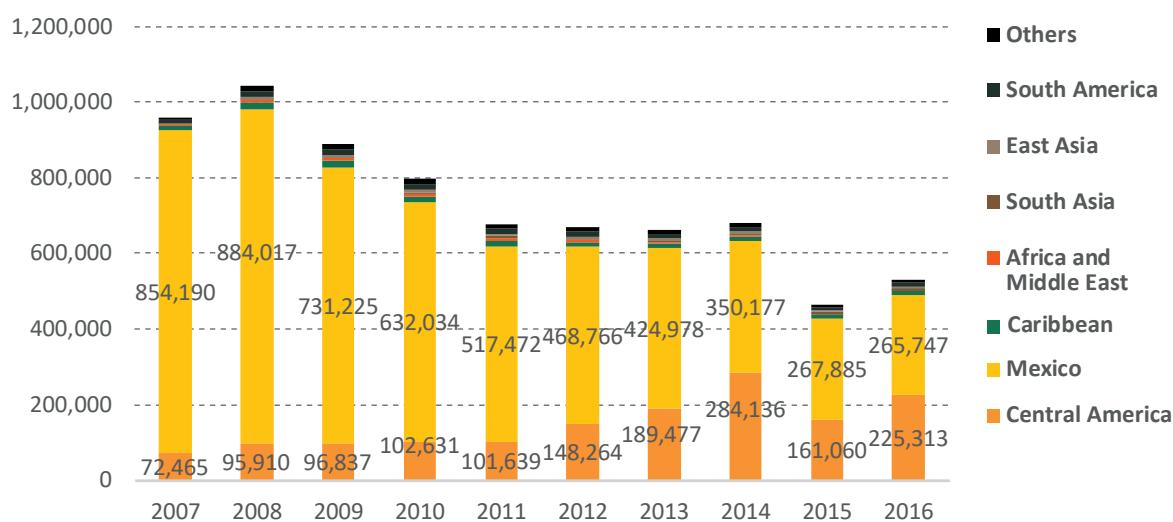
Data from the United States Department of Homeland Security<sup>13</sup> show that apprehensions by the Border Patrol take place almost exclusively along the land border between the United States and Mexico, where, as previously mentioned, the vast majority of migrants make use of smugglers. United States data on immigration enforcement actions confirm the decreasing trend of Mexicans crossing the borders irregularly, while the shares of Central Americans have increased.

Based on data from Mexico<sup>14</sup> it appears that in 2015, Mexico detected more Central American migrants than the United States. While the numbers of detections in Mexico increased until 2016, the citizenship profiles have remained broadly stable, with Guatemalans comprising the largest group, followed by Hondurans and Salvadorans. Among the detected migrants from the Caribbean, in 2016, most were citizens of Haiti.

Some Central American countries also collect statistics regarding the citizenships of irregular migrants detected upon entry into their territories. There is, however, no indication of how many of these irregular entries involved migrant smuggling. Overall, the data shows a peak in detections of citizens from the Caribbean in 2015, with numbers declining sharply in 2016. Moreover, it appears that few Haitians are transiting Central American countries. The number of detected Haitians who have irregularly entered Central American countries is far lower than in the United States and Mexico, and although Honduras detected nearly 2,300 Haitians in the first eight months of 2016, none of the other Central American countries reporting data saw similar increases.

The countries that reported the most notable increase in the detections of irregular entries by citizens of African countries were Honduras and Costa Rica. In 2014, 348

**FIG. 39:** Trend in the number of foreigners apprehended in immigration enforcement actions in the United States, total and by area of origin, 2007-2016\*

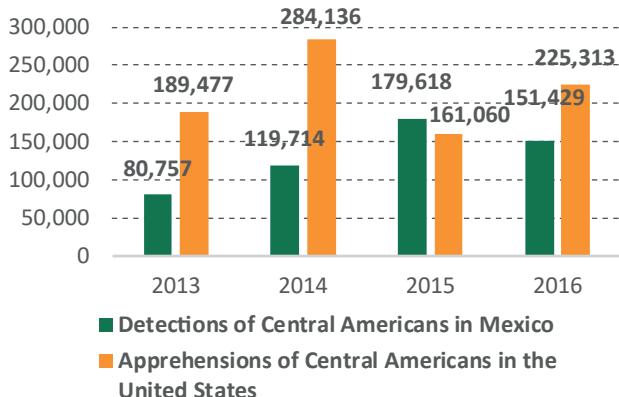


\* Fiscal years.

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

Africans entered Honduras irregularly, compared to 20,691 in 2015. Costa Rica recorded 18,000 irregular entries by African citizens in 2016. The data source notes that increases in irregular entries by Africans across several countries in 2016 involved many citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as the Congo.<sup>15</sup> Other principal African countries of origin for irregular entries in Central America in recent years are Somalia, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon and Guinea. For Asians, the most frequently reported origin countries appear to be Nepal, Bangladesh and India.<sup>16</sup>

**FIG. 40:** Number of detections of Central Americans in Mexico and apprehensions of Central Americans in the United States\*, 2013-2016



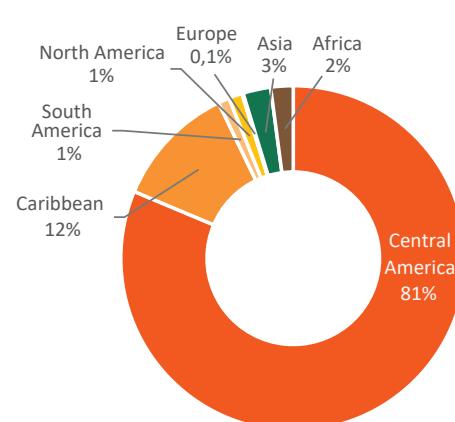
\* US data refers to fiscal years.

Source: US Department of Homeland Security; Mexico SEGOB.

Data from Costa Rica regarding entries of irregular migrants along the country's main southern land border shows that men comprise a clear majority, but the share of women has increased. In 2014, women comprised 21 per cent of all detected irregular migrants, whereas in the first seven months of 2016, the share was 26 per cent.<sup>17</sup> Surveys carried out at shelters across Mexico indicate that about three quarters of the migrants traveling along Mexico's migratory routes are male, and single, with 79 per cent aged from 18 to 40.<sup>18</sup>

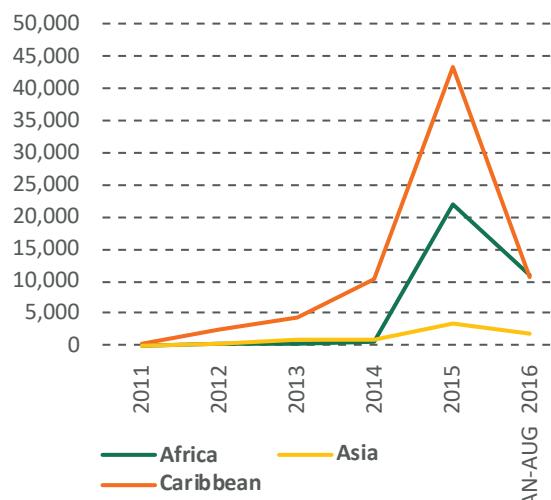
The presence of unaccompanied minors - citizens of all major origin countries considered in this route - has generated concern, although the trend seems to be decreasing.

**FIG. 41:** Detections of migrants in Mexico, by area of citizenship, 2016



Source: Mexico, SEGOB.

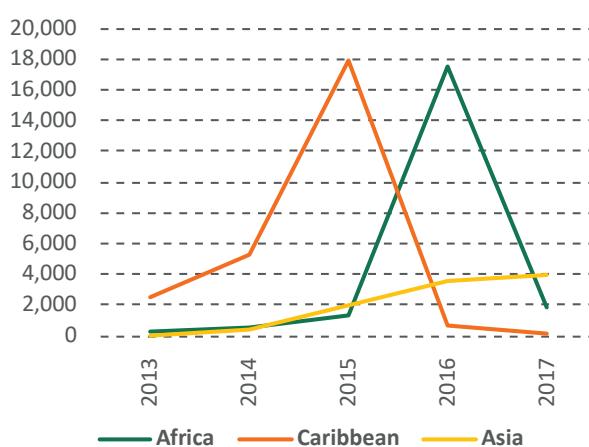
**FIG. 42: Trend in the number of detected Caribbean, African and Asian irregular migrants in Honduras and Panama, 2011 – 2016\***



\* The 2016 data is preliminary, from January until August.

Source: Organization of American States/IOM (citing national authorities in the countries concerned), *Irregular Migration flows within the Americas from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, 2016*.

**FIG. 43: Trend in the number of detected Caribbean, African and Asian irregular migrants in Costa Rica, 2013 – 2017**



Source: Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería of Costa Rica.

In fiscal year 2016, the United States Border Patrol apprehended 58,819 unaccompanied minors of different nationalities along border with Mexico. In fiscal year 2017, this decreased to 40,631.<sup>19</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Across the northward route, smugglers are commonly known as *coyotes* or *polleros*. While their organizational capabilities, methods, reliability and effectiveness vary widely, in general, smugglers – particularly along the

border between the United States and Mexico - act individually, yet in coordination with others. They perform specific tasks or provide certain services along migrants' routes for a fee or in kind payment.<sup>20</sup> Smuggling tasks are often highly specialized, with smugglers acquiring expertise in roles such as recruiters, drivers, lookouts or guides. The cooperation between different operators is often sufficient to offer not only 'a la carte' smuggling services along the migrant's route (specific legs of travel, border crossings, modes of transport, et cetera) but also entire migrant journeys from departure to final destination. For example, some migrants pay for a very short trip from one bank of the Rio Grande river to the other, while others pay for smuggling from their hometown to a final destination city in the northern United States.<sup>21</sup>

Most smugglers involved in complex operations are either known to each other by virtue of kinship or friendship, or have entered into ad hoc partnerships with larger and better resourced groups. Some are migrants or refugees themselves who have become involved in some aspect of smuggling either in the context of their own journey or because they reside along the migrant route.<sup>22</sup>

While most smugglers are men, women are also active, particularly in the provision of services such as caring for children and the elderly, preparing meals or cleaning safe houses. On both sides of the border between the United States and Mexico, some children and teenagers also participate in smuggling activities. Known in policy circles as "circuit minors," they often act as group guides or lookouts.<sup>23</sup>

The only country along this route to publish systematic statistics regarding migrant smugglers is the United States.<sup>24</sup> In fiscal year 2016, nearly two thirds (65 per cent) of the 2,404 sentenced smugglers were United States citizens. Their average age at the time of sentencing was 32, and more than half (56 per cent) had little or no prior criminal history. More than three quarters (76 per cent) of the smuggling offenders were male.

The idea that smuggling on the northward route is under the control of drug trafficking organizations in Mexico has been rejected by many experts.<sup>25</sup> However, some have argued that there is a nexus between drug trafficking and migrant smuggling.<sup>26</sup>

Interactions certainly take place as a result of the nature of these trades and the role of the border in their completion. The payment of *derecho de piso* by migrant smugglers - a 'tax' to use routes under the control of drug trafficking organizations – has been documented.<sup>27</sup> Failing to pay the

*derecho de piso* may result in segregation, torture and killing of migrants. Some of these organizations have been involved in mass executions of hundreds of migrants caught travelling along the northern route.<sup>28</sup>

Cases like the massacre in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, where the remains of 72 migrants from Central, South America and Asia were identified,<sup>29</sup> and the ensuing finding of mass graves containing what are believed to be the remains of hundreds of migrants in different parts along the northward route, are reportedly connected with the presence of these larger organized crime groups.

However, the payment of *derecho de piso* does not seem to constitute evidence of structural dependency among organizations. Some authors argue that considering it an example of convergence masks the complexity of the actors involved.<sup>30</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and the travel arrangements

Most smuggled migrants along this route come from Central America or Mexico. As a result, most of the travel involves crossing several Central American countries, plus traversing all of Mexico, before reaching the United States border. Along this route most smuggled migrants travel by land, while some may cover segments of their journeys by air. There is also evidence that on occasion, some migrants rely on sea routes connecting ports in South and Central America with Mexico and the United States.<sup>31</sup>

Central American smugglers who operate along the northward route often travel from and work in the different large cities of Central America, where they recruit migrants and organize the transport to locations on the Guatemalan side of the border with Mexico. Close to the border with Mexico, most migrants rely on smuggler 'guides' who walk them across short distances to evade controls.<sup>32</sup> According to UNODC research from 2012, smuggled migrants may even make use of zip lines across two rivers along the border between Guatemala and Mexico; the Usumacinta and the Suchiate.<sup>33</sup>

Once in Mexico, migrants often hire smugglers who guide them in their further travels. Others, traveling on their own or with limited resources, opt to stay away from traditional routes fearing encounters with law enforcement and criminal entities.<sup>34</sup> Most smuggled migrants then make their way to Mexico City, from where they split into three broad routes, depending on their intended point of entry into the United States. The first is the Gulf route, for those wanting to cross through the Rio Grande Valley and other points in eastern Texas. This appears to be the most common route nowadays. The second is the Pacific

route, for those seeking to cross into Arizona or California, and finally, the Central route for those crossing into western Texas or New Mexico.<sup>35</sup>

In the United States, there have been geographical shifts in the locations of key smuggling hubs and markets. In the 1990s, the implementation of special enforcement measures by the US Border Patrol<sup>f</sup> funnelled the flow of border crossings from the states of Texas and California into the state of Arizona, which recorded the highest numbers of migrant crossings and deaths during the decade of the 2000s.<sup>36</sup> Enforcement, the changing economic conditions of the United States and Mexico and the demographic changes in the makeup of US-bound smuggled migrants (more Central Americans for whom Texas is closer than Arizona or California) have led migrant flows to shift further east into south Texas in the 2010s.

In the state of Texas in the United States, small towns scattered along the border close to cities like Laredo, Brownsville and McAllen serve as transit after the border crossing. Migrants are often housed in these towns until the conditions for their transportation to locations within the United States are considered optimal by smugglers.<sup>37</sup>

As for most routes, smugglers establish their fees on the basis of multiple variables, ranging from enforcement levels<sup>38</sup> to points of departure and destination, the route and means of transportation selected, and even their personal connection to the migrants they transport.<sup>39</sup> Some research indicates that women are charged higher prices than men, and that age can play a role in determining the price.<sup>40</sup> Some smugglers also offer special, more expensive 'packages' to migrants that include a specific number of border crossing attempts that take into consideration the likelihood of arrest.<sup>41</sup> The terms of payment are nearly always the subject of intense negotiations.<sup>42</sup> A 2016 report cited a price range of US\$6,000-8,000 for being smuggled from northern Mexico into the United States.<sup>43</sup> According to field studies conducted among migrants returned to their origin countries, in recent years, Mexican migrants may have paid around US\$5,000 to be smuggled to the United States,<sup>44</sup> whereas Central American migrants may have paid on average US\$7,000 to be smuggled across Mexico and finally to the United States.<sup>45</sup>

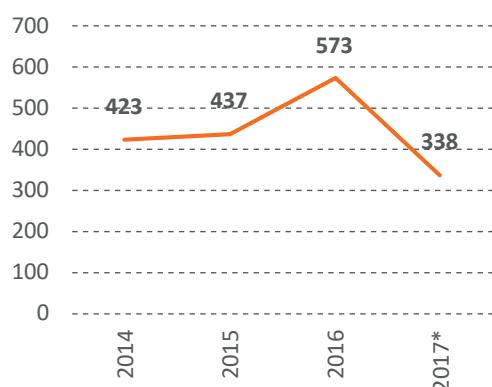


f In 1993, Operation Hold the Line in west Texas placed immigration agents right on the territorial border, which led to reductions in the number of crossing attempts in the El Paso Border Patrol sector. In 1994, Operation Gatekeeper temporarily sealed the stretch of the border between the Pacific Ocean and the San Ysidro port of entry, with the intention of pushing border crossing attempts eastward (Nevins, 2010). The impact of the shift was visible, for example, in the increasing migrant apprehensions along the Tucson sector of the Border Patrol, and in the number of migrant deaths recorded in Arizona since the late 1990s.

## The human cost

The northward route poses a number of risks for smuggled migrants. The number of fatalities is high, according to data from the IOM Missing Migrants Project. The reported figures for Central America and United States – Mexico border are minimum figures, not only because of the general risk of underreporting of migrant deaths, but also because deaths relevant to this route could be reported under Caribbean or South America in the IOM data set. 2016 appears to have been a year with particularly high numbers of fatalities; the data for 2017 up to 11 October indicate a declining trend.

**FIG. 44:** Trend in the number of reported deaths along the northward route,\*\* 2014-11 October 2017



\* 2017 data covers 1 Jan-11 Oct only.

\*\* Deaths reported to have occurred in Central America or on the United States-Mexico border. Does not include numbers of missing persons.

Source: IOM, Missing Migrants Project.

Environmental exposure –often a consequence of migrants' attempts to avoid detection, arrest, or violence –continues to be the leading cause of death among those transiting in this route.<sup>46</sup> Cases of smugglers transporting migrants in the back of commercial trucks or lorries have also been documented, sometimes with fatal consequences, such as in July 2017, when 10 migrants were found dead from heat exposure and asphyxiation in the back of a tractor-trailer in San Antonio, Texas.<sup>47</sup>

While crossing the border with smugglers constitutes an attempt on the part of migrants to increase the chances for a successful journey, this is an inherently precarious activity. While traveling along the northward route, migrants often report that smugglers fail to deliver on their promises, abandon them along the way, steal their fees, turn them over to the authorities or abuse them verbally and/or physically.<sup>48</sup> Smuggled migrants may also

encounter anti-immigrant militias, robbers, law enforcement or members of criminal groups who assault them, rob them or engage in intimidation.

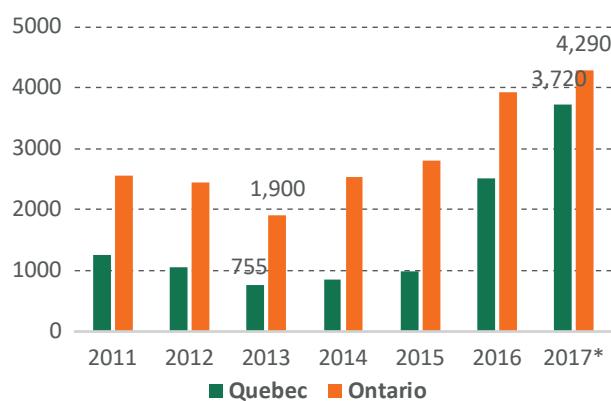
A troubling form of victimization of migrants smuggled along the northward route is the high incidence of extortion and kidnapping. As early as 2011, Mexico's National Commission for Human Rights reported that at least 198 cases involving nearly 10,000 kidnapped migrants took place between September 2008 and February 2009,<sup>49</sup> whereas in 2016, the Commission reported that there were some 3,800 cases involving nearly 4,800 victims.<sup>50</sup> This criminal practice has primarily targeted migrants from Central and South America traveling along this route, although kidnapping incidents involving migrants have been reported throughout the country.<sup>51</sup>

## Other northward migrant smuggling routes: Canada

Although migrant smuggling into Canada occurs on a smaller scale than that taking place in the United States, the country has a significant history of smuggling incidents, particularly by sea. For decades, migrants from Asia arrived in Canada on board lifeboats, freighters, cargo and cruise ships. One large event took place in August 2010, when nearly 500 Sri Lankans were smuggled to Canada aboard the MV Sun Sea.<sup>52</sup> However, data from the Canada Border Services Agency shows that most of the people arriving into the country nowadays do so by land or air.<sup>53</sup>

Specific numbers concerning smuggling into Canada are not available. The Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario – which share borders with several large states in the midwest and northeastern regions of the United States

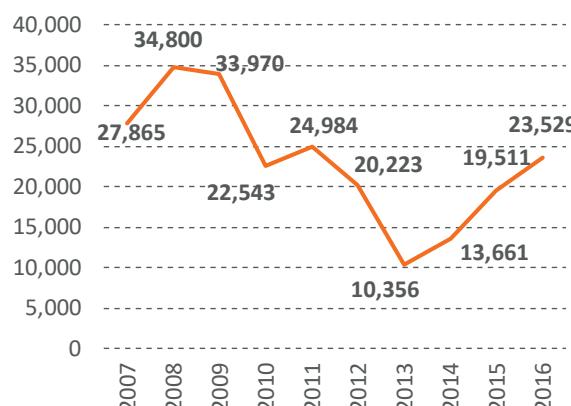
**FIG. 45:** Number of asylum claimants processed by Canada Border Services Agency offices at Ontario and Quebec land ports of entry, 2011-2017\*



\* 2017 data up to September 2017

Source: Canada Border Services Agency.

**FIG. 46: Trend in the number of asylum applications in Canada, 2007-2016**



Source: UNHCR.

– report the largest number of land arrivals registered in connection with processed claims for asylum. The numbers of processed asylum claims emanating from overland border crossings is increasing, with most of the growth due to numbers from Quebec and Ontario land ports of entry.<sup>54</sup> It is not known how many of the border crossings were facilitated by smugglers.

As for the northward route, Canadian smugglers are organized in multiple ways. Smuggling operations may be carried out by migrant and refugee communities in Canada, organized crews operating locally or local residents operating independently.

Migrant smuggling in Canada may pose serious challenges to migrants' safety. The country's cold climate, in particular, may involve significant risk for those who are accustomed to warmer conditions and often lack appropriate equipment.

## THE SOUTHWARD ROUTE: MIGRANT SMUGGLING INTO AND THROUGH SOUTH AMERICA

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The trajectories of Caribbean, Central American and extra-continental migrants into South America constitute what in this report is designated as the southward route. Within South America, the MERCOSUR regional integration arrangement has eliminated visa requirements for citizens of most countries, which obliterates the need for migrant smuggling of most South Americans.<sup>g</sup> Most of

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g As of November 2017, the participating countries are Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. MERCOSUR, *Residir y Trabajar en el MERCOSUR*, available at: <http://www.mercosur.int/innovaportal/v/6425/4/innova.front/residir-y-trabajar-en-el-mercrosur>.

the migrants smuggled into and through South America appear to be citizens of countries in the Caribbean. Some migrants are also smuggled from other continents, in particular, Africa and Asia.<sup>55</sup>

South American countries are sometimes destinations but perhaps more often transit areas for smuggled migrants heading northwards. While it is clear that some countries are more frequently traversed than others, due to, inter alia, geography, infrastructure, visa policies or a combination of these, it is difficult to single out specific routes. The information available regarding where and when migrants rely on smugglers is very limited.

Migrants from Cuba transit some parts of South America on their journeys northward to the United States.<sup>h</sup> One main route begins with a flight to Ecuador or Guyana. From there, migrants travel overland to Colombia, from where they board boats to Panama.<sup>56</sup> It is not clear how much of this travel is facilitated by smugglers.

Among Haitians, Brazil is a popular destination country. To reach Brazil, Haitians without a visa typically leave the capital Port-au-Prince by bus, traveling to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. Once there, they purchase a flight ticket to Panama, and continue from there on by plane or bus to Quito, Ecuador. From there, they travel through Peru to reach Iñapari on the border with Brazil, where they cross the border.<sup>57</sup> Some sources noted that smuggling of Haitians along land routes transiting Ecuador and Peru intensified around 2014, and that new routes via the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Argentina also started to be used for this smuggling.<sup>58</sup>

The Chilean authorities have noted that more citizens of the Dominican Republic are arriving irregularly in Chile. Those that are smuggled would usually travel first to Ecuador or Colombia, and from there, towards the northern parts of Chile overland through the Plurinational State of Bolivia or Peru. The number of deportations of Dominican citizens due to clandestine entry

••  
h Official statistics provided by the Cuban authorities report an increasing intensity of legal travel from and to Cuba over the last five years (2013-2018). During this period, more than 800,000 Cubans travelled legally abroad, most of them for the first time. 11 per cent of them established their residence abroad. In 2017, national authorities reported a 39 per cent increase in the number of travels from Cuba to the rest of the world. During the same year, about 460,000 Cuban citizens travelled to the United States; not all of them with the intention to migrate. More than 2 million Cubans residing abroad traveled to Cuba over the last five years. In 2017, a 21 per cent increase of such travel compared to the previous year was reported. These numbers show an increasing legal mobility out of and into Cuba; only a part of it for migration purposes.

increased significantly in Chile in 2015, but is still relatively low, at nearly 600.<sup>59</sup>

Undocumented Asian and African migrants who aspire to reach North America may rely on countries in Central and South America as transit points. Many of them complete often intricate routes, either on their own or with the assistance of smugglers. To reach the Americas, most migrants fly from Europe or Southern Africa, and arrive mainly in Brazil or Ecuador, sometimes transiting African, Middle Eastern or Eastern European countries. The use of false or altered travel documents in order to board flights has been reported.<sup>60</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the southward route

There is very little data concerning migrant smuggling into and within South America. Official statistics from some national authorities show, however, that irregular mixed migration flows<sup>61</sup> from Africa and Asia have been increasing in the last few years. The same is reported for irregular migration flows from the Caribbean.<sup>62</sup>

Data from the Colombian Sub-Division for Migrant Verification of Migration Colombia Unit shows a substantial increase in the number of detected entries of irregular migrants in Colombia from 2013 to 2016. It is not clear, however, how many of these entries were facilitated by migrant smugglers.

According to a study by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, authorities in border areas recognize that irregular migration takes place although there remains a lack of precise statistics.<sup>63</sup> The study notes the presence of Caribbean, African and Asian migrants in border areas. It is unknown

**FIG. 47:** Trend in the number of detected entries of irregular migrants in Colombia, 2012-2016\*



\* 2016 data only covers the period from January to August.

Source: OAS/IOM 2016 (citing data from national authorities).

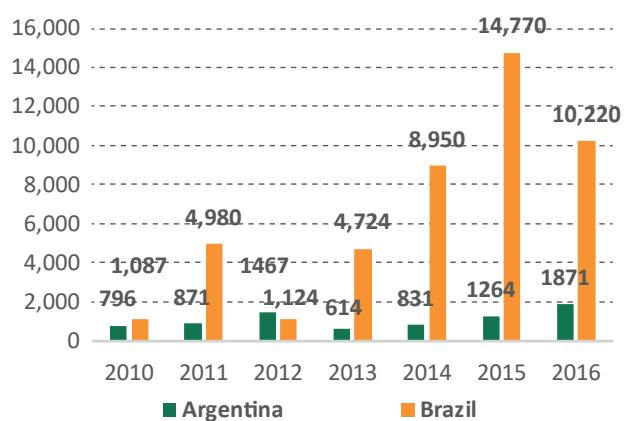
how many of these migrants have been smuggled. A reported episode involved some South Asians who had been smuggled into Brazil at the border town of Guiará, on the border with Paraguay. There had also been some cases of Haitians who had crossed the border with the assistance of 'coyotes'.<sup>64</sup> A recent study on migration from Haiti cites an estimate of 47,000 Haitians having entered Brazil irregularly between 2011 and 2015.<sup>65</sup>

Argentina has a high level of immigration.<sup>66</sup> It is also believed to be a significant destination for irregular migration, although this is difficult to demonstrate quantitatively. The number of asylum seekers in Argentina has increased moderately in recent years, although increases in Brazil have been larger. As for any statistics on asylum seekers, it is unclear how many of the applicants made use of smugglers to reach the country of application.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

While intra-regional migration has long been seen as uncontroversial as a result of MERCOSUR's agreements, the topic of extra-regional migratory flows has received

**FIG. 48:** Trend in the numbers of applications for asylum lodged in Brazil and Argentina, 2010-2016

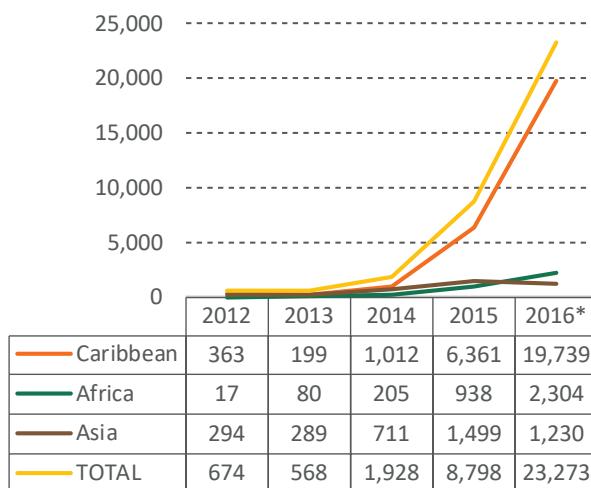


Source: UNHCR.

increased attention in recent years. For example, the Organization of American States has noted that irregular mixed migration flows in the Americas have been growing since 2010, and that there is vast ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity among those who comprise these flows.<sup>67</sup>

Data on irregular entries in Colombia illustrates that the flows are comprised mainly of people from the Caribbean. In 2016, the number of Haitian irregular entries detected in Colombia skyrocketed to nearly 15,000, from only 35

**FIG. 49:** Trend in the number of detected entries of irregular migrants in Colombia, total and by region of origin, 2012-2016\*



\* 2016 data only covers January-August.

Source: OAS and IOM, 2016 (citing data from national authorities).

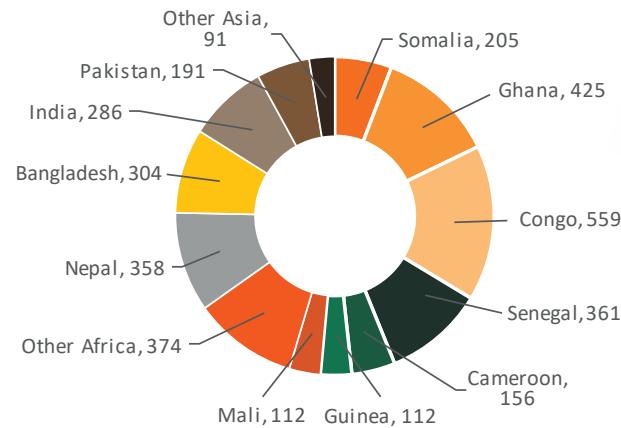
the year before. The number of irregular entries by Cubans was more than 6,000 in 2015 and nearly 5,000 during the first eight months of 2016. The number of detected irregular migrants from African and Asian countries remained relatively low, but the number of Africans surpassed that of Asians in 2016.

The Colombian data also show that there is great geographical diversity among the detected irregular migrants from outside the Americas. In the first eight months of 2016, large numbers of citizens of seven African and four Asian countries (more than 100 from each of these countries) were detected while irregularly entering Colombia. While these movements may not necessarily have involved migrant smuggling, given the large distances, it is likely that many did, at least during some part of the journey.

According to a 2013 study, between 2006-2012 in Colombia, East Asian citizens comprised the largest group of detected smuggled migrants by some distance (more than 38 per cent).<sup>68</sup> However, the more recent data on irregular entries reported above showed a marked decline among East Asian citizens in the first eight months of 2016. Although the two data sets are not directly comparable – one refers specifically to migrant smuggling, and the other to irregular entries – it does appear that the smuggling of East Asian citizens into Colombia has declined in recent years.

Statistics on the origin of asylum seekers confirm that

**FIG. 50:** Shares of citizenships among detected African and Asian irregular migrants in Colombia, January-August 2016 (n=3,504)



Source: OAS and IOM, 2016 (citing data from national authorities).

people from many parts of the world seek protection in South America. In Brazil, in particular, the numbers and citizenship variety of asylum seekers have risen considerably in recent years.

#### The smugglers' profile and organization

There is limited data regarding smugglers and how the smuggling is carried out along the southward route. Some sources indicate that smuggling involves ranging levels of complexity and organization, given the variety of destinations that migrants seek to reach. Others suggest that most movements are facilitated by local smugglers living in communities along the migrant trail who are well versed on the routes and mechanisms required for a successful journey. Men and women with whom migrants may share social or cultural ties may also be involved in the smuggling. Some smugglers may be particularly familiar with mechanisms conducive to irregular migration as a result of their own migration status.<sup>69</sup>

In South America, smugglers are known as *coyoteros* and *chilingueros*. Contrary to the case of the northward route, there are no clear indications that migrant smuggling has close links to drug trafficking. Ordinary men and women of varying ages and occupations are involved in the provision of smuggling services. The majority of those who provide services appear to be individuals working with the intention of generating supplemental income. Reports indicate that smugglers work as guides, connecting migrants with other smugglers at other locations, or transport them along segments of the route. Members of indigenous communities along the migrant trail have also been

identified as being engaged in smuggling, primarily in communities in Ecuador and Brazil.<sup>70</sup>

Smugglers and smuggled migrants often have the same citizenship; particularly when considering smugglers in senior ‘organizing’ roles. A court case from Chile is illustrative in this regard. In this case, a woman from the Dominican Republic was convicted for having led a network that smuggled more than 44 people, mostly Dominicans, to Chile. She managed a travel agency in the Dominican Republic, through which she recruited migrants and then smuggled them by air and overland to Chile, with numerous other smugglers facilitating different parts of the journey.<sup>71</sup> Despite this specific case, smugglers are typically males. Official data from the Dominican Republic indicate that among the 10 people convicted in this country for smuggling of migrants in 2017, nine were males. During the same year, 22 people were indicted for the same crime and they were all males.<sup>72</sup>

### The smugglers’ modus operandi and travel arrangements

As for other regions and routes, smugglers operating in South America make use of multiple operational methods. Some may sell or lease false or fraudulent documents including visas, passports, residence authorizations and identification cards. In 2011, individuals known as *tramitadores* were reported to be involved in the smuggling of Ecuadoreans to the United States, offering comprehensive services. They recruited migrants, made travel arrangements and obtained counterfeit visas or passports.<sup>73</sup> More recent research documents that smugglers operating in migrants’ places of origin, transporting migrants to specific destinations at the request of the latter’s families, or when approached by aspiring migrants by word of mouth.<sup>74</sup>

The use of forged documents has been reported in the region, particularly in Brazil. In 2012, the police detected a flow of Bangladeshis that entered Brazil from the Plurinational State of Bolivia, at the border town of Corumbá in Brazil’s Mato Grosso do Sul state. The smuggled migrants reportedly obtained falsified documents in Bolivia with which they managed to enter Brazil. More than 20 people were detained in this case.<sup>75</sup>

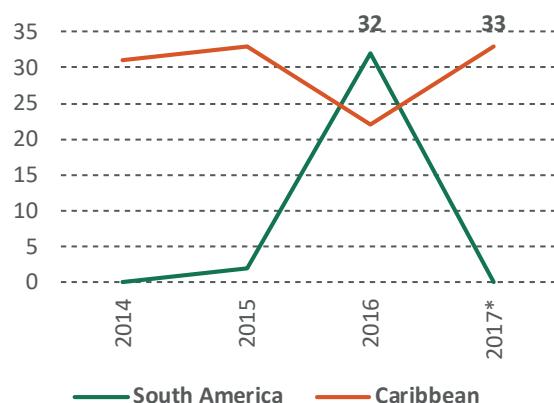
Smuggling services are financed in different ways. Some smugglers may be approached by people seeking to finance the journeys of their family members. Other trips may be financed through money lenders, who lend money at high interest rates and often demand the use of homes or land titles as collateral.<sup>76</sup> Little is known about smuggling

prices. One study reported that some South Asian smuggled migrants paid US\$3,500 to smugglers to cross the border between Paraguay and Brazil at Guaíra.<sup>77</sup> For Haitians, the price paid to smugglers for crossing Brazil from north to south - including the border crossing from Peru into the state of Acre or from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia or Peru into the state of Amazonas - could amount to \$3,000.<sup>78</sup>

### The human cost

The number of migrant fatalities in the Caribbean and South America is lower than the figures reported along many other routes. The IOM Missing Migrants Project reported that until late October 2017, 33 migrants had perished in the Caribbean, and none in South America. These figures do not include missing persons, however.

**FIG. 51: Trend in the number of migrant deaths reported in South America and the Caribbean, 2014-2017\***



\* Data coverage: 1 January – 23 October.

Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

As for other routes, migrant smuggling in South America often involves traveling under dangerous conditions. Venezuelan migrants attempting to reach countries like Colombia, Peru and Brazil or the islands of Curaçao or Bonaire may at times rely on boats piloted by fishermen not skilled in open-sea voyages, who may panic when fearing detection by the authorities and force their passengers to jump into the ocean despite being unable to swim.<sup>79</sup> The routes followed by Haitian migrants may take them through harsh and remote sections of the Amazon and the Andes. In general, the distance and conditions of clandestine migrations lead to significant levels of environmental exposure which may involve risks for the safety and wellbeing of people in transit.

It has also been reported that language barriers and the actions of organized smugglers may make some smuggled migrants more likely to encounter situations of labour exploitation. Moreover, smuggled migrants – particularly those not fluent in the local language, for example Haitians – might be tricked into paying large sums for false documents that are ultimately rejected by the authorities.<sup>80</sup>

## OTHER SMUGGLING ROUTES IN THE AMERICAS

The Caribbean island state of Trinidad and Tobago is widely viewed as a destination for both regional and extra-regional migrants, due to its relatively high level of development and available employment opportunities. It is also used as a transit point by some irregular migrants en route to Canada or the United States; some of whom stay and work for short periods to earn money for the rest of their journey.<sup>81</sup> Due to the country's small population of nearly 1.4 million,<sup>82</sup> the numbers of smuggled migrants are small in the global picture, but nonetheless illustrate the wide geographical extent of migrant smuggling.

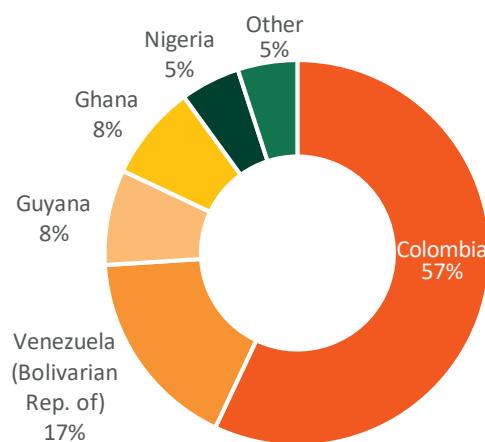
According to a 2013 study by the ACP Observatory on Migration,<sup>83</sup> most smuggling into the country relies on a combination of air and sea routes, and takes place along four main routes:

- Africa – Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) – Trinidad (by air and sea)
- Panama – Trinidad (by air)
- Colombia – Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) – Trinidad (by air and sea)
- West Africa – Brazil – Trinidad (by air)

In terms of citizenships of the smuggled migrants detected in Trinidad and Tobago between 2007 and April 2012, the majority were from Colombia. Citizens of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela also comprised a large share; perhaps due to the fact that the main island of Trinidad is located only 12 kilometres from the Venezuelan north coast. Most of the smuggled migrants were aged 20-34, with women comprising two thirds (66 percent) of the total.<sup>84</sup>

Many of those interviewed for the 2013 study perceived close linkages between the smuggling of migrants and contraband such as firearms and narcotics. The study also noted that migrant smuggling fuels the market for fraudulent documents, particularly since new arrivals need documentation to access services and employment opportunities.<sup>85</sup>

**FIG. 52: Smuggled migrants detected in Trinidad and Tobago, by citizenship, 2007-April 2012 (n=116)**



Source: Waldropt-Bonair et al, 2013 (citing national authorities).

## ENDNOTES - THE AMERICAS

- 1 United States Border Patrol (2017a), *Southwest Border Sectors: total illegal alien apprehensions by fiscal year*, statistics, 2017; Mexico, Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (2016), *Información de Migración Internacional con datos de la ENOE al tercer trimestre de 2015*, Boletín de Prensa 29/16, 28 January 2016.
- 2 Zhang, S. X. (2016), 'The United States,' in McAuliffe, M. and Laczko, F. (eds.), *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: a global review of the emerging evidence base*, International Organization for Migration, pp. 303-324, 2016, p. 318.
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## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Migrant smuggling is widely documented in South and South-West Asia, a vast and diverse region stretching from Syria and Afghanistan to Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. Several irregular migration and migrant smuggling routes depart from and cross the region. The routes departing from South Asia and from South-West Asia often converge and ultimately head to Europe, to the Gulf countries, Australia and North America.

This chapter starts by presenting the West Asian route, leading migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan to Turkey. A

large number of these migrants try to join the Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece and the European Union. A second section describes the different routes used for the smuggling of South Asians into Europe or to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. A third section analyses the routes from South and South-West Asia towards North America. These routes are relatively well documented, but the flows are smaller in magnitude than those towards Europe. A final section considers smuggling to Australia. While these routes were sizable a few years ago, they have since diminished. As for most routes described in this study, the individual routes should be considered as indicative, as most migrants' actual journeys vary considerably according to a myriad of factors, such as resources, time available, travel group, visa regimes, border security, terrain, weather, and so on.

### THE WEST ASIAN ROUTE TO EUROPE



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Smuggling from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan to Europe is well documented.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, Europe appears to have become an increasingly attractive destination for many South-West Asians. According to recent field research in Pakistan, a popular route runs from Afghanistan to Pakistan via the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey, joining the Eastern Mediterranean route to Europe.<sup>2</sup>

#### Profile of migrants:

Mainly Afghan migrants and refugees smuggled both as individuals and as families. Pakistani and Iranian migrants, mainly young males, are also smuggled along this route. In recent years, Syrians, including many families.

#### Human cost:

Some fatalities, mainly due to the harshness of the weather

and terrain. Risks of exploitation and violence in origin, transit and destination countries.

#### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Smugglers in organizing roles often share citizenship with the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

#### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers who facilitate short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

#### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Migrants and refugees are smuggled along land routes from South-West Asia towards Europe. For many Afghans,

their first transit country is the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas others travel first via Pakistan. They enter Pakistan almost exclusively by land, either on foot or by bus.<sup>3</sup> In Pakistan, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta are transit cities for people heading towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Once in Iran, most Afghan and Pakistani migrants head for Tehran.<sup>4</sup>

From the Islamic Republic of Iran, migrants and refugees are smuggled into Turkey from far north-western Iran by crossing the mountainous border area. Once in Turkey, they are taken towards Turkey's western cities, in particular Istanbul and Izmir, aboard buses and minivans. Often, smugglers provide forged travel documents to the migrants in order to avoid problems in case of routine police controls.<sup>5</sup>

As of 2011-2012, many Syrians have also joined the flow of other South-West Asians into Turkey. Most Syrians cross the border into south-central Turkey, from Syria's Idlib governorate, west of the city of Aleppo. They then head towards the Turkish west coast to join the Eastern Mediterranean route, or to Istanbul and onwards to Turkey's land borders with Bulgaria and Greece.

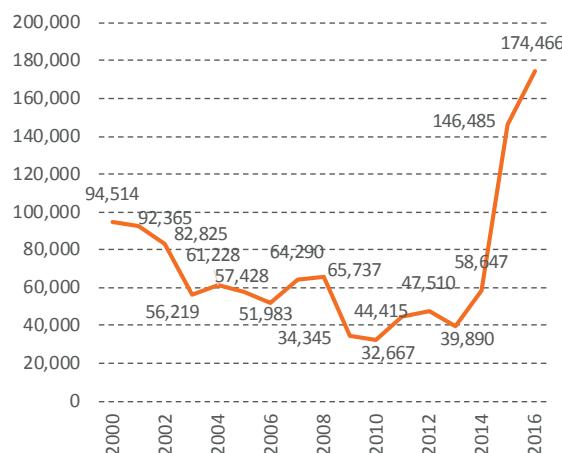
Some citizens South-West Asian countries are smuggled by air to Europe. Pakistani, Iranian and Iraqi migrants and refugees are smuggled by air to European destinations either directly from their country of origin or transiting through major airports in Europe, Africa, the Middle East or other parts of Asia.<sup>6</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South-West Asia to Europe

Turkey is usually the last transit country for migrants and refugees travelling by land routes from South-West Asia before reaching the European Union. It is also a destination country for some Iranians and Iraqis.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of specific data on migrant smuggling, Turkish data on irregular entries and exits will be considered. However, caution should be exercised in estimating the magnitude of migrant smuggling based on such data, since it is often unclear to what extent irregular migration is facilitated by smugglers.

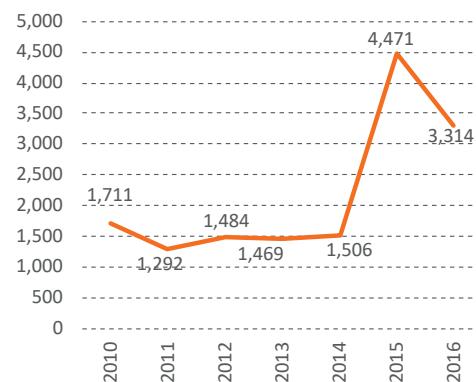
The Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management, within the Ministry of Interior, collects data about irregular migrants detected in the country. Their data show that there was a rapid and steep increase in apprehensions of irregular migrants in 2015 and 2016. Compared to 2016, a slight increase was recorded in 2017, when the number of apprehensions of irregular migrants was 175,752.<sup>8</sup> Research on irregular migration to Turkey

**FIG. 53:** Number of irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey per year, 2000-2016



Source: Turkish Ministry of Interior.

**FIG. 54:** Trend in the number of migrant smugglers detected in Turkey, 2010-2016



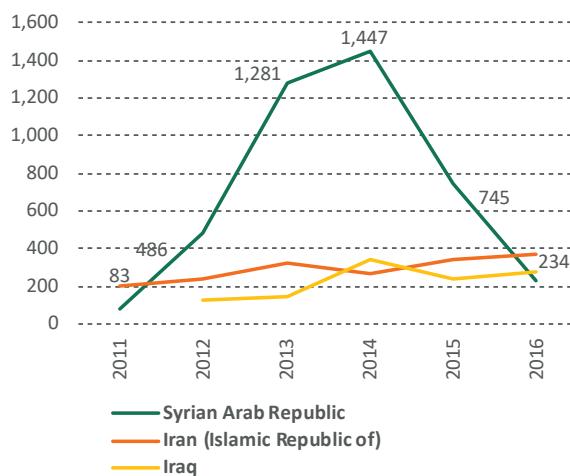
Source: Turkey Ministry of Interior.

carried out for the International Organization for Migration in 2012 suggested that about half of the apprehended irregular migrants travelled to Turkey with the assistance of migrant smugglers.<sup>9</sup>

Very few irregular border crossings are detected at Turkey's eastern border with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is partly due to stricter monitoring along Turkey's western borders.<sup>10</sup> The number of detected smugglers in Turkey increased sharply in 2015 (see figure).

Migrant smugglers are usually involved in supplying fraudulent documents for the purpose of entering the European Union or Schengen area countries. In 2016, more than 7,000 persons were denied entry at EU land and sea borders; some 4,400 at air borders. People claiming to come from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic were among the most commonly

**FIG. 55:** Trends in detections of document fraudsters claiming to originate from selected South-West Asian countries at external EU borders,\* 2011-2016



\* 2011 data for Iraq is not available as Iraq was not among the top ten citizenships detected that year.

Source: Frontex.

detected citizenships. The number of detected Syrian document fraudsters spiked in 2013 and 2014, for then to decline rapidly. Detections of Iranian and Iraqi document fraudsters have remained broadly stable over the last few years.<sup>a</sup>

South-West Asians may be smuggled to Western Europe not only by land but also by air, directly from the country of origin or from countries along this route. Data about smuggled migrants could only be found for the United Kingdom for a limited period. Between 2010 and 2013, the number of South-West Asian migrants smuggled to the United Kingdom ranged around 1,400 per year.<sup>11</sup>

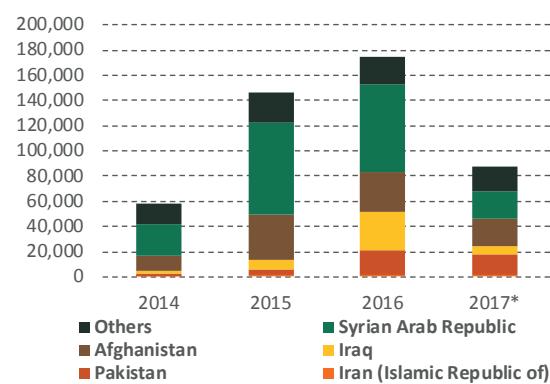
### The profile of smuggled migrants

The citizenship profiles of Middle Eastern and South-West Asian irregular arrivals in Turkey have changed considerably in recent years. Not only has the number and share of citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic among irregular migrants fluctuated greatly, but so has the number of Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis.

For Afghan nationals, their final destination largely depends on the wealth of the migrants and their families. Migrants with limited social and economic resources tend to be smuggled to neighbouring countries, whereas those from wealthier families are smuggled to destinations fur-

• •  
a The data only shows the number of people claiming to have a particular citizenship who have been detected using fraudulent documents upon entry into the EU or Schengen area. Some may have presented counterfeit passports or identity documents, whereas others may have tried to use fraudulently obtained visas or residence permits.

**FIG. 56:** Trend in the number of South-West Asian citizens among irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey, 2014-2017\*



\* 2017 data only covers the period 1 January-15 August.

Source: Turkey Ministry of Interior.

ther away.<sup>12</sup> Afghan migrants and refugees are smuggled both as individuals and as families. Those smuggled individually are mainly young men who intend to settle in the destination country. Recent research has indicated that an increasing number of Afghan families are on the move.<sup>13</sup>

The number of unaccompanied minors smuggled from Afghanistan to Europe – most of whom are boys – is significant and growing.<sup>14</sup> According to a 2014 study on Afghan unaccompanied minors travelling to Europe, children who engage in unaccompanied travel are usually between 13 and 17 years old, and most of them are neither the only male nor the eldest child in the family.<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Afghan migrants already in Europe have also indicated that there may be a relation between the age of the migrant and the fact that decision to migrate is not a personal choice, but rather a family decision. The younger the migrants, the more likely that the decision to migrate was taken as a household coping strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Iranians who are smuggled to Europe – or Australia or North America – are mainly male, as are most Iraqi migrants. A relatively large number of unaccompanied minors, most of them male teenagers, have also been detected among Iraqi smuggled migrants arriving in Europe via Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Pakistani smuggled migrants are also predominantly men, mostly aged between 18 and 30.<sup>18</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Smuggling networks operating from and in South-West Asia are usually loosely connected, informal and not strictly hierarchical. Different individuals and groups form flexible chains, where members can be easily replaced with little or no disruption to the network's activities.<sup>19</sup>

Individuals involved in migrant smuggling in South-West Asia generally do so casually, temporarily or on an ad hoc basis. They supplement other sources of income through migrant smuggling or get involved in it when opportunities arise.<sup>20</sup>

Smugglers operating along this route have strong linguistic, ethnic and cultural ties with the local communities and primarily originate from the border regions.<sup>21</sup> The vast majority of migrant smugglers operating along the routes departing from South-West Asia are adult males. According to a 2016 report by the Pakistani Investigative Agency, for example, 90 out of the 92 most wanted Pakistani migrant smugglers (or human traffickers) are males. More than half are between 30 and 49 years old.<sup>22</sup>

Most Afghan migrants appear to organize their journey step-by-step, relying on personal networks in each of the countries they cross.<sup>23</sup> They first rely on a local smuggler, who will arrange the first leg of the journey, namely the passage from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan. Local smugglers are often from the same village, neighbourhood or district of their clients, and are recommended to them by friends or relatives.<sup>24</sup> Local smugglers are often part of transnational networks, whereby the main smugglers manage the business from outside Afghanistan and local smugglers ('agents') recruit the clients and organise their journey in Afghanistan and in transit countries.<sup>25</sup>

In transit and destination areas, local smugglers and smuggler 'agents' are often nationals of the country where they operate. For instance, Pakistani migrants and refugees usually rely on Turkish or Greek smugglers to move from Turkey into Greece.<sup>26</sup> Local individuals and groups are also involved in the production and provision of fraudulent identity and travel documents to migrants and refugees.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes, smugglers are migrants who were smuggled along the same route on which they operate. For instance, on the routes from western Turkey onwards to Greece and Bulgaria most smugglers are Afghans who were previously smuggled and are familiar with the region.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes, smuggled migrants become smugglers in their country of destination. In other cases, they remain in or return to transit countries, where they get involved in smuggling activities. Migrants stranded in transit countries may also participate in the smuggling of others to collect money to continue their journey to their intended destination.<sup>29</sup>

There is very limited information about the profile and organization of smugglers operating in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The available sources indicate that the smug-

gling of migrants in Iran is largely managed by local and loosely connected networks. A typical smuggling network consists of 3-4 smuggler 'organizers' and approximately 10 other smugglers involved in transporting smuggled migrants, producing fraudulent documents and laundering the profits.<sup>30</sup>

### **The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements**

Afghans enter Pakistan along two main routes. The first one departs from Kabul, passes through Jalalabad, crosses the border at the Torkham border crossing point and arrives in Peshawar, Pakistan. The second leaves from Kandahar - Afghanistan's second largest city - crosses the border at Chaman and leads into Pakistan's Balochistan region, in particular, its capital, Quetta.<sup>31</sup> Migrants and refugees crossing the border at Torkham do not necessarily engage smugglers as that portion of border is mountainous and difficult to patrol. Those travelling along the second route, instead, generally have their journey facilitated by smugglers.<sup>32</sup>

From Pakistan, migrants are smuggled through border crossing points along the land border with the Islamic Republic of Iran,<sup>33</sup> with many crossing the border near the Iranian city of Zahedan. From there, they continue north to the region near Mashhad, and onwards to Tehran.<sup>34</sup> An alternative route takes migrants and refugees to the south-western coast of Pakistan, from where they cross the border to Iranian coastal cities, before continuing to Shiraz and Tehran.<sup>35</sup>

Many Afghans are smuggled directly into the Islamic Republic of Iran from Afghanistan; often from the area around Herat. A survey of nearly 2,000 Afghans in European countries found that 58 per cent<sup>b</sup> had transited through only Iran and Turkey before reaching the European Union.<sup>36</sup> Smugglers in western Afghanistan move migrants in batches between 10 and 80 people either on foot or by car (or bus or truck) across the border into Iran.<sup>37</sup> These migrants then head directly to Tehran where migrants and refugees may find new smugglers and also work for some time to finance the next leg of their journey. The majority of Afghan nationals transiting through Iran travel without any documents.<sup>38</sup>

From Tehran, migrants and refugees travel to the mountainous areas near the cities of Urmia and Salmas, close to the Turkish border, usually by taxi in groups of two to five. Migrants and refugees smuggled along these routes

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<sup>b</sup> In addition, 6 per cent reported having departed from the Islamic Republic of Iran, indicating that they had lived there for some time prior to departure for Europe.

regroup there, before crossing into Turkey.<sup>39</sup> The border crossing is usually undertaken on foot in large groups of up to 1,000 people.<sup>40</sup> Two or more smugglers usually assist with the crossing, which takes 12-15 hours. More rarely, migrants and refugees are smuggled across the border in taxis, private cars or trucks. There are also reports of migrants and refugees using forged documents at the official border crossing points.<sup>41</sup>

Most movements from Iraq to Turkey are facilitated by smugglers.<sup>42</sup> Iraqis – particularly from Baghdad and north-western Iraq - are often smuggled across the border near the city of Zakho.<sup>43</sup> According to an IOM survey of Iraqi migrants and refugees who left Iraq in 2015 and are currently residing in Europe, most of them transited legally through Turkey and continued their journey irregularly to Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Once in Turkey, Van, Ağrı and Dogubeyazit are major transit points used to organize the rest of the trip through that country.<sup>45</sup> Migrants and refugees primarily use public transportation to reach the outskirts of Istanbul where they stay while waiting for the smugglers to organize their onward journey to Western Europe.<sup>46</sup>

People from the Syrian Arab Republic have undertaken the bulk of irregular entries into Turkey since 2013. They generally cross the border away from official border crossings, often in the area around the border village of Khirbet al-Joz, in Idlib governorate. It is not clear to what extent migrant smugglers are involved in those movements. A few others are smuggled by boat from the Syrian coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus to Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

Until a few years ago, Syrians could freely cross into Jordan and Lebanon. But between 2012 and 2015, Lebanon and Jordan partially or totally closed their border with the Syrian Arab Republic. As a result, a growing number of Syrians (and Palestinian refugees who have been living in Syria for years) have sought the assistance of migrant smugglers to reach the neighbouring countries.<sup>48</sup> Lebanon and Jordan have become increasingly significant transit countries for Syrian refugees. From there, some Syrians are smuggled by land or sea to Egypt and Turkey, whereas others fly to Cairo or Istanbul.<sup>49</sup>

With regard to prices, there are several different sources and estimates, and prices also seem to vary considerably. UNODC reported in 2015 that Afghan migrants seemed to pay, on average, US\$10,000 to be smuggled to western European countries, based on information from 2008-2014 from a range of different sources.<sup>50</sup> Other, more recent sources report lower fees for the journey to an unspecified destination in Europe, ranging between

\$4,000 and 6,000.<sup>51</sup> According to a 2016 survey conducted by IOM in the Balkans, the vast majority of Afghans travelling along the Western Balkans route paid \$1,000 to 5,000. Few reported having paid more than US\$5,000.<sup>52</sup> Smuggling by air from Afghanistan is more expensive, with the cost for a passport, visa and air tickets reportedly ranging between \$20,000 and 25,000.<sup>53</sup> Pakistani migrants and refugees reportedly pay a bit less than Afghans. Estimates suggest that smuggling fees for Pakistanis range between US\$3,000 and 8,000 for smuggling by land, whereas smuggling by air to Europe costs between \$12,000 and 18,000.<sup>54</sup> Recent field research involving migrants from Pakistan has shown that the average price for being smuggled to Germany is \$11,000, while smuggling to Sweden costs \$6,800. The same study found that the journey to Greece would cost \$4,000.<sup>55</sup>

Most of the time, these fees are not paid in one lump sum. Rather, they are the sum of fees charged and paid at each leg of the journey, so that particular land or sea crossings can cost between several hundred or a few thousand dollars each.<sup>56</sup> Every border has a specific price, and the payment is only effected upon successful crossing of the border.<sup>57</sup> South-West Asians often rely on the *hawala* money transfer system to pay the smuggling fees. Before departure, most Afghans leave an upfront deposit with a third-party guarantor, who will pay the smuggling fees either entirely or in instalments upon milestones en route. Smugglers with occasional and limited tasks seem to be paid cash by the migrants and refugees.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes, smuggling services include several attempts to enter a country. Sham marriages are also reportedly used to smuggle South-West Asian migrants to European countries.<sup>59</sup>

### The human cost

The land journey from South-West Asia to Turkey and Eastern Europe involves several other risks and difficulties for smuggled migrants. The Afghans travelling through Pakistan have to cross the dangerous Hindu Kush mountains and the insecure Nangarhar province.<sup>60</sup> The border between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey is also mountainous and difficult to cross in some areas. Many migrants and refugees are ill equipped to make this journey and some have died trying to cross the border in freezing temperatures.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, migrant surveys have revealed that those who cannot keep up with the walking pace of the smugglers may be beaten up or abandoned along the way.<sup>62</sup>

Migrants and refugees are also at risk of exploitation, violence and abuse by smugglers. In Afghanistan, delays in payment could lead to migrants and refugees being forced

## Syrians and Iraqis escaping conflict smuggled to neighbouring countries

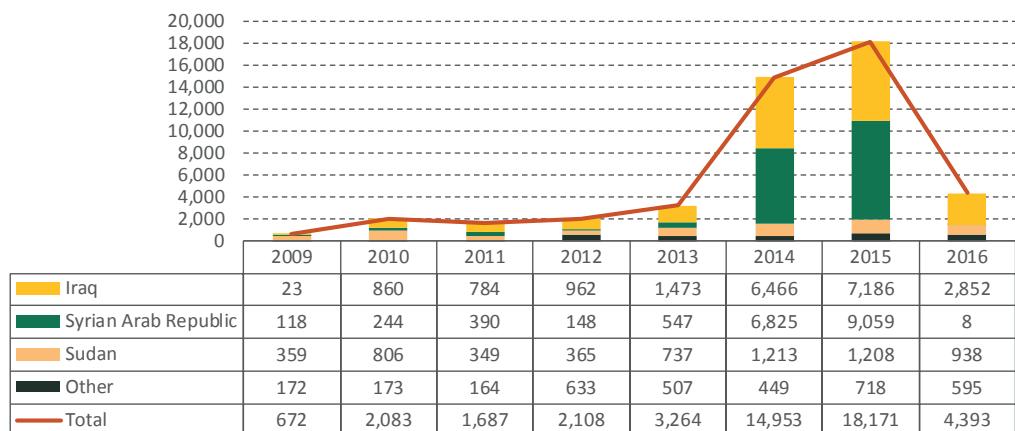
Trend in the numbers of arrivals of citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq in Jordan,\* 2009-2016



\* Not necessarily registered with UNHCR.

Source: UNHCR

## Asylum applications submitted in Lebanon per year, 2009-2016



Source: UNHCR.

UNHCR provides data on arrivals in Jordan from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Until 2012, the Syria-Jordan border was open without restrictions. It can thus be assumed that Syrian citizens did not need migrant smugglers to cross into Jordan. However, since the eruption of conflict in Syria, previously open border crossings have been closed, and migrant smuggling is documented at the Syria-Jordan border, although the extent remains unclear.<sup>a</sup> The number of arrivals from the Syrian Arab Republic in Jordan peaked in 2013 at nearly 300,000, according to information from UNHCR.

As for the Iraq-Jordan border, Iraq has closed it several times since the beginning of the civil war in 2014. In 2015, Jordan closed the border, following a suicide attack on its forces. Migrant smuggling at this border is documented, but again its magnitude is difficult to assess.<sup>b</sup>

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a European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Case Study 1: Syria/Lebanon – Egypt - Italy*, 2015.

b Ibid.

Data about clandestine entry attempts into Lebanon could only be found for a few months in 2012 and 2013. Detections were extremely limited, ranging between 0 and 3 per month. Statistics about newly registered Syrian and Iraqi asylum-seekers as well as field research indicate that large numbers of Syrians and Iraqis migrate to Lebanon, and that many of them rely on migrant smugglers to enter the country.<sup>c</sup> The number of Syrian and Iraqi asylum applications in Lebanon grew sharply in 2014 and 2015, while the number of Syrian applications in particular decreased from more than 9,000 in 2015 to only eight in 2016.

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<sup>c</sup> Ibid.; Achilli, L., *Tariq al-Euroba: Displacement Trends of Syrian Asylum Seekers to the EU*, MPC Research Report 2016/01, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, 2016.

to carry drugs, or they may end up in a situation of human trafficking.<sup>63</sup> In Pakistan, migrant interviews have revealed that many smugglers working as ‘agents’ run away with the money once a deposit has been paid.<sup>64</sup> Smuggled migrants also risk being captured and held hostage by criminal organizations operating along this route.<sup>65</sup>

According to a survey conducted by IOM in 2016 among Afghans in Calais, France, the majority of respondents reported incidents of detention and violence. A smaller group reported having food, money, phones, clothes and other personal belongings stolen. The perpetrators are often the smugglers or their affiliates, border control or police officers. Furthermore, several respondents recounted having been abducted for ransom by smugglers operating along this route.<sup>66</sup>

### Other migrant smuggling routes from South-West Asia

A minor smuggling route connects South-West Asia to the European Union via Azerbaijan and Georgia. From the Islamic Republic of Iran, migrants are smuggled to Azerbaijan, continue to Georgia and on to the Russian Federation. From there, they are smuggled either to the Baltic countries and/or Belarus and Ukraine, and smuggled into the European Union along the Eastern borders route. Those smuggled along this route reportedly use fraudulent identity or travel documents to cross borders, rather than clandestine movements.<sup>67</sup> More than 1,000 Iraqi citizens were refused entry at Georgian borders in the first half of 2014, making Iraq the most frequently refused citizenship in Georgia. During the same period, 853 citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran were also refused entry.<sup>68</sup> It is not clear how many of the entry refusals involved facilitation by smugglers.

There is also a minor route connecting South Asia to Europe via Central Asia and the Russian Federation. This route is discussed in more detail in the section on South Asia to Europe.

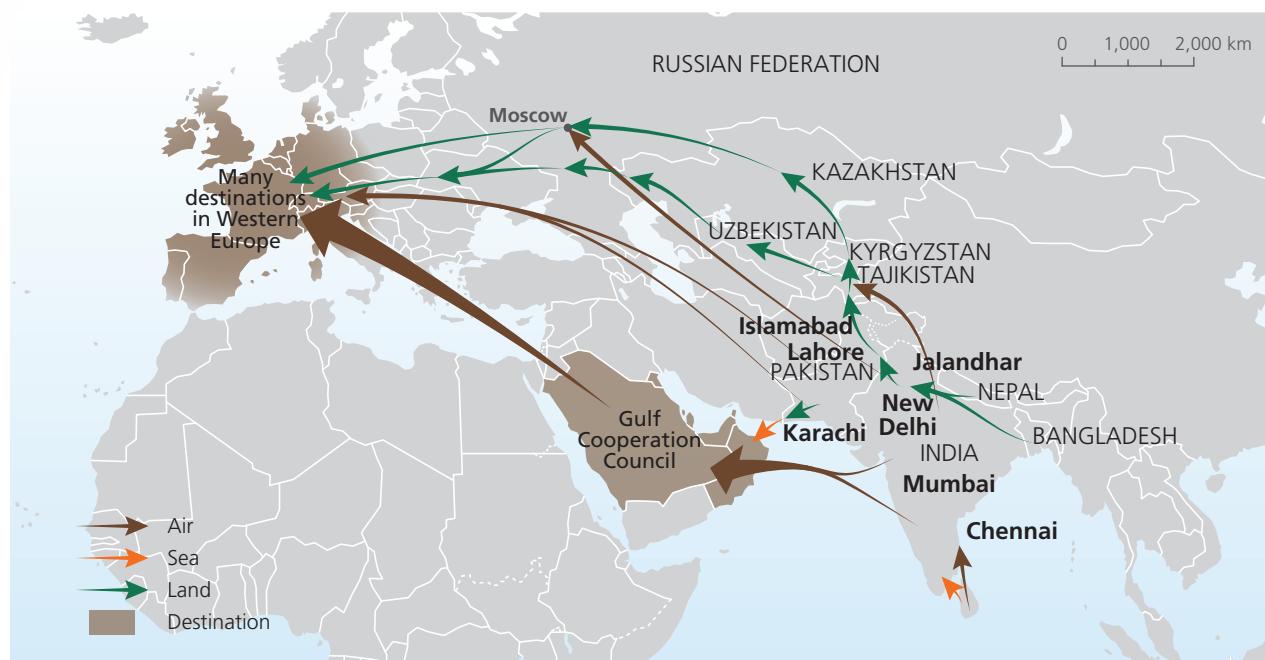
## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia, encompassing the five former Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, is a transit area for irregular migration and migrant smuggling from South, South-West and East Asia to Europe. After transiting through Central Asia and the Russian Federation, South West and East Asian migrants continue to Ukraine and Belarus, from where they enter the European Union in Poland, Slovakia or Hungary. Alternatively, a few irregular migrants also pass through the Russian Federation, the Baltic countries and then enter one of the Nordic countries.<sup>69</sup>

Within Central Asia, irregular migration is relatively rare, since the citizens of most Central Asian countries can freely move within the region, without a visa. Irregular migration status mainly results from overstaying, the failure to register as a temporary resident or unauthorized employment, rather than from irregular movement across national borders.<sup>70</sup> Still, some Central Asians also migrate irregularly within the region and to the Russian Federation, sometimes with the assistance of migrant smugglers. These are mainly people who do not possess valid travel documents, or citizens of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who need a visa to travel to most of the countries within the region. Kazakhstan and in particular the Russian Federation are the main destinations for these migrants.<sup>71</sup>

Although Central Asia remains mainly a transit point for irregular migration and migrant smuggling, the continued rise in living standards in some Central Asian countries has made them increasingly desirable as destinations.<sup>72</sup> Kazakhstan, in particular, has recently become attractive for irregular migrants from neighbouring countries due to its relatively high levels of economic development and political stability.<sup>73</sup> Because most Central Asians can travel within the region without visas, irregular migration mainly takes place in order to avoid expensive and time-consuming formalities and evade other entry regulations.<sup>74</sup>

## FROM SOUTH ASIA TO EUROPE AND THE GCC COUNTRIES



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

### Profile of migrants:

Mostly young males from South Asia.

### Human cost:

Risks of exploitation and various forms of victimization reported in origin, transit and destination countries; particularly along land passages.

### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed; some smugglers share citizenships with the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

Within South Asia, much irregular migration appears to be facilitated by smugglers.<sup>75</sup> Some migrants are smuggled within the region – from Sri Lanka, Nepal or Bangladesh to India, for instance – and may also be smuggled onwards the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>76</sup> or to Europe.<sup>77</sup> The Gulf countries are also used as transit countries; particularly when migrants are smuggled by air.

It appears that most migrant smuggling to Europe is

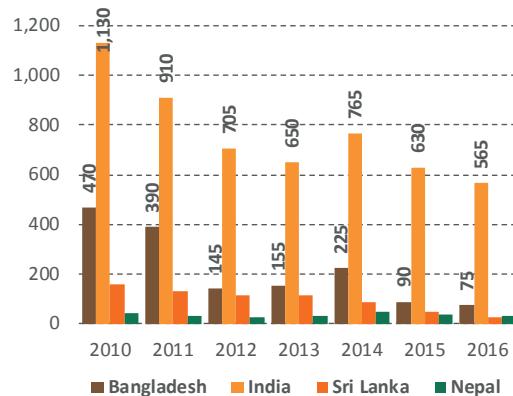
carried out by air or in a combination of air and land smuggling.<sup>78</sup> Many South Asians also follow different land routes. Some follow land routes across South-West Asia to Turkey, and enter Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean. Some are also smuggled along land routes across Central Asia.<sup>79</sup>

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Along the different routes, some South Asian migrants travel regularly – with required documents, taking advantage of bilateral free-movement agreements – others irregularly, sometimes with the assistance of migrant smugglers.<sup>80</sup> Bangladeshi migrants are mainly smuggled to India by land, although a few also enter irregularly by sea.<sup>81</sup> Sri Lankan nationals enter India by air or sea. Many travel regularly, others use forged documents. Once in India, they join Indian migrants on the land and air routes heading to Europe. Chennai, New Delhi, Mumbai and Jalandhar are important transit cities in India.<sup>82</sup>

Some migrants are smuggled by air via Pakistan or the Gulf countries, mainly to Belgium, France and Germany, from where many try to enter the United Kingdom.<sup>83</sup> Other air routes involve flights to a West or North African city and onward smuggling by sea along the Western or Central Mediterranean routes.<sup>84</sup>

**FIG. 57: Trend in the number of South Asian nationals refused entry at the United Kingdom's air border, 2010-2016**



Source: Eurostat.

South Asians heading to Europe may be smuggled by air from New Delhi to the capital cities of Central Asian countries, using fraudulent documents. From there, they continue by land to Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>85</sup> Some migrants are smuggled from New Delhi directly to Moscow via air and then enter Europe through Ukraine. The journey to Moscow is usually undertaken by air with a legitimate visa, whereas the travel by land to the European Union is often facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>86</sup>

Most South Asian migrants heading to the Gulf States via land and sea routes travel to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (together with migrants and refugees heading to Europe). Entry into Pakistan and Iran usually occurs across land borders, either on foot or by motor vehicle. From Iran migrants are smuggled to Oman by sea. From Oman, some migrants continue to other GCC

countries. The smuggling of Bangladeshi migrants also appears to take place across the Gulf of Oman in the opposite direction, from Oman to Iran.<sup>87</sup>

Some South Asians are also smuggled via Central Asia to the Russian Federation and ultimately to various countries in the European Union. These routes often combine air and overland travel. South Asians may enter Central Asia in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan, from where they make their way through Kazakhstan, sometimes via Uzbekistan, and on to the Russian Federation. Migrant smuggling is documented from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation, and from there onwards to Ukraine and the European Union.<sup>88</sup>

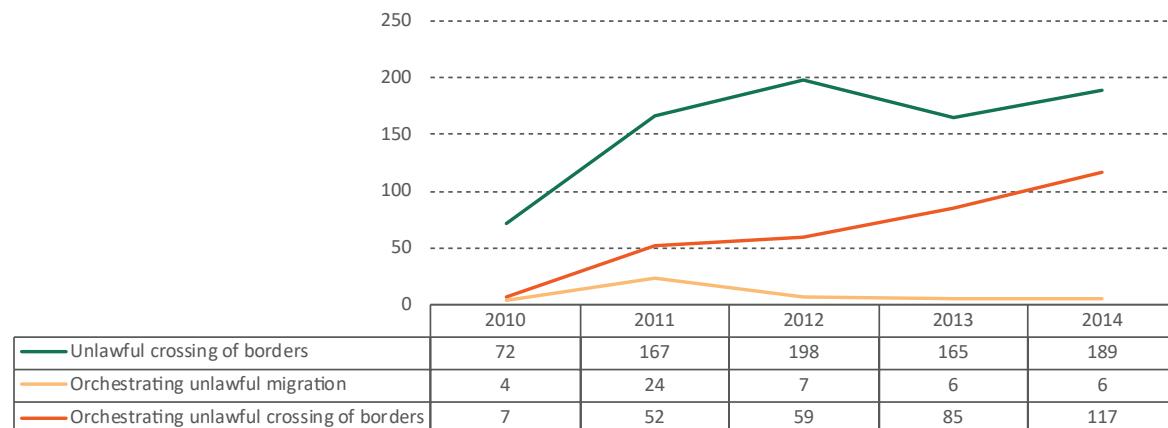
### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South Asia to Europe

Data from the United Kingdom shows that some South Asian migrants and refugees choose the United Kingdom as their destination. This is a traditional migration route with a long history.<sup>89</sup> In 2010, 170 smuggled migrants from India were detected, whereas the numbers for 2011 and 2012 were lower, 80 and 50 respectively. Additionally, the United Kingdom reported the detection of 10 Sri Lankan smuggled migrants for each of the years from 2010 to 2012. The data does not specify whether the migrants were smuggled by land, sea or air.<sup>90</sup>

Considering entry refusals of South Asians at European air borders, the United Kingdom has the highest totals, although the trend is declining. In 2016, the United Kingdom refused 565 Indian citizens, and less than 100 other South Asian citizens entry at airports.<sup>91</sup>

Other European countries also reported refusals of South Asians at their air borders, though in far smaller numbers.

**FIG. 58: Trend in the numbers of criminal cases launched in Kyrgyzstan for irregular migration and border crossing, 2010-2014**



Source: IOM, 2016 (quoting data from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs).

In 2016, Italy refused about 250 South Asian citizens entry, and France about 200. Refusals at German air borders are lower, apart from the 115 Indians who were refused entry there in 2016.<sup>92</sup>

As for smuggling along land routes through Central Asia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan recorded an increasing trend in the number of irregular migration-related criminal cases launched from 2010 to 2014. It is, however, unclear how many of these cases involve migrant smuggling.

With regard to Tajikistan, in 2013, 736 violations of migration legislation were detected; many of which may be unrelated to migrant smuggling. Regarding the flow from Afghanistan, Tajikistan appears to be a destination and transit country for Afghan nationals, although the flows to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are much smaller than those heading to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>93</sup>

While in general relatively few South Asians are smuggled via the land route through Turkey into Europe, in 2016, Bangladeshi citizens were frequently detected. According to official data, in 2016, Bangladesh was the sixth most frequently detected citizenship among irregular migrants apprehended that year, with nearly 2,400 apprehensions.<sup>94</sup>

Data from Saudi Arabia show that the total number of detections of attempted irregular entry in that country is declining steeply, whereas the number of arrested smugglers is increasing. This might indicate that more migrants are seeking assistance from smugglers.

While regular migration flows may bear little resemblance

to smuggling flows, it is nonetheless noteworthy that South Asians comprise a vast part of the GCC countries' considerable migrant workforces. Out of the total migrant stock in the GCC countries, some 25.4 million people, South and South-West Asians comprise some 15.4 million, or 61 per cent. Indian citizens make up the largest group, with nearly 8.2 million, followed by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis (nearly 3 million each).<sup>95</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

There is very little information available regarding the profiles of smuggled migrants from South Asia directed to Europe. According to two 2009 UNODC studies, most Indian migrants who are smuggled to Europe are young men of middle class background. They generally come from rural areas, have low levels of education and leave in search of work opportunities.<sup>96</sup>

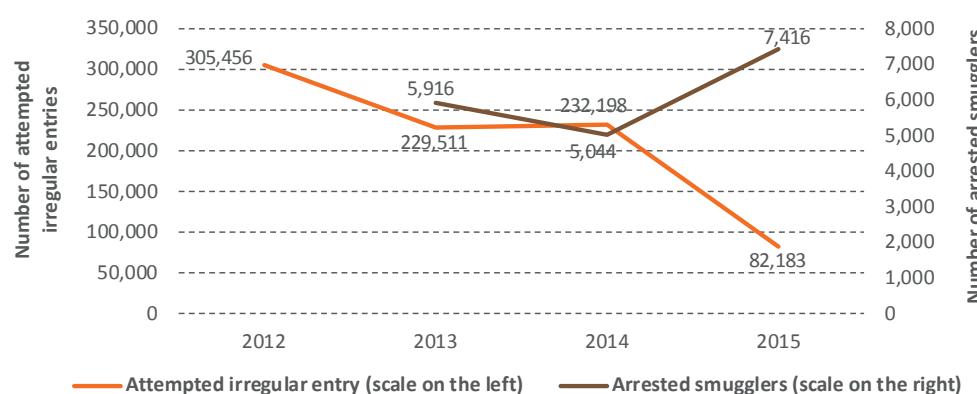
Most South Asians who are smuggled by land routes to Europe are young men from families of modest income. They are generally smuggled alone, often to join relatives who previously emigrated, to earn money to support their families who remained in in their home countries.<sup>97</sup> Many have connections with relatives living in the destination countries.<sup>98</sup>

South Asians who seek to be smuggled to Gulf countries are often young men seeking unskilled, low-skilled or temporary work.<sup>99</sup> Unskilled Indian migrants from poor backgrounds typically come from southern Indian states.<sup>100</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Smuggling into India from neighbouring countries is largely carried out by local smugglers. Bangladeshis are usually smuggled out of their country by fellow citizens.

**FIG. 59: Trends in the number of detected attempts of irregular entry and arrests of migrant smugglers, Saudi Arabia, 2012-2015\***



\* Months and years are approximated from the Islamic calendar.

Source: Saudi Arabia, Border Guards.

In transit countries, South Asians smuggle other South Asians on the basis of their ethnic background, together with locals.<sup>101</sup>

In origin countries, smugglers usually belong to the migrants' local community. They may be friends, relatives, community members or returnees. According to a 2013 study on labour migration from South Asia, more than 60 per cent of the surveyed stated that they had met their smuggler through friends.<sup>102</sup>

The recruitment of migrants is usually undertaken by local smugglers, or 'agents', especially in rural areas.<sup>103</sup> They work for a few main smugglers based either in large cities or close to international borders. Many smugglers run travel agencies as a cover for their smuggling business.<sup>104</sup> A 2012 study noted that more and more migrants were using smugglers in major cities, rather than their local smuggler 'agents'.<sup>105</sup>

The same 2012 study found that most smugglers operating in some parts of India were male, although a few females were also involved; sometimes working with their husbands. Most of the smugglers were reported to be in their 30s.<sup>106</sup> Another study of the profiles of more than 11,000 individuals involved or suspected of being involved in irregular migration in Punjab found that nearly all the smugglers were locals. Some 94 per cent of the intermediaries came from Punjab, while the remaining were from elsewhere in India. Very few were based abroad.<sup>107</sup>

The available sources suggest that Indian smuggling organizations continue to be involved throughout the smuggling process to Europe and engage local groups and individuals in transit countries. Smugglers of Indian origin or with Indian citizenship also operate in a range of European transit and destination countries.<sup>108</sup> With regard to the smuggling of Bangladeshis, diaspora communities living in destination countries may provide some support.<sup>109</sup>

### **The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements**

Bangladeshi and Nepalese migrants are mainly smuggled to India by land to New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore and other major Indian cities.<sup>110</sup> After crossing into India, Nepalese typically settle in India, while those who can afford to fly to the GCC countries contact other smugglers who can provide them with the necessary documents and plane tickets.<sup>111</sup> Most Bangladeshis head across the country towards Pakistan. A few are smuggled to Europe by air.<sup>112</sup> For many Bangladeshi smuggled migrants, Pakistan is a transit country.<sup>113</sup>

Document fraud is commonly used by migrant smugglers operating on routes departing from India or Pakistan.<sup>114</sup> From here, they board international flights to Europe, the Gulf countries or South-East Asia.<sup>115</sup> In 2013, the Pakistani Federal Investigation Agency reported about an Africa-based cartel that sold stolen or expired passports to smuggling networks in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Egypt. Visas were lifted from the passports and pasted on the migrants' authentic passports.<sup>116</sup>

Migrants generally pay between US\$35 and US\$50 to be smuggled from Bangladesh to India, although lower fees have also been reported.<sup>117</sup> The fee for being smuggled from India to Western Europe is considered to range between US\$15,000 and 30,000.<sup>118</sup> Smuggling fees from India to Eastern Europe may be considerably lower. According to a 2011 report, Indian migrants pay between €1,500 and 4,500 to be smuggled to Eastern Europe, and US\$1,500-2,000 to continue onwards to the European Union.<sup>119</sup> Migrant smugglers in India are estimated to earn between US\$250 and \$750 per migrant.<sup>120</sup> In 2011, the cost of the entire journey from Bangladesh to Europe was estimated at €12,000-18,000.<sup>121</sup>

According to a recent survey of Pakistani migrants, the smuggling journey from Pakistan to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, costs approximately US\$1,000, but that excludes the cost of travel documents.<sup>122</sup> Somewhat older research cited fees for destination countries in the Middle East varying between €1,400 and 4,300. Higher fees are charged when the smugglers accompany the migrants to their destination.<sup>123</sup>

### **The human cost**

Harassment, assault and occasional killings of smuggled migrants have been reported along the different routes here considered.<sup>124</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual violence by criminal gangs or border officials.<sup>125</sup>

Several sources report that migrants are often deceived by smugglers or charged exorbitant fees for their services.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, there are reports of South Asian smuggled migrants ending up in situations of debt bondage or forced labour to pay back money owed to the smuggler or to friends and relatives.<sup>127</sup>

## **FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA TO NORTH AMERICA**

Some migrants are smuggled by air from South and South-West Asia to North America, but information on routes and methods is sporadic and limited.<sup>128</sup> Some of the routes

involved are complex; involving transits through countries on other continents. Due to the costs involved and the limited number of flights (compared to smuggling overland and by sea) the magnitude of this smuggling is relatively small.

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

There is scattered evidence of migrant smuggling from most South and South-West Asian countries to North America, primarily to the United States of America, but also to Canada. South and Central American countries are sometimes used as transit locations. South Asian and South-West Asian migrants are smuggled to North America by air directly or via third countries in the Americas.<sup>129</sup>

Canada and the United States are both destination countries for South Asian smuggled migrants. The United States is sometimes used as a transit point en route to Canada.<sup>130</sup> According to the British authorities, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Kingdom are used as transit points to smuggle migrants from South-West Asian countries to North America.<sup>131</sup>

Several Latin American countries have reported cases in which smuggled migrants from South-West Asia were detected, usually on their way to the United States. Smuggling of these migrants to the United States and Canada often involves fraudulent documents.<sup>132</sup> Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic are also reportedly used as transit countries by migrants and refugees from South-West Asia heading to the United States by air.<sup>133</sup>

Between 2009 and 2010 a few cases of migrant smuggling by sea to Canada involving Sri Lankan nationals were also recorded. In 2009 and 2010, a few hundred Sri Lankan nationals were smuggled to British Columbia, in Canada, on vessels originating from South-East Asia. According to the Canadian authorities, different countries in South-East Asia may have served as transit countries for some of those migrants. Another attempt to smuggle Sri Lankan nationals by sea to North America was foiled in 2011. Since then no further arrivals of this kind have been recorded.<sup>134</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South and South-West Asia to North America

Statistics about migrants smuggled to the United States could not be found. In the absence of specific data on migrant smuggling, other immigration-related data collected by the US Department of Homeland Security provide an indication of the potential magnitude of the

**FIG. 60:** Trend in the number of South and South-West Asian citizens determined inadmissible at ports of entry into the United States, 2009-2015\*



\* Fiscal years (FY 2015 ran from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015).

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

phenomenon. For instance, the US immigration authorities deem a large number of people inadmissible each year, with increasing numbers during recent years. Inadmissibility grounds include those related to an inability to satisfy documentary requirements, previous immigration violations, as well as crime and national security-related reasons. These instances may not involve migrant smuggling.

Out of the more than 250,000 determinations of inadmissibility in fiscal year 2015, nearly 10,800 were for citizens of countries in South and South-West Asia, representing more than 4 per cent of the total. Citizens of India comprised the largest share. Smaller shares of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Iranian citizens were also deemed inadmissible to the United States.

The number of apprehensions for suspected immigration violations by the US Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement has declined in recent years. There was, however, a modest increase for fiscal year 2016 (1 October 2015 – 30 September 2016), when some 530,000 apprehensions were reported. Many of these apprehensions are unlikely to be due to migrant smuggling. South and South-West Asians accounted for some 4,700 of the more than 460,000 apprehensions in fiscal year 2015, slightly more than 1 per cent.

While the United States is the main destination country in North America, some migrants are also smuggled into Canada. The number of immigration apprehensions in

**FIG. 61: Number of smuggled South and South-West Asian migrants apprehended in Canada, by citizenship, 2008-2012**



Source: UNODC.

Canada has steadily declined since 2012. As for the United States, immigrants may be apprehended for a number of reasons; many of which may not be linked to migrant smuggling.

The Canadian authorities provided UNODC with data about smuggled migrants from South and South-West Asia apprehended between 2008 and 2012. While the data are slightly out of date, they nonetheless indicate the size and composition of the migrant smuggling flow into Canada. In 2008 and 2010, Sri Lankans were the most commonly detected, whereas in the other years, Indians outnumbered the other nationalities.

Migrant smugglers often facilitate irregular movements by air from India.<sup>135</sup> The scale of migrant smuggling by air from India is corroborated by data about people apprehended while trying to irregularly leave India from the major international airports in the country. Between 2008 and August 2012, 1,173 cases of irregular migration were recorded at Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi. Most of those departing were Indians, but citizens of many other countries - Afghans, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans in large numbers - were also detected. The United States or Canada was the destination in nearly 20 per cent of the cases.<sup>136</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

The Canadian authorities have reported that around two thirds of the Indian and Iranian migrants who were smuggled into Canada between 2008 and 2012 were male.<sup>137</sup> Most Sri Lankan smuggled migrants are reported to be males between 30 and 40 years old.<sup>138</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

According to Canadian officials, smugglers facilitating the journey from South Asia - and in particular from Sri Lanka - to Canada operate in loosely organized networks.<sup>139</sup> Members of the Sri Lankan community in Canada are sometimes involved in the smuggling of other Sri Lankans. They may serve in different smuggling roles - as organizers, agents or facilitators - but may also help provide genuine Canadian passports for use by other Sri Lankan migrants.<sup>140</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and the travel arrangements

Various countries in South and Central America are used as transit countries for migrant smuggling between South and South-West Asia and North America. Sometimes this is due to visa arrangements. Between 2009 and 2011, for example, Indians used a visa waiver scheme for Indian nationals in Guatemala to gain easier access to the United States via Mexico. After the termination of this scheme, Ecuador, which had a similar program, emerged as a transit point for the smuggling of migrants from India.<sup>141</sup> Other South Asian citizens use fraudulent Indian passports to be smuggled on the same route.<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is sometimes used as transit country by Iranians. Taking advantage of the visa-free policy adopted by Venezuela in the mid-2000s, Iranian migrants would fly there and continue to the United States and Canada with the assistance of smugglers.<sup>143</sup> According to the Canadian authorities, approximately 80 per cent of the Iranian nationals who arrived in Canada irregularly by air between 2008 and 2012 had their journey facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>144</sup> There have also been reports of Iraqi citizens who have been smuggled into the United States by air, relying on fraudulent travel or identity documents.<sup>145</sup>

Sri Lankan nationals are also smuggled to Canada and the United States by air. This often involves fraudulent travel or identity documents. According to the Canadian authorities, an estimated 55 per cent of the Sri Lankan nationals who were apprehended attempting irregular entry by air between 2008 and 2012 had used the services of smugglers. The smuggled migrants who arrived in Canada by air over the same period often used fraudulent documents. This included the use of genuine Canadian passports that some Canadians had 'rented' to smugglers or the use of forged foreign passports.<sup>146</sup>

Smuggling routes from South Asia to North America can be complex. To illustrate, one route involved Sri Lankans who were smuggled first from India to Kenya and the

United Republic of Tanzania. From there they continued along a route via Istanbul and Helsinki to Paris, where they obtained fraudulent British passports. They were then brought to Belgium, from where they boarded a flight bound for Canada.<sup>147</sup>

### The human cost

There is no specific information regarding the various human rights risks that smuggled migrants along these routes are exposed to. Migrant smuggling by air entails fewer physical risks than sea or land-based smuggling. However, migrants travelling by air pay high prices, and a failed experience might incur severe debts. Moreover, as for other routes, migrants are at the mercy of smugglers who may be more concerned about their profits and risks of apprehension than the safe arrival of their clients.

## FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA TO AUSTRALIA

Since the early 2000s, Australia has been a significant destination for irregular migrants and refugees from South-West Asia. Migrant smuggling is widely documented along this route, which usually transits South-East Asia.<sup>148</sup> Australia is also a significant destination for South Asians. Irregular maritime arrivals in Australia nearly came to a halt in 2014 and the sea route is now largely dormant.

### Profile of migrants:

Migrants from South-West Asia and South Asia. Most are young adult males.

### Human cost:

Fatalities have been recorded; mainly along sea passages. Risks of exploitation and gross human right violations in origin, transit and destination countries.

### Profile of smugglers:

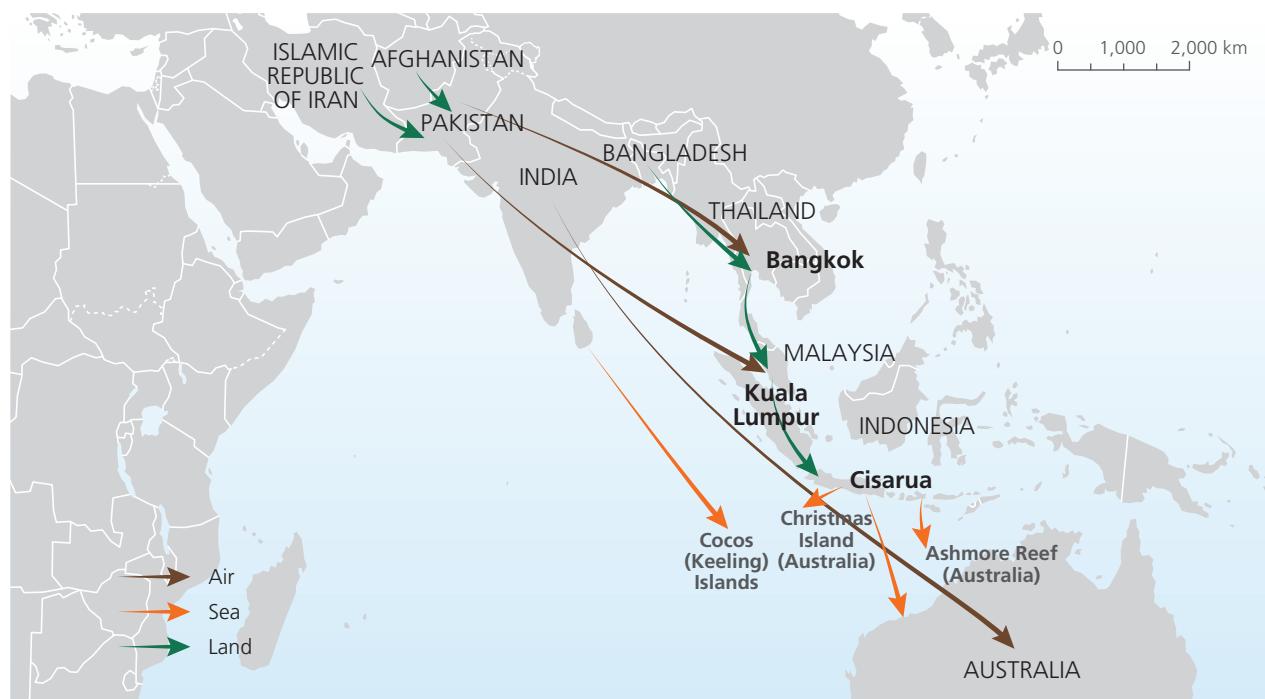
Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Smugglers in organizing roles often have the same citizenship as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Almost all irregular migrants and refugees from the South-West Asian countries rely on smugglers for at least part of their journey towards Australia.<sup>149</sup> They are often smuggled together along the same routes. The journey usually involves smuggling by air from South-West Asia to South-East Asia, and smuggling by land and sea to southern



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Indonesia, where migrants and refugees board vessels bound for Australia or its offshore territories.<sup>150</sup>

Pakistan is a departure as well as transit point for migrants and refugees from South-West Asia heading to Australia. As there are few flights from Afghanistan to South-East Asia, Afghans often head to Pakistan first. They usually make their way to Karachi or Islamabad, and board flights to major international airports in South-East Asia.<sup>151</sup> Some South-West Asians also fly to South-East Asia via Gulf countries.<sup>152</sup> From South-East Asia, they continue towards Indonesia, by land, air or sea. Other South Asians are also smuggled along this route.<sup>153</sup>

For maritime departures, in Indonesia, migrants and refugees from South and South-West Asia embarked on board boats to Australia from the main island of Java. The town of Cisarua was reportedly a transit point. From Cisarua, migrants would travel by land to Java's southern coast, where they would board boats to Australia's Christmas Island.<sup>154</sup> Pelabuhan Ratu was a known embarkation point for Christmas Island.<sup>155</sup> Departures for Ashmore Reef – located south of the western part of Timor island – would usually take place further east in Indonesia.<sup>156</sup> Some Sri Lankans also tried to reach the Australian Cocos (Keeling) islands, about half way between Sri Lanka and Australia.

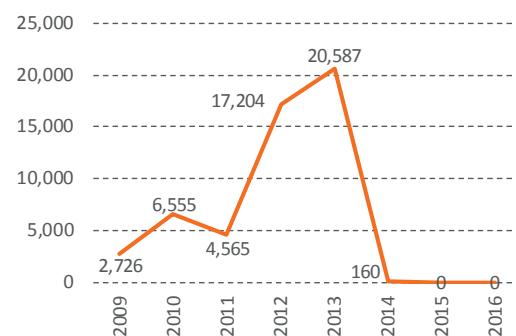
### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South and South-West Asia to Australia

As for most maritime routes, most migrants and refugees reaching Australia by sea would have had their journey facilitated by smugglers. A 2013 survey of irregular maritime arrivals in Australia found that 55 per cent of the respondents admitted to having used the services of someone who helps people travel (for example, migrant smuggler).<sup>157</sup> Many respondents (41 per cent) also reported having travelled on a false passport at some stage during the journey,<sup>158</sup> which indicates the involvement of smugglers. The Australian data about maritime irregular arrivals can thus be considered broadly representative of the migrant smuggling flow to Australia by sea. The number of irregular maritime arrivals increased rapidly from 2009, peaking at more than 20,000 in 2012-13. Irregular maritime arrivals to Australia started to decrease in late 2013, following the implementation of Operation Sovereign Borders.<sup>c</sup>

The Australian authorities provided some statistics regard-

<sup>c</sup> A military-led border security operation aimed at combating maritime migrant smuggling and protecting Australia's borders, established in September 2013. (Operation Sovereign Borders; [www.osb.border.gov.au](http://www.osb.border.gov.au)).

**FIG. 62: Irregular maritime arrivals in Australia, 2009-2016\***



\* Financial years (July 1-June 30).

Source: Parliament of Australia, Australia Parliamentary Library.

ing the number of smuggled migrants detected in 2012 and the first half of 2013 to UNODC. About 23,000 originated from countries in South and South-West Asia, including both smuggling by air and sea, during that period.

Migrant smuggling by air is also documented along this route, sometimes with the help of sophisticated fraudulent documents. There are reports of small numbers of South Asians having been smuggled by air to Australia.<sup>159</sup> A few smuggled migrants from South-West Asia head to New Zealand; usually involving either fraudulent documents or the swapping of a boarding pass in the airport transit lounge.<sup>160</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

Almost all migrants and refugees that have entered Australia by sea come from South and South-West Asia. Since November 2011, the Australian government has granted a particular type of visa, 'Bridging Visa E (BVE)' to some irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs). This type of visa is only granted to IMAs; many of whom may have arrived prior to 2011. The purpose is to release holders from immigration detention and allow them to remain lawfully in Australia while their immigration status is being resolved.<sup>161</sup> As of the end of March 2017, a total of more than 36,000 such visas have been granted. Statistics by citizenship of the more than 24,000 current BVE holders<sup>d</sup> show that Iranians, Sri Lankans, Afghani and Stateless migrants are among the largest groups granted this visa.

Although the implementation of Operation Sovereign

<sup>d</sup> Of the more than 36,000 BVEs granted since November 2011, some 12,000 holders had either been granted substantive visas, departed Australia, returned to immigration detention or died, as of 31 March 2017.

Borders has nearly halted irregular maritime arrivals in Australia, there are still a few irregular sea crossings. Between early 2014 and April 2017, nearly 800 people who were intercepted at sea were returned to their origin countries by the Australian authorities, according to an April 2017 speech by the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection.<sup>162</sup>

Statistics regarding the Australian offshore asylum processing facilities in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, which started operations in late 2012, show that South West Asian citizens comprise the largest group by far, followed by South Asians. In October 2016, there were more than 1,200 asylum seekers in the two centres; about half of the total registered at the peak in April 2014. These included 50 women and 45 children.<sup>163</sup> Asylum seekers may or may not have sought the assistance of migrant smugglers en route towards Australia.

Sri Lankan migrants travelling directly to Australia usually do so in small groups, often with relatives or people from their village. According to data collected by the Sri Lankan Criminal Investigation Department, all attempts of irregular departure by sea in 2013 involved children, compared with less than half (22) of the 56 attempts in 2012.<sup>164</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Most migrant smugglers are male. Nevertheless, some sources note that women are sometimes involved in the smuggling of migrants from South-West Asia to Australia (as well as to Canada) by air, probably because they are less likely to draw the authorities' attention.<sup>165</sup>

The smuggling of South and South-West Asians to Australia seems to be organized mainly by people from the same countries as the migrants, many of whom were once smuggled migrants themselves. For the boat journey from Indonesia to Australia, smugglers in the role of 'organizer' hire young, local Indonesians, who may receive a small salary for captaining or crewing the vessels used for the smuggling.<sup>166</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

South-East Asian countries seem to have gained popularity as transit for the smuggling of Afghan migrants and refugees in recent years.<sup>167</sup> Smuggling by air typically involves the use of fraudulent documents. According to information from the Pakistani authorities, smuggled Afghan migrants are frequently apprehended at airports in Pakistan with fraudulent travel or identity documents when attempting to board a flight to major international airports in South-East Asia. Iranian, Iraqi and Pakistani

nationals also travel along this route.<sup>168</sup>

Sri Lankan nationals are smuggled to Australia along two main routes. The first is the route used by most South-West Asians, described above. The second is a sea route from Sri Lanka to the Australian mainland or one of its offshore territories, especially the Cocos (Keeling) Islands approximately midway between Australia and Sri Lanka. The sea journey from Sri Lanka to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands typically takes between 10 and 20 days. Vessels bound for Australia depart from various ports along the Sri Lankan coast.<sup>169</sup>

Most Bangladeshi migrants smuggled along this route first travel to Thailand. Bangkok and Songkhla are important transit points, where migrants usually have to wait a long time until the smugglers can arrange for their onward journey. Once they have reached the border region, migrants often use remote paths through the jungle to enter Malaysia.<sup>170</sup> They then continue to southern Indonesia, where they board boats heading to Australia's offshore islands or north-western coastline.<sup>171</sup>

Many smuggled Afghan migrants in Australia left Afghanistan long ago and lived in Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran for some time before they were smuggled to Australia.<sup>172</sup> According to a 2013 survey of migrants and refugees who had arrived irregularly in Australia by sea, the majority of Afghans (57 per cent) indicated that they had lived in another country for at least 12 months prior to travelling to Australia, whereas few Iranians did so. The main host countries identified by respondents were Pakistan (60 per cent) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (24 per cent).<sup>173</sup>

Indian citizens also seem to be smuggled to Australia, but very limited information is available about this route. Some are smuggled by air directly to Australia, others travel through South-East Asia.<sup>174</sup>

Smuggling routes to Australia can be very complex. Some migrants and refugees from South-West Asia transit through one of the Gulf countries before flying to Indonesia or Malaysia.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, some Iraqis are smuggled to other Middle Eastern countries, from where they continue to South-East Asia and Australia.<sup>176</sup> The use of fraudulent documents appears to be common along those routes.<sup>177</sup>

Many smugglers in Pakistan offer deals to reach Indonesia only, according to a recent small-scale survey among migrants and smugglers in Pakistan.<sup>178</sup> This implies that the sea voyage from Indonesia to Australia is usually arranged by local smugglers. The cost of a smuggling

## Migrant smuggling in the Pacific

The scattered nature of the states and territories in the vast Pacific limits most smuggling activity to the international airline industry and to a lesser extent, the shipping industry. Migrant smuggling by air usually involves people travelling individually or in small groups of 2-5, as opposed to sea vessels which can carry hundreds of migrants at a time.

### Main departure and arrival points

The Pacific island economies are heavily dependent on tourism and in order to support the growth of this industry, a number of countries have announced new direct flights into Asia and are considering other destinations. The exact list is subject to change, but, for example, it was reported in 2014 that Fiji had direct flights to Hong Kong, China and the Republic of Korea. Papua New Guinea had flights to the Philippines and Singapore, and Palau to several Chinese destinations, the Republic of Korea, Japan and the Philippines.<sup>a</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling in the Pacific

The Pacific is viewed mainly as a transit point for smuggled migrants of Asian origin attempting to enter Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Members of the Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference (PIDC)\* reported varying levels of detected smuggled migrants between 2003 and 2011, ranging from 30-220. However, in 2012, because of a large jump in the Australian data, there were 18,000 detections. Since 2012, the number has dropped to the higher end of the range of pre-2012 numbers, around 200.

The Pacific region has experienced an upward trend in border refusals since 2009. In that year, the number of border refusals was approximately 3,000, whereas by 2013, it had increased to 3,930.<sup>b</sup> Immigration-related fraud has also increased in the region, from 32 cases in 2009 to 905 cases in 2013. The types of immigration fraud reported included false or altered immigration documents, genuine immigration documents obtained fraudulently, false or altered supporting documents and imposters. False passports appears to be the most common type of immigration-related fraud.<sup>c</sup> Most of the migrants attempting to cross borders by fraudulent means are Asians (48 per cent), followed by Pacific Islanders (19 per cent) and Europeans (16 per cent).<sup>d</sup>

There have been occasional large cases of migrant smuggling in the Pacific, involving large numbers of people travelling via boat. For example, in November 2014, the Federated States of Micronesia detected a vessel near the island of Yap carrying 53 individuals, primarily from India and Nepal, who had paid smugglers for transit to the United States.<sup>e</sup> The gender breakdown of the smuggled migrants reported in 2013 by PIDC members was 70 per cent adult male, 13 per cent adult female, 11 per cent boys and 6 per cent girls.<sup>f</sup>

\* Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

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a Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference, *People smuggling, human trafficking and illegal migration in the Pacific*, 2014.

b Ibid.

c Ibid., p. 12.

d Ibid., p. 13.

e United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational organized crime in the Pacific: a threat assessment*, Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, September 2016, p. 40.

f Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference, *People smuggling, human trafficking and illegal migration in the Pacific*, 2014.

package from Pakistan to Australia is estimated at US\$10,000-12,000, with \$7,000 for the leg from Pakistan to Indonesia, and some \$4,000 from Jakarta to Australia.<sup>179</sup> A 2013 survey reported an average price of US\$12,600 for smuggling to Australia, with some variations according to citizenship (Sri Lankans reportedly paid \$9,200, while Afghans paid \$13,500).<sup>180</sup>

### The human cost

South and South-West Asians smuggled to Australia face several risks, in particular during sea crossings. South Asians risk their lives in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the vessels used to smuggle migrants and refugees from Indonesia to Australia are often in poor condition and overcrowded, and carry insufficient water, food and life-

saving equipment.<sup>182</sup> Many smuggled migrants, in particular Afghans, cannot swim, which greatly increases their risk of drowning during a sea crossing.<sup>183</sup>

Migrants and refugees are also exposed to many other risks, as described for other routes. These risks include theft by smugglers, kidnapping for ransom, arrest, and violence. Moreover, detention upon arrival and the possibility of being returned to one's origin country are other challenges faced in some destination countries.<sup>184</sup>

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING FROM AND TO EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In East and South-East Asia, smuggling flows and patterns are diverse and varied, with local, regional and transregional flows. Countries in this area are countries of origin, transit and destination for smuggled migrants.

The smuggling flows in the Mekong subregion, which includes Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand, often involve border communities and have Thailand as the main country of destination. Malaysia is also a destination country for migrants from within the region, from Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh.<sup>185</sup>

In terms of smuggling routes out of East and South-East Asia, one significant route runs towards European destinations and North America. This route is characterized by high levels of organization of the smuggling networks.

### Smuggling of migrants within South-East Asia

There is migrant smuggling between many of the countries in South-East Asia. Thailand is the main destination for smuggled migrants from countries in the Mekong subregion. Thailand shares extensive and unevenly monitored land borders with Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, which makes smuggling a low risk venture.<sup>186</sup> People from the countries of the Mekong subregion wishing to go abroad often seem to seek the services of smugglers for different reasons. While formal migration channels often do exist, making use of them is expensive and time-consuming. In this area, smugglers may offer both facilitated irregular entry and job placement services.<sup>187</sup>

The other main destination country for migrant smuggling within South-East Asia is Malaysia. Due to Malaysia's relative economic prosperity and labour shortages, it sees significant labour-related irregular migration, particularly for citizens of Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as Bangladesh and Myanmar. These movements appear



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to be facilitated by smugglers to a significant extent.<sup>188</sup> The route between Malaysia and Indonesia, in particular, is reportedly 'busy and lucrative' for smugglers,<sup>189</sup> and Indonesian and Filipino migrants are believed to comprise the bulk of flows into Malaysia.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, migrant smuggling from other regions into South-East Asia is only significant with regard to the smuggling of Bangladeshi migrants to Malaysia.<sup>191</sup>

#### **Profile of migrants:**

Migrants are smuggled from most countries within the subregion; mainly migrant workers but also people fleeing persecution.

#### **Human cost:**

Many fatalities along both sea and land routes. Mass killings of migrants have been reported. Exploitation, extortion and physical injuries are not uncommon.

#### **Profile of smugglers:**

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Some smugglers ('organizers') have the same citizenships as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smuggler organizers are based in origin countries.

#### **Organization:**

A mix of well-organized operations on some routes, and looser organization along others. Local smugglers often facilitate short legs of the journeys.

#### **The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points**

With regard to smuggling into Thailand, the routes that smugglers use from Cambodia are well established. One main route leads from Prey Veng Province, in the east of the country almost on the border with Viet Nam. This route follows the main railway line to Battambang and the border town of Poipet, and then across the border into Thailand. Another main route involves the coastal passage from Kampot to Koh Kong and into Thailand. In addition to the established routes, irregular crossings are possible at many points along the border, through forests, rivers and unstaffed checkpoints. These crossings are generally attempted on foot, at night and in small groups to avoid patrols.<sup>192</sup>

The smuggling of migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic to Thailand occurs primarily over the Mekong River, which makes up a long stretch of the border between the two countries. Although irregular crossings at official border checkpoints likely occur, the methods used and the frequency with which it occurs are

unclear.<sup>193</sup> Migrant smuggling from Myanmar to Thailand takes place over the heavily forested land border. The district of Mae Sot has been singled out as a frequent entry point into Thailand, although crossings also occur elsewhere.<sup>194</sup>

It is also likely that, in the attempt to flee from the violence, the Rohingya<sup>e</sup> ethnic group is generating significant smuggling activity destined into Thailand and Malaysia, as well as into the Cox's Bazar district on the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh. Deprived of citizenship, they have no access to legal migration channels. In mid-2015, UNODC reported - on the basis of information from UNHCR and IOM - that the most common route involved travelling by sea to the province of Ranong, Thailand, across the border from the southernmost tip of Myanmar, followed by a one-day land journey across the Malaysian border.<sup>195</sup> After reaching Malaysia - either by sea or land, usually transiting Thailand either way - they often search for work within established Rohingya communities in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.<sup>196</sup>

Indonesian nationals are smuggled into Malaysia by sea or overland. The sea route departs from the island of Sumatra, crosses the Strait of Malacca and lands along the coast of the Malay peninsula. The land route starts from Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, and crosses the land border into the Malaysian states of Sabah or Sarawak.

From the Philippines, migrants are smuggled to Malaysia by sea or air. The sea routes often start from the islands of Sulu and Balawan in south-western Philippines and head to Sabah state in the far north of Malaysian Borneo.<sup>197</sup> Migrants from the Philippines are also smuggled to Malaysia by air; although information is scarce, this might be the more prevalent method.<sup>198</sup>

Most smuggled migrants from Bangladesh have transited Thailand on their way to Malaysia. They may have reached Thailand by land, sea or air, and generally pass through Bangkok. Another common transit point is Songkhla in the south of Thailand where migrants may have to wait for some time for smugglers to organize the onward journey.<sup>199</sup> Then, they cross the land border into Malaysia by driving through the thick jungle and forest.<sup>200</sup>

#### **The magnitude of migrant smuggling within South-East Asia**

There is little migrant smuggling-specific data available for this region. In 2013, UNODC estimated that more than 660,000 irregular migrants enter Thailand each year

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e The Government of Myanmar disputes the term 'Rohingya' and prefers the term 'Bengalis'.

from neighbouring countries and, based on field research, that more than 80 per cent of them use the assistance of smugglers. This would indicate that about 550,000 migrants are smuggled from these countries into Thailand each year.<sup>201</sup>

Data from the Thai authorities shows that the number of irregular entries that are detected in Thailand amounted to more than 200,000 on average per year during the years covered. The authorities only identify small numbers of smuggled migrants, however; ranging between some 200 to nearly 700 for the 2010 – 2013 period.<sup>202</sup> It is not clear why the Thai data suggests that only a fraction of irregular entries are facilitated by a smuggler.

Regarding maritime departures, UNHCR estimates that between 2012 and 2015, some 170,000 refugees and migrants left from Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat. These movements are believed to be greatly facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>203</sup> While the sizable flows from Myanmar's Rakhine state across the border into Bangladesh have lasted for decades,<sup>204</sup> the situation escalated dramatically in late August 2017, when nearly 500,000 people left in the span of one month.<sup>205</sup> These new developments are likely to have increased the demand for migrant smuggling as well.

With regard to migrant smuggling into Malaysia, information is even scarcer. Several estimates of the stock of irregular or undocumented migrants and workers have been published in recent years, and although the estimates are inconsistent (and of course do not entail only smuggled migrants) they give a rough indication of the scale of irregular movements. In 2011, OECD estimated that there are 2.5 million undocumented workers in Malaysia,<sup>206</sup> and in 2016, it was reported that Malaysia hosts more than 2 million irregular migrant workers, with well over half being Indonesians.<sup>207</sup>

Data from government-initiated efforts to regularize the immigration status of undocumented workers can also give an indication of the magnitude of flows, even though, of course, many undocumented workers may not have been smuggled. For example, in 2011, the Malaysian authorities carried out a regularization drive,<sup>f</sup> and registered about 1.3 million undocumented workers. Most were Indonesians, but there were also 270,000 Bangladeshis (registration numbers for citizens of the Philippines and Myanmar were not reported).<sup>208</sup> It is likely that migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar are smuggled

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<sup>f</sup> Malaysia has used regularizations several times. In the 2011 wave, all foreign workers, including those holding a legal status, had to register with their biometric information.

**FIG. 63:** Trend in the number of asylum applications lodged in Malaysia by citizens of Myanmar, 2010-2016



Source: UNHCR.

for at least some part of their journey to Malaysia.

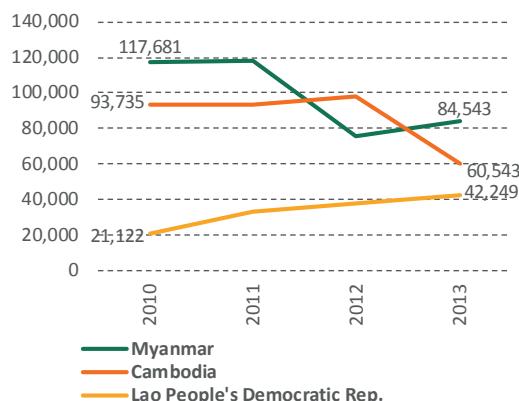
Some migrant smuggling to Malaysia may also involve refugees in search of international protection. Between 2010 and 2016, on average, some 20,000 citizens of Myanmar applied for asylum in Malaysia per year. In the peak year of 2013, more than 50,000 such applications were lodged. A few Indonesians also seek asylum in Malaysia, although the numbers are low, reaching almost 200 in the peak year of 2016.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

Data from large-scale governmental efforts to register irregular migrant workers in Thailand shows that 82 per cent were from Myanmar, 10 per cent from Cambodia, and 8 per cent from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Assuming this distribution for the 2013 UNODC estimate of 550,000 migrants smuggled from these countries into Thailand each year would imply annual inflows into Thailand of about 450,000 migrants and refugees from Myanmar, 55,000 from Cambodia, and 44,000 from the Lao People's Democratic Republic.<sup>209</sup>

Official Thai statistics show that citizens of Myanmar are the most frequently detected group irregularly entering the country, but not by as large a margin as the figures above would imply. In 2013 – the most recent year for which data is available - the Thai authorities detected more than 84,500 citizens of Myanmar who were entering Thailand irregularly. The corresponding figure for Cambodians was some 60,500, while for citizens of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, it was just over 42,000. The number of detected smuggled migrants was a mere fraction of this. The year with the highest reported numbers of smuggled migrants was 2011. In that year, the authorities recorded 261 smuggled migrants from Myanmar and 16 from Cambodia.<sup>210</sup>

**FIG. 64: Trend in the numbers of detected irregular entries into Thailand of citizens of Myanmar, Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2010-2013**



Source: UNODC.

The available data for Malaysia only refers to irregular migrants, who may or may not have been smuggled into the country. In 2015, UNODC reported that more than 60 per cent of irregular migrants in Malaysia are Indonesians, with citizens of Bangladesh, the Philippines and Myanmar constituting the second, third and fourth largest groups.<sup>211</sup>

Smuggled South-East Asian migrants tend to be economically disadvantaged and have low levels of education.<sup>212</sup> With regard to smuggling into Thailand, migrants can be divided into two categories, with corresponding differences in the services they commonly request from smugglers. First are those from rural border areas who cross the border to Thailand to take advantage of seasonal agricultural work and may employ the assistance of smugglers for transport and to avoid patrols by Thai border guards. The second category are longer-term migrants, who move all over the country and work in a broad range of sectors. These migrants either seek the services of smugglers for assistance in job placement, or are recruited by someone they know.<sup>213</sup>

Most of the available data and research suggest that the majority of smuggled migrants within the Mekong subregion are young men, although the smuggling of females is also significant. Research from 2011 indicated that the majority of irregular migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic living in Thailand are women, working as domestic workers.<sup>214</sup> The same is true for Indonesian smuggled migrants. Although most are men, there are also significant numbers of women, and these women often seek employment as domestic workers.<sup>215</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

As for many parts of the world, most migrant smuggling organizations in South-East Asia seem to be loose associations of individuals operating on a small scale, rather than structured, hierarchical criminal syndicates. These networks tend to act on a very local level, so that smugglers are known to migrants or somebody close to them.<sup>216</sup> Much of the smuggling within the region also appears to be opportunistic.<sup>217</sup>

However, with regard to smuggling of Indonesians to Malaysia, it has been reported that smugglers operate extensive networks in the two countries, capable of offering very well organized smuggling services. Recruitment is often handled by local smugglers living in the migrants' home communities.<sup>218</sup> It appears that smugglers involved in the facilitation of movements from Indonesia to Malaysia often engage in related forms of crime, in particular document fraud.<sup>219</sup> The networks that smuggle Bangladeshi migrants through Thailand into Malaysia are also reported to be well organized. These networks can often assist migrants in obtaining tourist visas - permitting them to enter or transit through Thailand - and arranging their onward travel to Malaysia. Some of the groups appear to have links to construction firms in Malaysia.<sup>220</sup>

Migrant smugglers in the Mekong subregion are commonly citizens of the origin country of the migrants they smuggle. In the case of Cambodian migrants, Cambodian smugglers transport them across the border into Thailand. With migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thai and Lao smuggling groups work together to smuggle migrants from one country to another.<sup>221</sup> Many smugglers were irregular migrants themselves, and most rely on word-of-mouth to promote their services.<sup>222</sup>

In the Mekong subregion, migrant smugglers also tend to offer a wider range of services than what is common along most other routes. Smugglers not only make it possible for migrants to evade border controls, but they also act as job brokers and often offer accommodation.<sup>223</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Some migrants that cross into Thailand via the land borders are smuggled closer to Bangkok by private car or public transportation. Other smugglers then arrange transportation to a final destination. If law enforcement intercepts the smuggling, migrants are generally arrested, fined, and then deported. The smugglers are often not penalized.<sup>224</sup> It seems that many smugglers along this route rely heavily on other smugglers who live in border communities, especially at particular border crossings.<sup>225</sup>

According to the Thai authorities, migrants from South Asia are smuggled into Thailand through Bangkok and Songkhla Province. Most of them are smuggled by sea, debarking in southern Thailand, including Ranong province.<sup>226</sup>

A UNODC report from 2013 shows that the fees for being smuggled into Thailand vary according to the services required. A safe border crossing and transportation to an employer in Thailand will cost the migrant approximately US\$325. Fees typically cover the cost of crossing the border, food, water, transportation to the Thai employer and en route accommodation. Smugglers who act as recruiters also collect fees from the Thai employers. The amount ranges from some US\$6 to US\$16 (200 and 500 baht) per worker.<sup>227</sup> There may also be differences in the fee structures based on origin. Migrants from Myanmar reportedly pay the highest fees, while migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia pay considerably less.<sup>228</sup>

Much of the migrant smuggling into Malaysia has a strong labour connotation, and much of the smuggling involves unlicensed recruitment agencies in both the origin country and in Malaysia. These smugglers usually facilitate both irregular entry and job placement.<sup>229</sup> The use of fraudulent documents for the purpose of smuggling into Malaysia is relatively well documented, particularly regarding movements from Indonesia and the Philippines. Migrant smuggling organizations may either forge the documents themselves or outsource the work to other criminal networks.<sup>230</sup> In operations from the Philippines, smuggling groups usually do not forge documents themselves, instead relying on specialized criminal groups to provide this service.<sup>231</sup>

Regarding smuggling operations from Indonesia into Malaysia, some research has found that the role of Indonesian smugglers ends with arrival at destination, where Malaysian smugglers handle job placement.<sup>232</sup> However, there are also reports that Indonesian and Malaysian smugglers operate on both sides of the border and act as brokers, recruiters or agents that are organized into smuggling networks. These smugglers are often well-known local figures who live among their clientele and have a record of successful smuggling operations.<sup>233</sup>

Smuggled migrants from the Philippines who travel by sea are usually transported to Malaysia aboard small boats, often used by local traders. The smugglers who navigate the boats anchor near the shoreline of Malaysia's Sabah state, permitting the migrants to wade ashore.<sup>234</sup>

Corruption often seems to play a role in this subregion,

with a wide range of officials potentially benefitting. Recent research published by the International Organization for Migration argued that ‘...the corrupt behaviour that facilitates migrant smuggling and human trafficking (is) endemic and (has) proved difficult to manage’ in South-East Asia.<sup>235</sup>

### The human cost

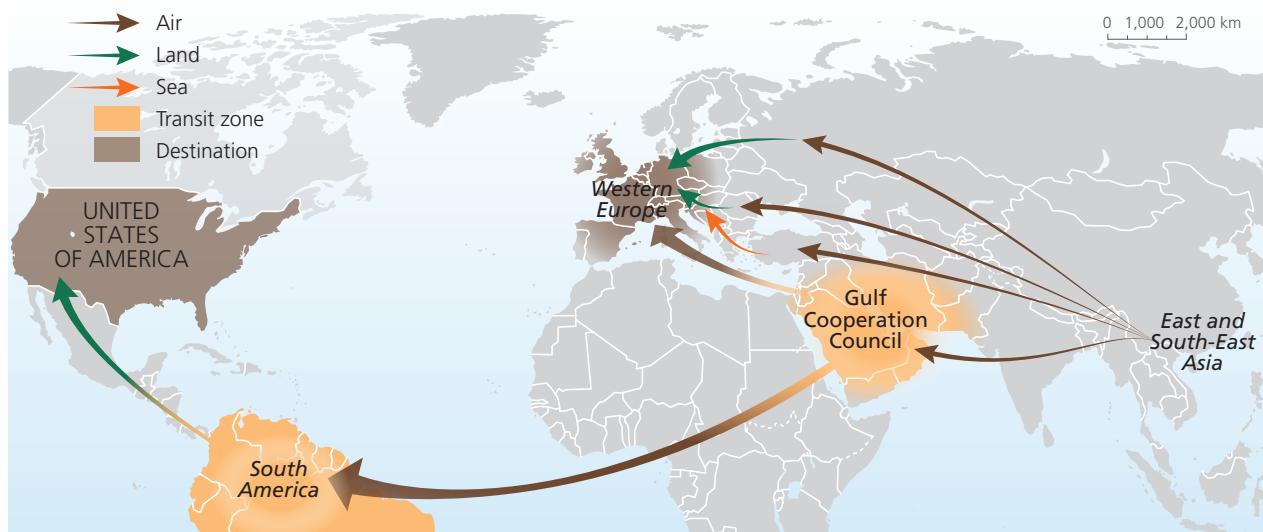
Significant numbers of fatalities have been reported during smuggling in South-East Asia. An estimated 800 people lost their lives in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in 2014 and 2015, when large numbers of stateless persons attempted to reach Thailand and Malaysia from Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat.<sup>236</sup> In South-East Asia, as for most routes, the majority of fatalities occur at sea. Between January 2014 and June 2017, 89 per cent of recorded migrant deaths involved maritime travel. This includes deaths caused by gunfire, torture or beatings that occurred on board ships. However, it is likely that migrant deaths on land go unrecorded. In 2015, mass graves containing nearly 200 migrant remains were discovered in the region.<sup>237</sup> This indicates that irregular overland movements in South-East Asia are also fraught with danger.

The smuggling of migrants along this route entails dangers, both environmental and at the hands of smugglers, as well as vulnerability to labour exploitation as a result of the irregular migration process. Smuggled migrants may have no choice but to accept excessively long working hours, unsafe conditions and payment well below the minimum wage.<sup>238</sup> Some smuggled migrants are also exploited and become victims of trafficking in persons.<sup>239</sup> South Asian migrants who are smuggled by sea to the southern provinces of Thailand may fall prey to human trafficking syndicates. Thai authorities reported having assisted victims of trafficking as well as migrants vulnerable to being trafficked among the migrants smuggled along this route.<sup>240</sup>

## FROM EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA TO EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

East and South-East Asia are regions of origin for migrants who are smuggled to Europe and North America. The smuggling of migrants from Cambodia, China, the Philippines and Viet Nam, as well as from other countries in East and South-East Asia is dispersed in several parts of Europe and North America.

East and South-East Asians are smuggled along the Eastern Mediterranean and European Eastern Borders routes, as



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

well as through air routes. Similarly, East and South-East Asians are smuggled to North America via air routes to major international airports in the United States, as well as through that country's southern border.

#### **Profile of migrants:**

From various East and South-East Asian countries; mainly individual males, but also women.

#### **Human cost:**

Various forms of victimization have been recorded along certain land passages.

#### **Profile of smugglers:**

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed, or related to the citizenship of the migrants smuggled.

#### **Organization:**

Mainly large transnational smuggling networks.

#### **The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points**

Smuggling from East and South-East Asia to Europe involves a range of different routes and methods. Most commonly, migrants fly as close as possible to their desired destination, and are smuggled overland for the remaining stretch. The choice of transit airport is guided by considerations regarding cost and visa requirements for these migrants. In recent years, many migrants have flown to Eastern European major cities with fraudulent travel documents. Smugglers then transport migrants over land,

often via the European Eastern Borders route.<sup>241</sup>

UNODC research from 2015 identified three key migrant smuggling routes from East Asia to the European Union. One involved migrants flying from major international airports in the region to major international airport in Eastern Europe. The air passage to Europe may be regular or undertaken with altered documents or genuine documents belonging to someone else. Migrants then continued overland to one of the Baltic States and/or Eastern European countries into Western Europe.<sup>242</sup> Frontex reports that most detections of irregular border crossing by East and South-East Asian citizens take place at the Eastern EU border with Latvia.<sup>243</sup> Poland is also a transit country for the smuggling of these migrants, and there appear to be links between some smuggling networks and the East Asian communities there.<sup>244</sup>

The second route involved direct flights to some European transit airports, mainly in South-eastern or Central Europe. From there, migrants were transported overland to other destinations in Western Europe.<sup>245</sup>

A third smuggling route involved East and South-East Asians making use of the Eastern Mediterranean route. Typically, they would fly into Turkey with fraudulent documents, and travel onwards from Turkey to Greece by boat. Many would continue to Italy, and then transit through various other European countries to reach either France or the United Kingdom.<sup>246</sup>

With regard to smuggling from East and South-East Asia to North America, it appears that different nationalities

use different smuggling methods. Some arrive with genuine documents and then overstay their visa. This travel method may or may not involve smugglers. There is a possibility, for example, that a genuine visa is obtained with the help of a smuggler. Some East and South-East Asian migrants pay smugglers to arrange a sham marriage with a Canadian or American citizen in order to enter those countries. Others may be smuggled by air directly to the United States or via a neighboring country.<sup>247</sup>

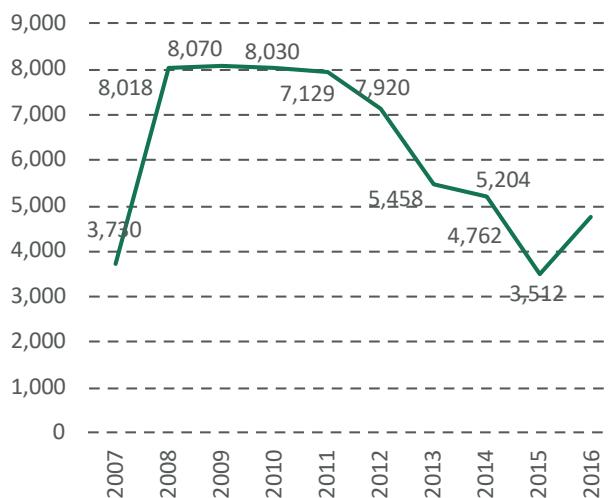
Smugglers may use a number of air routes. Sometimes migrants are smuggled first by air to a Gulf country or to Europe, then onwards to South or Central America. Or they may fly directly to a South American country and then head north towards the United States overland. From Central America, migrants are smuggled to Mexico, continuing overland to the border region.<sup>248</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from East and South-East Asia to Europe and North America

There is very little specific migrant smuggling data available, and there is no consensus among academics regarding the magnitude of these flows.<sup>249</sup>

With regard to entry refusals of East and South-East Asian citizens at the European Union external borders, the number has ranged between 1,800 per year in 2012 and 3,000 per year in 2016. The trend is increasing, but still

**FIG. 65: Trend in the number of East and South-East Asians apprehended in immigration enforcement actions in the United States, 2007-2016\***



\* Fiscal years (FY 2016 ran from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016).

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

a mere fraction of the more than 388,000 total entry refusals at European borders in 2016.<sup>250</sup>

With regard to smuggling of East and South-East Asian citizens into the United States, data from the US Department of Homeland Security shows that the trend for apprehensions of East and South-East Asian citizens for immigration offences was declining from fiscal year 2009 to 2015.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

The majority of smuggled migrants from East and South-East Asia come from specific provinces in their countries<sup>251</sup>. It is likely that the presence of established diaspora communities in destination countries plays a role in this smuggling.

The sex, age and educational profile of smuggled migrants appear to vary between origin and destinations. For instance, Vietnamese irregular migrants in Europe are mostly aged between 18 and 40 years. Vietnamese persons who are smuggled into Germany are often in their 40s or older, and fairly well educated. Those detected in other parts of Europe were both younger (mostly in their late 20s) and less educated.<sup>252</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

East Asian migrant smugglers typically share the same citizenship with the migrants,<sup>253</sup> although cooperation between groups from different East Asian background has been reported in destination countries.<sup>254</sup> They come from a range of backgrounds, often with good family networks and contacts, and do not seem to conduct other illicit activities. Smugglers are usually men aged between 20 and 50. Smugglers based in the European Union typically have legal residence there and have been living abroad for an extended period of time.<sup>255</sup> Although men dominate, many women are also involved in these networks.<sup>256</sup>

Smuggling from East Asia appears to involve a combination of different groups and networks that cooperate along the main smuggling routes. The groups involved in the smuggling along these routes have extensive contacts outside their origin countries in Europe and North America. The networks have been described as interconnected and horizontal.<sup>257</sup>

Some East Asian smuggling networks seem to work with groups operating in origin countries, outsourcing certain legs of the trip to local groups with contacts and knowledge. They may also engage other criminal groups to handle travel through transit countries as well as entry into the destination country. Such arrangements are handled like business relationships, with frequent communica-

## Smuggling of migrants from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) shares land borders with China and the Republic of Korea. It appears that the Republic of Korea is the preferred destination for most smuggled migrants from the DPRK.<sup>a</sup>

The Republic of Korea's Ministry of Unification publishes statistics on the number of 'defectors' from the Democratic Republic of Korea that enter the Republic of Korea (ROK) each year. While it is not clear whether or to what extent these movements involve migrant smugglers, it is likely that a large share of them do, given the border fortifications between the two Koreas and the convoluted alternative routes into the ROK for DPRK citizens. The data show a declining trend, and average yearly arrival numbers around 1,500.<sup>b</sup>

According to the Ministry of Unification data, the age groups of 20-29 and 30-39 accounted for 57 per cent of the DPRK 'defectors' who arrived in the ROK between 1998 and 2016. Children and young people (age groups 0-9 and 10-19) accounted for some 16 per cent of the arrivals. In 2016, nearly 80 per cent of the 'defectors' were females.

Regarding the specific place of origin of the irregular migrants, research for the United Nations Human Rights Council found that most of the migrants originated from regions bordering China. Approximately 80 per cent of the more than 26,000 former DPRK citizens who left for the Republic of Korea by late 2013 and acquired citizenship there originated from the North Hamgyong and Ryanggang border provinces in the country's north-east.<sup>c</sup>

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cation and close follow-up.<sup>258</sup> For example, European smuggling groups seem to be involved in assisting migrants with information and onward travel arrangements, sometimes also including forged or fraudulently obtained documents. Reports indicate that some migrants are travelling (regularly or irregularly) directly to capitals in Eastern Europe from East Asia, where they continue by truck into Western Europe.<sup>259</sup>

More organized smuggling networks seems to integrate several smugglers who serve as 'stage coordinators,' controlling different parts of the geographical movement and/or certain aspects of the smuggling process. The 'stage coordinators' have some seniority and oversight, and may delegate certain tasks to lower-ranking smugglers. The 'stage coordinators' appear to report to senior smugglers, 'organizers' in origin countries, who maintain responsibility for the financial aspects of the smuggling crime. Document forgery and falsification is also generally carried out in East Asia.<sup>260</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to

Europe is usually carried out by a combination of air and overland travel. Eurostat data on entry refusals by border type shows that more than 50 per cent of refusals of these citizens take place at airports in the European Union. About one third of the refusals were reported at land borders and much less at sea borders.

Migrants who make their way to Western Europe via Eastern Europe are often smuggled first by air from their origin countries to an international airport in one of the Eastern European countries. From these transit points, migrants are smuggled westward to the European Union.<sup>261</sup> Smugglers may provide migrants with forged or altered documents or genuine documents under false identities, at origin countries or en route. Sometimes smugglers employ sophisticated techniques. Smuggled migrants may be presented as students seeking to study in Europe and travel with academic transcripts, language proficiency certificates and enrolment documents that may be forged.<sup>262</sup>

Czech and Slovak authorities have reported various methods of document fraud and false representations in applications for visas and travel documents by these migrants, for example, photo substitution in temporary Czech passports. In other cases, visas have been fraudulently obtained

through embassies in origin countries. Forged passports have also been reported.<sup>263</sup> According to Hungarian authorities, some South-East Asian citizens present fraudulent travel or identity documents to obtain Schengen visas.<sup>264</sup> The fraudulent documents are typically manufactured or altered in East Asia and sent to transit points where they are given to the smuggled migrants.<sup>265</sup>

The fees charged for the smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to Europe vary greatly, depending on destination, travel routes and time spent in transit countries. Reported estimates for smuggling into Europe are between US\$7,000 and \$15,000.<sup>266</sup> In general, smuggling into Eastern Europe is less expensive than to Western Europe. Migrants typically pay an upfront fee of \$1,000 to \$2,000 in order to obtain fraudulent travel documents, and then pay the rest at destination.<sup>267</sup>

Methods of payment seem to change according to the smuggling organization or the migrant's nationality. Some smuggling groups handle financial transactions through a hawala-like system. A smuggler ('broker') in the origin country is given the cash and arranges payment to another smuggler in destination country. If the smuggling is unsuccessful, part of the fee is refunded to the migrant's family.<sup>268</sup> Some other smuggling groups seem not to use such informal methods of transferring fees.<sup>269</sup>

### The human cost

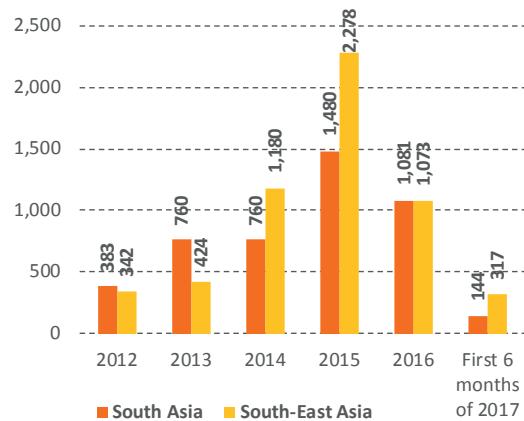
The smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to Europe and North America can be extremely dangerous and even life threatening. There have been reports of migrants dying inside shipping containers from lack of air.<sup>270</sup> A case in which migrants were concealed in plastic bin bags from France to the United Kingdom, for example, resulted in the death of one smuggled migrant while several others fell unconscious and had to be resuscitated after they were detected.<sup>271</sup>

The migrants' irregular status in transit and destination countries also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. In addition, the high smuggling fees associated with these routes subject migrants to severe repayment tactics that may lead to exploitation. East Asian migrants have been reported to be vulnerable to situations of debt bondage, sometimes entailing years of brutal working conditions.<sup>272</sup>

### Other routes in East Asia

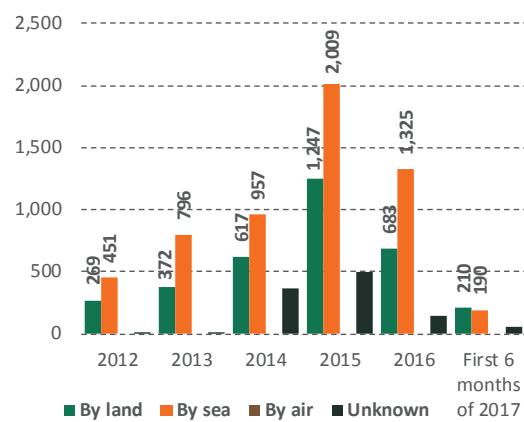
Smuggling of migrants flows seem to affect the two Special Administrative Regions of China; that is, Hong Kong SAR, China and Macao SAR, China. A number of irregular entries have been reported by the Chinese authorities in

**FIG. 66:** Trend in the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong SAR, China, by region of citizenship, 2012-June 2017



Source: Official information from Hong Kong SAR, China.

**FIG. 67:** Trend in the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong SAR, China, by method of travel, 2012-June 2017



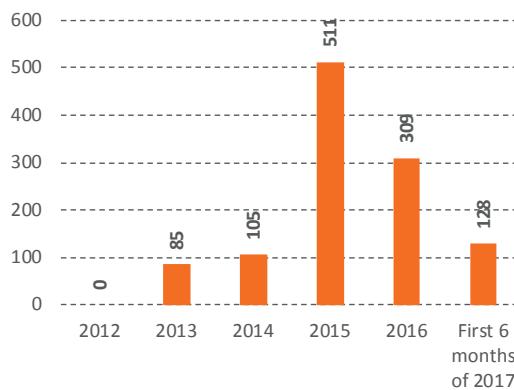
Source: Official information from Hong Kong SAR, China.

reference to these two areas in recent years. Two facts suggest that many of these irregular entries have been facilitated by smugglers. The first is the origin of the detected migrants and the second is the method of transportation.

Many of the migrants who have been detected for irregularly entering in Hong Kong, China are South Asian citizens, 45 per cent of the illegal entries between 2012 and the first six months of 2017. The majority of migrants (55 per cent of the entries) are South-East Asian migrants.

The majority of migrants who are detected when attempting irregular entry into Hong Kong, China travel by sea, which suggests a travel method requiring a minimum level of organization. About 56 per cent of the irregular entries recorded in Hong Kong, China between 2012 and the

**FIG. 68: Trend in the number of migrants smuggled into Macao SAR, 2012-June 2017**



Source: Official information from Macao SAR, China.

first six months of 2017 involved travel by sea; 33 per cent by land, while for 11 per cent of the irregular entries the method of travel was unrecorded. None of the detected irregular entries took place at airports.

For Macao, China, the data refers specifically to smuggled migrants. The number of smuggled migrants recorded in Macao, China is much lower than the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong, China, and almost all refer to South-East Asian citizens. There are no indications that South Asian migrants are smuggled into Macao, China.

Linguistic ties due to the colonial past of these areas could help explain the flows from parts of South Asia to Hong Kong, China, as well as the absence of such flows to Macao, China. Both Special Administrative Regions recorded increasing trends of irregular entries until the peak in 2015. A sharp reduction was recorded in 2016 and the decreasing trend is confirmed by data for the first half of 2017.

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## EUROPE



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

### Profile of migrants:

Along the Central Mediterranean route, most smuggled migrants are from the Horn of Africa and West Africa. Along the Eastern Mediterranean route, many people from South-West Asia, mainly the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as Afghans and Iraqis. Most of those using the Western Mediterranean route are West Africans, plus Syrians and Moroccans. Most of the smuggled migrants are men.

### Human cost:

Thousands of smuggled migrants have died during the sea passage, mostly along the Central Mediterranean route. Deaths have also been reported along the other European routes. Exploitation of migrants and gross human rights violations have been recorded in origin, transit and destination countries.

### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries of departure or of the same citizenship as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smuggling organizers are based in destination countries.

### Organization:

Depending on the route, a mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journey and larger transnational networks. Sea journeys generally require more organization than overland travel.

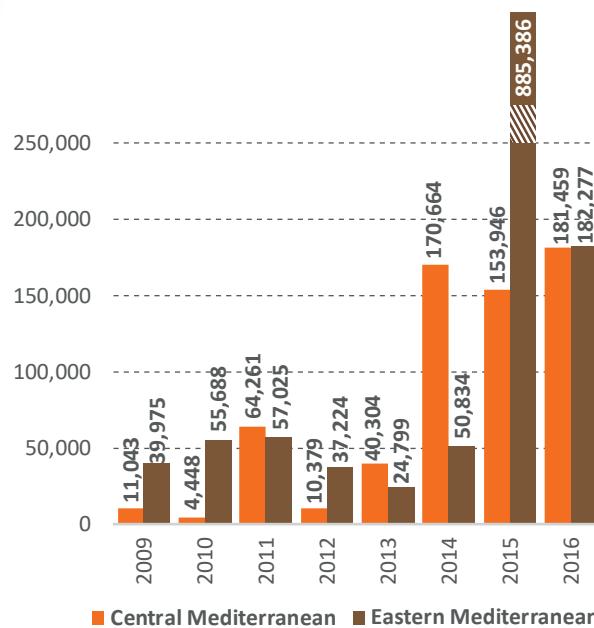
## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING TO AND ACROSS EUROPE

Since 2014, Europe has seen a significant increase in the number of arrivals of irregular migrants and refugees compared to the first few years of this decade. Flows along some traditional migratory routes have increased and some new routes have emerged.

Although so far no accurate and comprehensive statistics on migrant smuggling to and within Europe have been produced, there is extensive evidence that many of the irregular migrants and refugees arriving in European countries have been smuggled. Europol has reported that more than 90 per cent of irregular migrants use facilitation services – usually migrant smugglers – at some point during their journey to Europe.<sup>1</sup> In early 2016, Europol launched the European Migrant Smuggling Centre in response to the unprecedented increase in the number of irregular migrants arriving in the European Union since 2014.

There are currently three major smuggling routes into Europe. The Central Mediterranean route departs from North Africa, most commonly Libya, and arrives in Italy, usually in Sicily. The Eastern Mediterranean route connects the Turkish coast to various Greek islands, and the Western Mediterranean route departs from Morocco and arrives in Spain, either by sea or overland. For most of the migrants and refugees who make use of these routes, being smuggled across the Mediterranean is only one part of a longer journey that may have started in South-West Asia, the Horn of Africa, West Africa or elsewhere.

**FIG. 69:** Number of detected irregular border crossings along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

The Western Mediterranean route has consistently seen the lowest arrival numbers, ranging between some 4,000 and 20,000 per year between 1999 and 2016, apart from a sharp rise to nearly 40,000 arrivals in 2006.<sup>2</sup> Arrivals on the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes fluctuated sharply between 2009 and 2013, although yearly arrival numbers on either route never exceeded 65,000 during these years.<sup>3</sup>

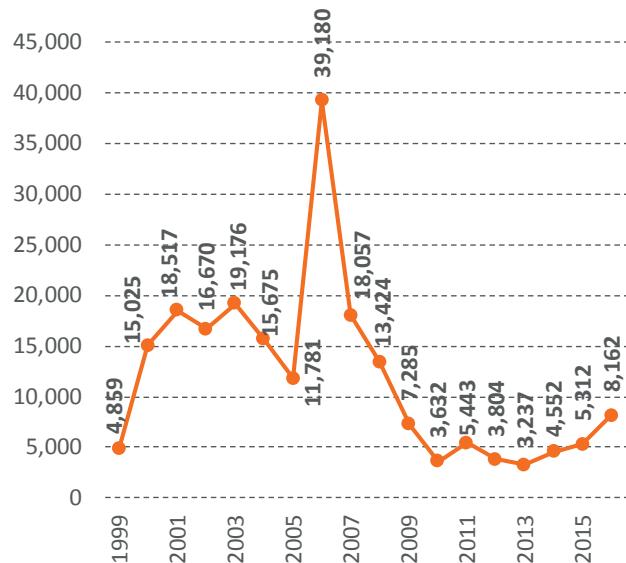
In 2014, however, the number of arrivals increased significantly, driven by more than 170,000 arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route. This was followed by an even more dramatic increase in 2015, when more than 1 million people arrived, mostly along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The years 2016 and 2017 saw a stark decrease compared to the year 2015, however the number of arrivals remained above the number recorded in 2014 and before.<sup>4</sup> While nearly half of the arrivals in 2015 were from the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2016, this share had decreased to 23 per cent, alongside a diversification of the origins of migrants smuggled into the European Union.

The three Mediterranean routes dominate, but migrant smuggling also occurs elsewhere in Europe. Irregular

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a Several international organizations, including Frontex, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, as well as national authorities in some destination countries, monitor arrivals along the Mediterranean routes and regularly report data. The exact figures vary somewhat between agencies, but these variations do not affect overall trends.

**FIG. 70:** Trend in the number of irregular migrants arrived at Spanish coasts, both in continental territory and the Canary Islands, 1999-2016



Source: Spanish Ministry of Interior.

entries are reported through the European Union's eastern borders every year, although it is difficult to determine how many of those are facilitated by migrant smugglers. In 2016, some 1,350 irregular border crossings were detected along the Eastern Borders route.<sup>4</sup> In autumn 2017, detections of migrants who had been smuggled across the Black Sea increased, although the numbers were small compared to the other sea routes.<sup>5</sup>

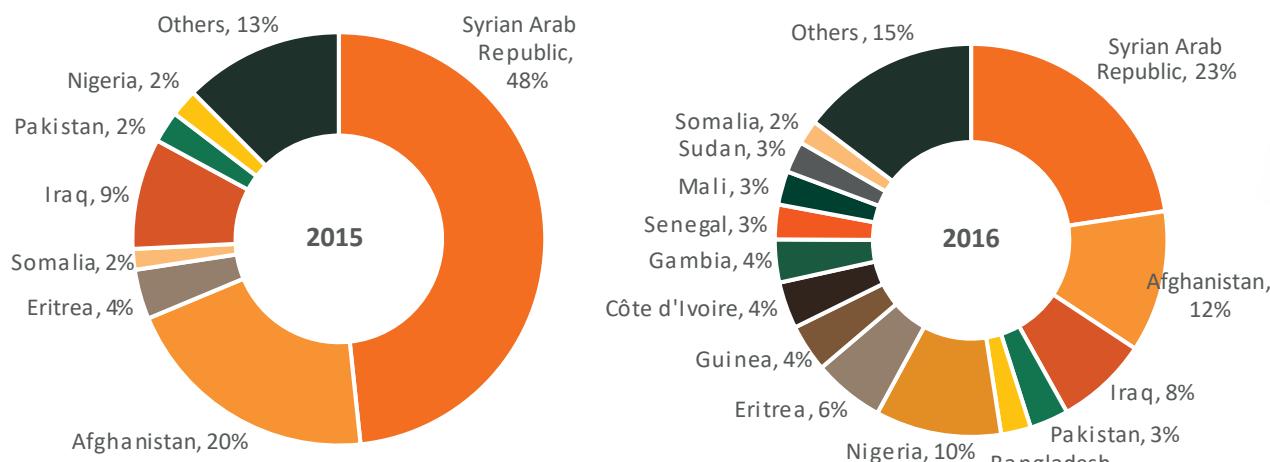
Moreover, smugglers facilitate some of the movements of migrants and refugees along the Western Balkans route. The use of the Western Balkans route peaked in 2015, with detections of irregular border crossings of more than 764,000. By 2016, these detections had decreased to just over 130,000.<sup>6</sup> Smugglers also facilitate 'secondary movements'<sup>b</sup> within the European Union. It is difficult to gauge how many of the 'secondary movements' involve smuggling as irregular migrants use a variety of modi operandi and means of transport.<sup>7</sup>

Migrants are also smuggled to a range of major airports in Europe, often using fraudulent documents. The number of detections of fraudulent documents on entry from third countries into the EU or Schengen area has been decreasing in recent years. From a peak of more than 11,000 in 2013,<sup>8</sup> there has been a gradual decline to just

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b The phenomenon of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for various reasons move from the country in which they first arrived, to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere. (European Parliament, *Secondary movements of asylum-seekers in the EU asylum system*, Briefing, October 2017).

**FIG. 71: Shares of citizenships among people who arrived in the European Union along the three Mediterranean routes, by country of citizenship, 2015 and 2016**



Source: UNHCR.

more than 8,000 in 2016. The most frequently detected type of fraudulent document is passports (34 per cent in 2016), followed by visas.<sup>9</sup>

## THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Central Mediterranean route – from North Africa to Italy (and Malta) – is a common entry point to Europe for irregular migrants and refugees travelling by sea. Apart from the year 2015, when arrivals in Greece on the Eastern Mediterranean route surpassed those in Italy, most migrants who travel by sea use the Central Mediterranean route. The route's arrival and departure points, the magnitude, and the profiles of the people comprising the flows along this route have changed considerably over time. For many migrants smuggled across the Mediterranean, this is but one leg in a longer journey.

Accurate data specific to migrant smuggling is not available. Nevertheless, according to the extensive literature available, it can be concluded that virtually all migrants travelling along this route depend on smugglers for the sea crossing.<sup>10</sup> Such a crossing, by boat, is far more difficult to accomplish alone than traversing a land border. It can thus be assumed that data about irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean route also broadly depict the migrant smuggling situation.

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Libya has traditionally been and is still the main departure point for this route. The exact share is difficult to determine and may also fluctuate, but up to 90 per cent of

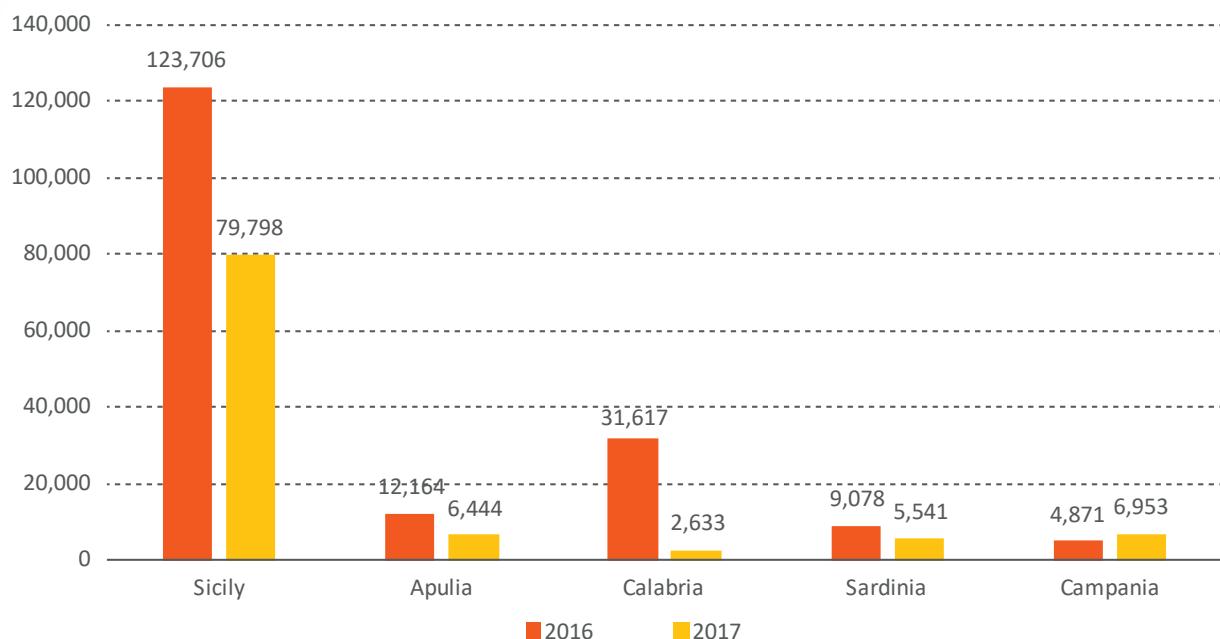
those using the Central Mediterranean route to reach Italy depart from Libya.<sup>11</sup> Smuggled migrants usually leave from Tripoli and its surroundings, including Zawiya and Zuwarah to the west of the capital and Misrata to the east. Some migrants also leave from Benghazi, which is some 1,000 km east of Tripoli.<sup>12</sup>

Libyan departure points to Europe change quickly depending on a number of factors, including the actions of local communities, the local security situation and the presence of checkpoints. For example, in 2016, smuggling departures moved eastwards along the Libyan coast, with departures from Zuwarah decreasing significantly. One of the drivers of this decrease was the capsizing of a boat and subsequent drowning of 183 migrants off the coast of Zuwarah. This sparked a wave of public outrage, and many locals turned against the smugglers.<sup>13</sup> Sabratha – some 40 km to the east of Zuwarah – then became the main departure point along the Libyan coast.

Egypt is much less significant as a transit and departure point. Until 2013, people departing from Egypt were mainly Syrian refugees. After 2013, the majority of migrants departing from the northern Egyptian coast were people claiming to be Sudanese, Eritreans and Somalis.<sup>14</sup> According to Frontex, in 2017, the migrant smuggling flow from the Horn of Africa to Europe via Egypt virtually stopped.<sup>15</sup> When the route was still active, departures mainly took place between Damietta to the east of Alexandria and El-Hamam to the west.<sup>16</sup>

The route connecting Tunisia to Sicily was popular among Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian seasonal workers in the 1990s. Since 1998, the signing of a readmission agreement

**FIG. 72: Sea arrivals in Italy, by point of arrival, 2016-2017**



Source: Italian Police, Direzione Centrale Anticrimine, Servizio Centrale Operativo.

between Italy and Tunisia<sup>c</sup> and increased controls have contributed to reduce the number and size of landings. Boats would leave from several areas, including Cap Bon in the north-east and the area south of Monastir.<sup>17</sup>

Data from the Italian authorities indicates that this smuggling route is, to some extent, active again. In 2017, more than 5,900 migrants were smuggled by sea to Italy with Tunisia as departing country. This represents a large increase compared to the 999 migrants recorded in 2016 and 569 in 2015 who used this departure point to reach Italy.<sup>18</sup>

Most of the Central Mediterranean route arrivals occur in Italy, where 181,436 migrants and refugees landed in 2016; an increase of nearly 18 per cent compared to the 153,842 arrivals in 2015. In 2017, the number of landings recorded in Italy dropped to 119,369.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority of arrivals take place on the island of Sicily, including Lampedusa, a small island between the vastly larger Sicily and Libya.

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c Tunisia and Italy signed an agreement on both readmission and police cooperation in August 1998. The countries committed to readmitting their own nationals as well as third-country nationals (with the exception of the nationals of the Arab Maghreb Union) who transited from their respective national territories. The agreement entered into force on September 23, 1999. See: Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, January 15, 2000 *Atti internazionali entrati in vigore per l'Italia nel periodo 16 settembre - 15 dicembre 1999 non soggetti a legge di autorizzazione alla ratifica.* Supplemento ordinario alla GAZZETTA UFFICIALE.

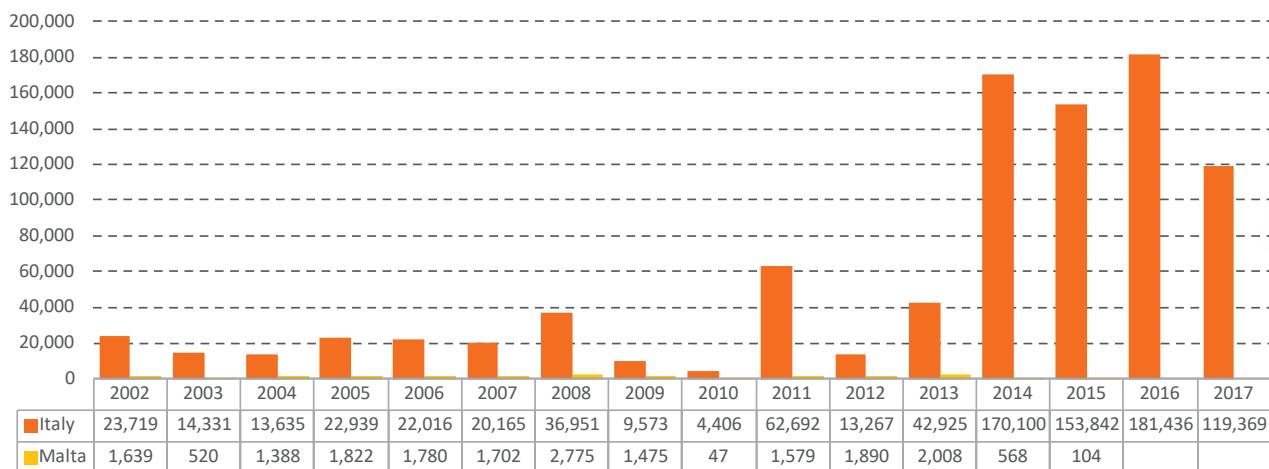
As of 2014, sea arrivals in Malta have significantly decreased, and in 2016, IOM reported no arrivals in Malta. Some research has attributed this decrease mainly to the Operation Mare Nostrum, started by Italy in October 2013, which envisaged disembarkation in Italy only.<sup>20</sup> The number of arrivals in Malta decreased even further in 2015, after the end of Mare Nostrum and its replacement by the Frontex Operation Triton, which does not foresee disembarkation in Malta either.

For most of the migrants travelling along the Central Mediterranean route, the sea crossing to Europe is part of a longer journey, which starts in West or East Africa, the Middle East or Asia, and often continues to northern Europe. Those legs of the journey do not necessarily involve migrant smuggling.

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Central Mediterranean route

Between 2002 and 2010, the number of irregular migrants and refugees entering the European Union along the Central Mediterranean route fluctuated, but remained at a level of less than 40,000 per year. In 2011, there was a sharp increase, with more than 64,000 migrants and refugees arriving in Italy and Malta. Three years later, the number of arrivals marked a new order of magnitude, reaching more than 170,000. This high level remained relatively stable in 2015 and 2016. The year 2017 marked some decrease compared to the previous three years, with about 120,000 sea arrivals.

FIG. 73: Trend in the number of sea arrivals in Italy and Malta\*, 2002-2017



\* Data on Malta for 2016 and 2017 was not available.

Source: IOM and Italian Police.

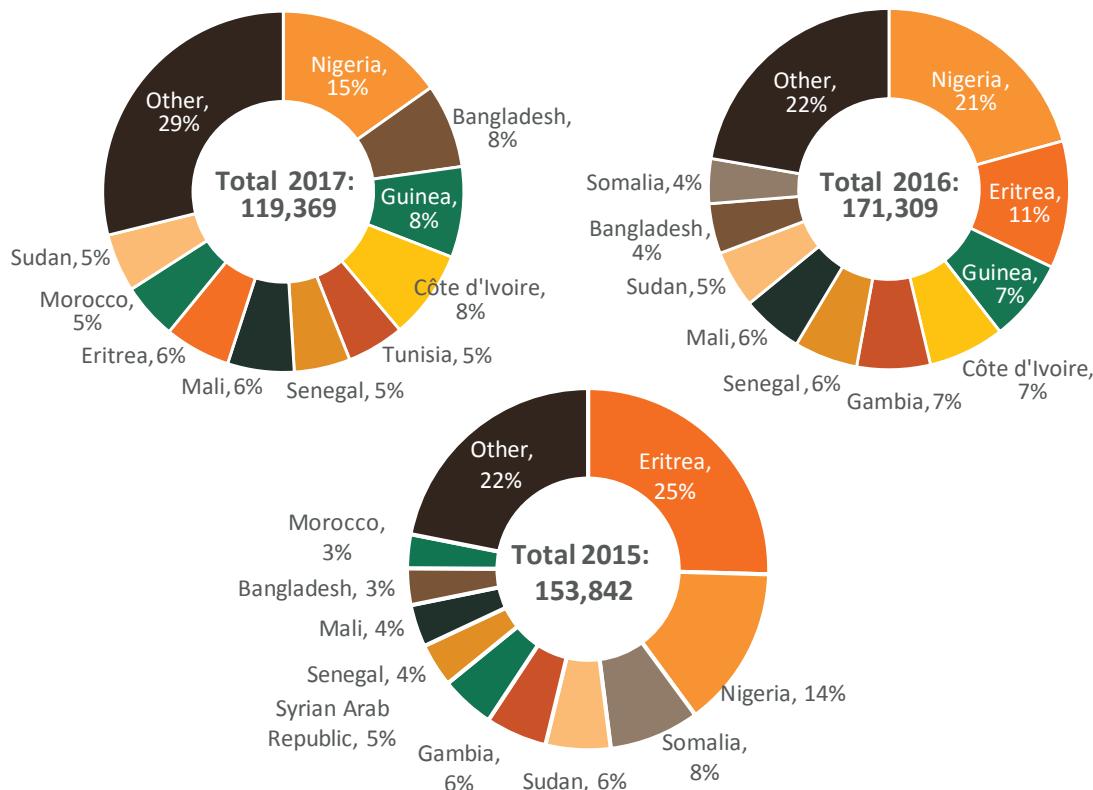
### The profile of the smuggled migrants

The vast majority of the smuggled migrants making use of the Central Mediterranean route are originally from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Asia, but among them are also a few citizens of North African countries.<sup>21</sup> Many have been smuggled from West Africa or the Horn

of Africa along the routes described in other sections of this report.

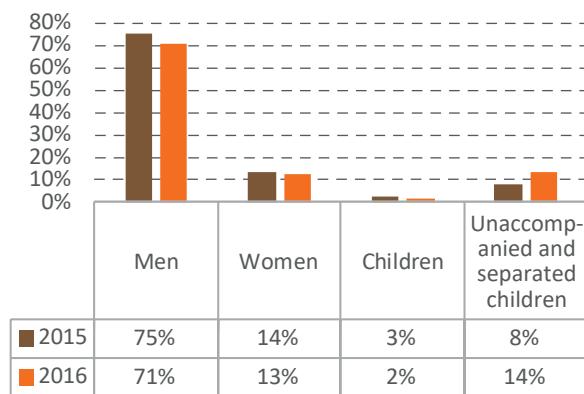
The citizenship profiles of the smuggled migrants arriving in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route are broadly stable, though with some significant fluctuations. Whereas in 2015, Eritreans (or people claiming to be Eritreans)

FIG. 74: Shares of arrivals in Italy by the Central Mediterranean route, by citizenship declared at landing, 2015-2017



Source: Italian Police, Direzione Centrale Anticrimine, Servizio Centrale Operativo.

**FIG. 75:** Share of arrivals in Italy along the Central Mediterranean route by age and sex, 2015-2016



Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

comprised the largest share of arrivals, followed by Nigerians, in 2016, the situation was the opposite. In the year 2017, Nigerians were more frequently reported, with Eritreans not even among the five most commonly reported citizenships. Moreover, in 2017, there was a surge in arrivals of Bangladeshi citizens; particularly noticeable in the month of May.

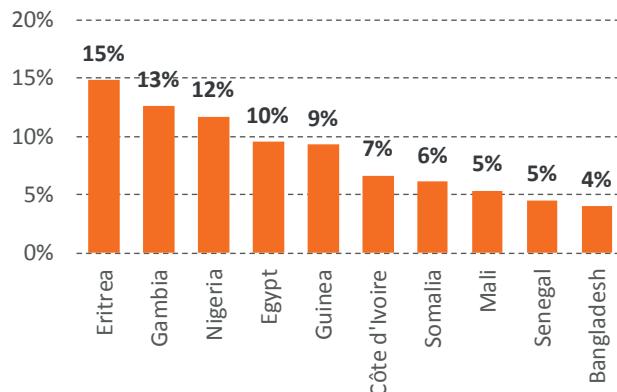
The vast majority of arrivals in Italy, more than 7 in 10, involve men. The share of women remained stable at nearly 15 per cent of arrivals in 2015 and 2016. The most significant change has been the recent increase in arrivals of unaccompanied minors. Some 26,000 unaccompanied minors – nearly all teenage boys – reached Italy in 2016; more than a doubling of the total for the previous year.<sup>22</sup>

Nearly all the unaccompanied minors (UAMs) who arrive in Italy come from countries in West, North and East Africa. The number of African UAMs increased significantly in 2016.<sup>23</sup> Eritrean UAMs tend to see Italy as a transit country, moving north as soon as they can, whereas for example Egyptians are more likely to settle in Italy, where they look for a job in order to send money back to their families.<sup>24</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Migrant smuggling into Europe seems to be largely based on flexible and *ad hoc* agreements and interactions among different local and transnational networks, rather than on highly structured and hierarchical organizations.<sup>25</sup> Usually, the organizations which sell the sea crossing to Europe are different from those that recruit and move migrants by land to the departure points of the Central Mediterranean route, but the two types of organization tend to establish stable relationships.<sup>26</sup> This allows for easy geographical

**FIG. 76:** Top ten citizenships among unaccompanied minors who arrived in Italy by sea, 2016 (n=25,846)



Source: UNHCR.

shifts and adjustments, as well as fast replacement and turnover of network components.

Some unique information about the organization and functioning of smuggling networks operating towards Libya and along the Central Mediterranean route can be gleaned from criminal investigations carried out by the Italian authorities (such as the Glauco I case, followed by Glauco II and III<sup>27</sup>). These cases revealed the existence of an organized criminal group operating in smuggling hubs along the route. The criminal group, which included cells composed of Eritrean nationals in Italy, smuggled migrants and refugees from Libya to Sicily, onwards to mainland Italy, and then to other European and North American countries. The cell operating in North Africa and in Italy would contact associates in other European countries in order for them to organize the last part of the migrants' journeys or to make financial transactions linked to the smuggling. The financial transactions revealed payments originating from 10 different countries in Europe and North America.<sup>28</sup>

The available literature also identifies a link between migrant smuggling and illicit trade and trafficking of numerous commodities to, within and from Libya. The routes used by migrant smugglers are the same routes traditionally used by smugglers of different goods from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya and there is evidence suggesting that different illicit activities are often linked.<sup>29</sup>

The smuggling of migrants across North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea also appears to be linked to drug trafficking. Since the mid-2000s some migrants have reportedly made money by carrying drugs across the desert for sale in North Africa. Since then there have been reports

of significant quantities of cocaine being transported across the desert from West Africa to North Africa.<sup>30</sup> Although it is not clear who the key intermediaries in these cocaine trades are, the prominence of the main *passeurs* involved in migrant smuggling and their relations with the security forces suggest that it is quite likely that, at the very least, their businesses intersect those of the major drug traders.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, Italian investigators highlight that no structured connections are recorded between transnational smuggling networks and the traditional Italian mafia-like organized crime groups.<sup>32</sup>

According to a 2015 study, the heads of smuggling organizations are usually older than 35, whereas guides and other actors operating on the ground are usually younger. Migrant smuggling is a male dominated business, but women - often the smugglers' girlfriends and wives - are also involved to a certain extent. For instance, women may be tasked with the recruitment of migrants, handling payments, and women may also receive and escort migrants to temporary accommodation between different legs of the route.<sup>33</sup>

Citizenship and ethnicity seem to play crucial roles in the internal organization of the networks, in their cross-border connections and in smuggler-migrant relations. Smuggling networks operating transnationally generally include members with different citizenships, usually involving citizens of the countries where the organization is operating and/or smugglers who share migrants' citizenships.<sup>34</sup> Smugglers involved in recruitment and communication with the migrant's family generally share the same citizenship as the migrants.

According to RMMS, in Libya migrants refer to smugglers of their own national or ethnic community, the so-called "connection men", at all stages of the smuggling process. These "connection men" work for Libyan smugglers.<sup>35</sup> Other research points to the role played by migrants themselves in the smuggling business: they operate as recruiters, liaise with other migrants and collect information relevant to their business from them.<sup>36</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Migrants proactively engage smugglers, but smugglers may also approach migrants to offer them their services. Smugglers advertise their services in places where migrants can typically be found, such as railway stations, cafes or bazaars. One example is the neighbourhood of Abu Salim in Tripoli, an area with a large Somali community.

Migrants reported that smugglers came to their neighbourhood and asked them if they wanted to board a boat to Europe.<sup>37</sup>

When migrants look for smugglers, diaspora communities often play a key role in facilitating contact. These communities can also often recommend or advise against particular smugglers. While much information is shared by word of mouth, social media is also widely used for pre-departure research. Syrians, in particular, make extensive use of technology such as Facebook, Viber, Skype and WhatsApp, to share comments and reviews of smugglers.<sup>38</sup>

The smuggling fees depend on the services included in the package, but also on the migrants' citizenship, sex and age. Along the different Central Mediterranean sub-routes, smugglers tailor the prices to the – real or perceived – economic means of the migrants. Syrians, who are usually wealthier than African migrants, pay more for safer journeys. Negotiations are possible and the prices may vary significantly.<sup>39</sup>

One study reported that migrants from sub-Saharan Africa would pay around US\$1,000 to be smuggled below deck on a boat from Libya to Europe, whereas a Syrian would pay \$2,500 or more for a safer seat.<sup>40</sup> In February 2015, new arrivals to Italy from Libya reported having paid smugglers between US\$700 and 1,000 per person to undertake the journey. Some reported having paid as little as \$400 for the journey to Lampedusa.<sup>41</sup> The EUNAVFOR MED Operation in the Mediterranean Sea estimated that smuggling businesses generate between 250 and 300 million euros in annual revenue for smugglers in Libya.<sup>42</sup>

Departures from Egypt are fewer and appear to be somewhat pricier. Migrants leaving from Alexandria reported having paid US\$2,500 in advance to board a boat to Italy in 2015.<sup>43</sup> According to IOM, Syrians departing from the Egyptian shores paid around US\$3,000, whereas for Palestinians, the sea crossing cost around US\$2,000.<sup>44</sup> Other sources reported fees ranging between US\$2,000 and 4,000.<sup>45</sup>

When it comes to sea crossings, the contact between the smuggler who will facilitate the sea crossing and the migrant usually takes place along the Libyan coast, close to the boat departure points. This smuggler is the migrant's link with the Libyan smugglers or other intermediaries, with whom the price and travel arrangements will be discussed. Migrants usually pay the full amount in advance. Some migrants travelling along this route pay for the entire journey from their country of departure or hub to their country of destination. This payment method is

called “integrated system”.<sup>46</sup> In this case, migrants often buy their journey to a specific destination in Europe, not just to Italy. Once they reach Italy, they are put in touch with someone in the smuggler’s network to facilitate their journey across Europe.<sup>47</sup>

The departure time depends on several factors, including weather conditions, the number of clients gathered by the smugglers and the activities of the border control and search operations. During the waiting period, which can vary from one day to several months, migrants are hosted in temporary accommodation referred to as ‘connection houses.’ These are often crowded and have limited kitchen and sanitary facilities. Migrants are generally not allowed to leave. Sexual violence and forced labour are reportedly widespread in many migrant holding facilities in Libya.<sup>48</sup>

The vessels used for the sea crossings range from small wooden boats or rubber inflatable dinghies to larger ships.<sup>49</sup> The former are usually driven by migrants, who in exchange travel for free, whereas the latter are generally driven by professionals. When the driver is a migrant, he is usually chosen by the intermediary some time before departure, lodged with intermediaries and briefly trained by Libyan smugglers. He may even receive some money for his services.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes, when questioned on arrival, all migrants claim that they drove the vessel, in order to protect the actual driver.<sup>51</sup>

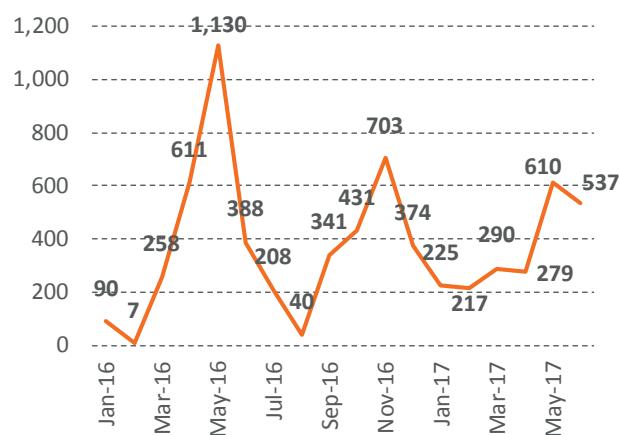
Boats usually leave the coast at night in order to avoid apprehension by the Libyan authorities.<sup>52</sup> They do not display any flag, number or name to impede identification. The boats are usually not returned to the smugglers, but used only once.<sup>53</sup>

### The human cost

The Central Mediterranean is considered to be the deadliest migration route in the world.<sup>54</sup> According to IOM, 4,581 persons died along this route in 2016, compared to 2,876 deaths registered in 2015.<sup>55</sup> As of 30 June, 2,232 persons had lost their lives at sea on the way between North Africa and Europe in 2017. While the monthly numbers of deaths fluctuate, travelling along the Central Mediterranean route is clearly imbued with a significant risk of drowning for migrants.

Conditions for migrants in Libya who are waiting to be smuggled to Europe are appalling. Some migrants are reportedly sold as slaves, whereas others are tortured, raped or exploited in forced labour. Compounding the difficulties of the thousands of refugees and migrants in detention in Libya is the fact that many of the smugglers and traffickers are protected by well-known militias.<sup>56</sup>

**FIG. 77:** Trend in the number of deaths along the Central Mediterranean route, by month, January 2016 – June 2017



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

The sea crossing is generally described by migrants and refugees as a horrific experience. The boats used are often unseaworthy and overcrowded, sufficient food and water are usually not provided and lifejackets may not be distributed. People smuggled on board of these boats often have little information about the journey.<sup>57</sup> It is very common that vessels run out of fuel, have engine problems, lose their way at sea or fill up with water.<sup>58</sup>

Sometimes border control measures may also result in violations of the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees. According to the available literature, asylum seekers and refugees are sometimes returned to their countries of origin or deported to third countries where their life and security may be at risk, in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*. Moreover, in countries of arrival, migrants may face collective expulsions, inadequate reception conditions and lack of access to justice.<sup>d</sup>

## THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Eastern Mediterranean route, which saw an unprecedented growth in the number of arrivals in 2015,

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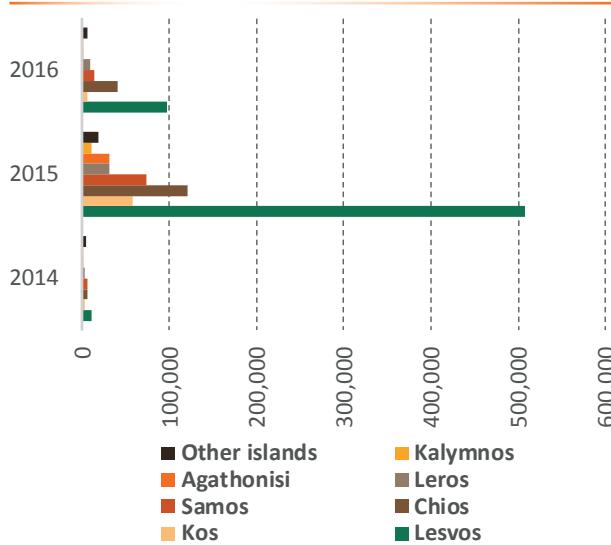
d In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights found different EU countries violated international law for high sea interception and push-back practice (EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), *Fundamental rights at Europe's southern sea borders*, 2013: 49). In his 2015 report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants expressed concerns about the practice of mandatory detention of smuggled migrants (A/HRC/29/36/Add.3, *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants*, François Crépeau, pp. 13-14). As observed by the EU FRA, mandatory detention policies complicate the identification of vulnerable migrants: persons with “non-visible” vulnerabilities, such as victims of trafficking or people with mental health problems, may be overlooked (EU FRA, op. cit., p. 95).

connects Turkey to the European Union by sea and land. Many of those making use of this route have been smuggled along the South-West Asian route. The Eastern Mediterranean route comprises two major sub-routes: a sea route leaving from the Turkish shores and heading to the Greek islands, and a land route departing from Turkey and arriving in north-eastern Greece or Bulgaria.

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

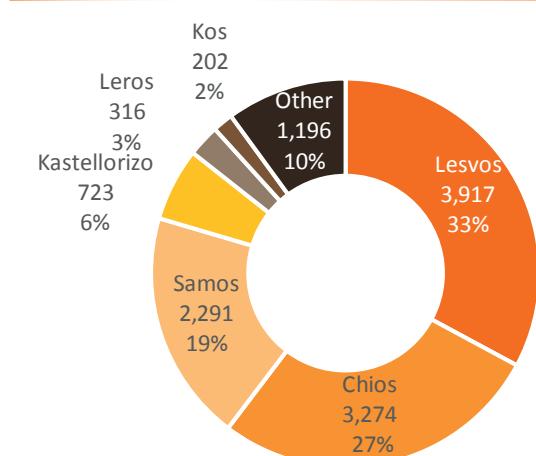
Many Turkish coastal towns serve as departure points for migrants heading to the nearby Greek islands. During the first half of 2017, IOM reported that most migrants were apprehended along the western Turkish coast facing the

**FIG. 78:** Number of irregular sea arrivals in Greece, by port of arrival, 2014-2016



Source: UNHCR.

**FIG. 79:** Numbers and shares of irregular sea arrivals in Greece, by port of arrival, 1 Jan – 6 Aug 2017



Source: UNHCR.

Greek islands. The sea close to the town of Çeşme – close to both the large Turkish city of Izmir and the Greek island of Chios – saw the largest number of apprehended migrants.<sup>59</sup> Other towns, such as Balikesir or Edirne are also transits for smuggling to the Greek islands<sup>60</sup>.

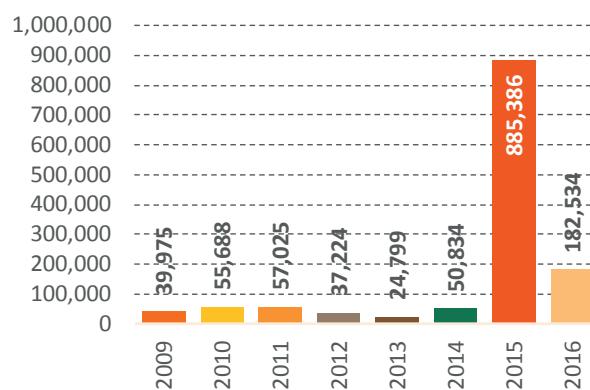
The main landing point for boats departing from the Western shores of Turkey is the Greek island of Lesvos. In 2015, when arrivals skyrocketed, this island was the epicentre of events with more than half a million arrivals, according to UNHCR data. The island of Chios is the second most common landing point, albeit with far fewer arrivals than Lesvos throughout 2015 and 2016.

Smuggling activity is also recorded along the land sub-route. The Greek-Turkish land border is approximately 200 km long and follows almost entirely the Maritsa/Evros river. Crossing this river is extremely difficult due to the enhanced surveillance on both sides. Migrants travelling along the land route between Turkey and Bulgaria usually cross the border at the Kapitan Andreevo - Kapikule checkpoint.<sup>61</sup> Migrants and refugees coming from Greece often cross the land border in the area of the Kulata-Promahon border crossing point or via routes in the Petrich region.<sup>62</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Eastern Mediterranean route

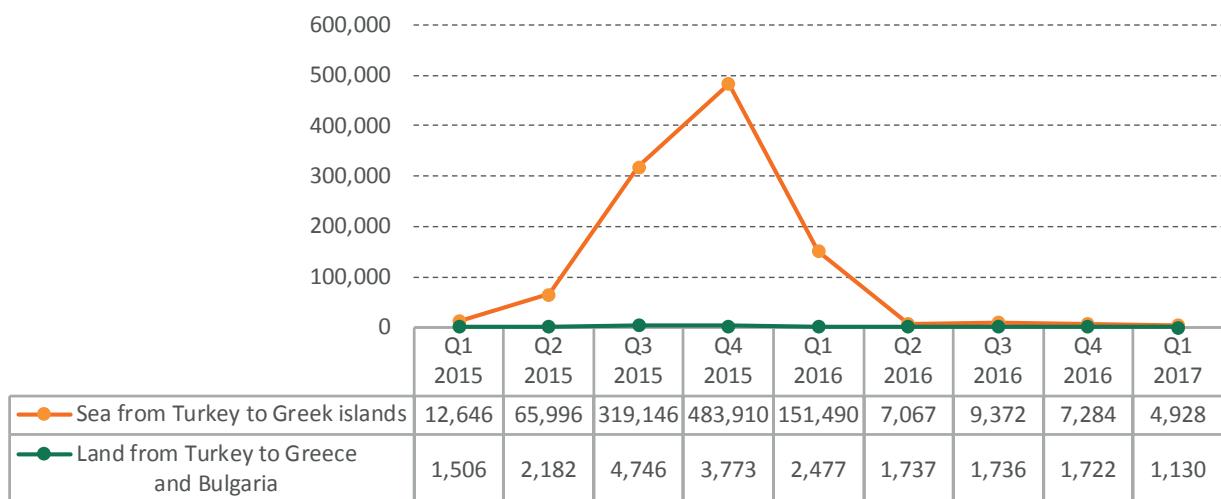
Over the period 2009–2014, the number of migrants irregularly entering the EU through the Eastern Mediterranean route ranged between 25,000 and 57,000 per year. In 2015, the flow skyrocketed, with more than 850,000 irregular border crossings; making the Eastern Mediterranean route the main entry point to Europe for irregular migrants and refugees. In 2016, the flow declined rapidly; a decline that has continued into 2017. In addition to the

**FIG. 80:** Trend in the number of irregular arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

**FIG. 81:** Trend in the number of irregular border crossings from Turkey to the EU, by land or sea route, by quarter, 2015 – Q1 2017



Source: Frontex.

arrivals on the Greek islands, some migrants also depart from Turkey via the northern border with Bulgaria. According to information from Frontex, in 2017, a few hundred migrants have used this land route each month.

The sudden drop in arrivals on the Greek islands has been ascribed to the impact of the European Union - Turkey Statement agreed by the EU heads of state and the Turkish government on 18 March 2016. Under this agreement, 'all new irregular migrants or asylum seekers crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey, after an individual assessment of their asylum claims in line with EU and international law. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey, another Syrian will be resettled to the EU from Turkey directly (1:1 mechanism)'.<sup>63</sup>

### The profile of the smuggled migrants

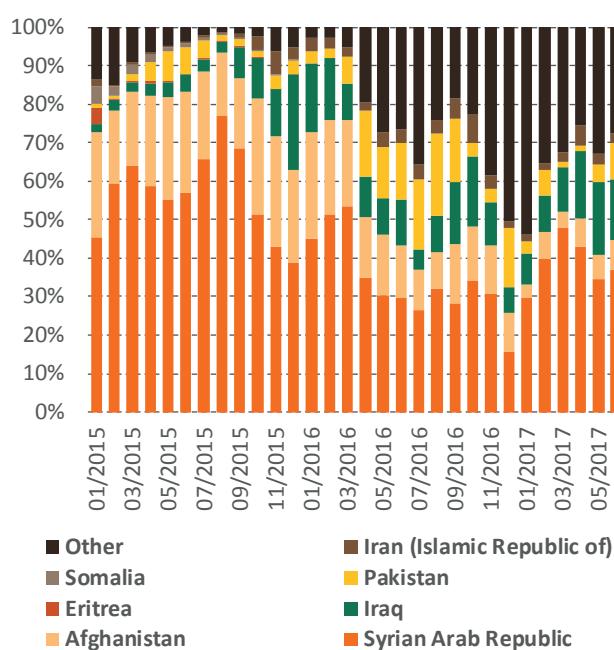
Syrians comprise the largest share of citizenships among those crossing the Turkish borders to Greece, although their share among arrivals has declined. In the first half of 2017, Syrian citizens accounted for some 38 per cent of arrivals in Greece, compared to 45 per cent in 2016 and 57 per cent in 2015. Citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq also comprise sizable shares. While Afghan arrivals comprised a larger share of the total than Iraqis in 2016, in early 2017, the situation seems to have reversed, with Iraqi citizens comprising the second most commonly reported group of irregular arrivals in Greece, followed by Pakistani and Afghans.<sup>64</sup>

Since a large part of the flow is made up of Syrian refugees fleeing war or leaving their countries of first refuge, more families travel along this route than along most other mixed migration routes where young males tend to dom-

inate. According to a survey conducted by UNHCR among Syrian arrivals on the Greek islands in February 2016,<sup>65</sup> the vast majority - 88 per cent - travelled with a close family member (child, spouse, parent and/or sibling). Only 7 per cent travelled alone.

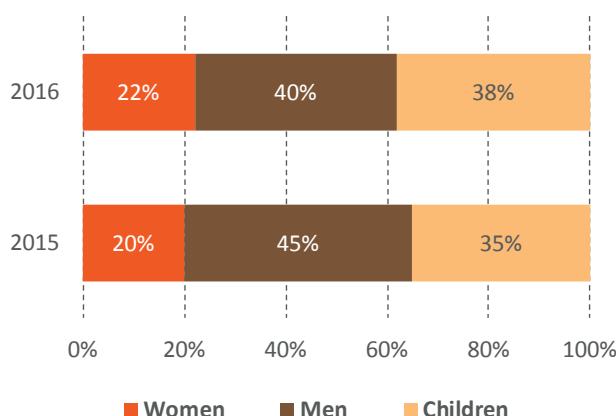
Women made up 22 per cent of the total number of arrivals in Greece in 2016, and 38 per cent were children. In contrast to the situation in Italy, the vast majority - 92 per

**FIG. 82:** Shares of citizenships among arrivals in Greece, by month, Jan 2015 – Jun 2017



Source:UNHCR

**FIG. 83: Profiles of arrivals in Greece by the Eastern Mediterranean route by age and sex, 2015-2016**



Source: UNHCR; Greek national authorities.

cent - of the children who arrived in Greece were accompanied. Some 8 per cent - more than 5,000 children - were unaccompanied; many of them teenage boys from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan or Pakistan.<sup>66</sup> Many of the Afghan unaccompanied adolescents travel in groups, sometimes accompanied by a non-family member adult.<sup>67</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

In addition to the general observation that most migrants travelling along sea routes rely on smugglers, there are strong indications that most migrants travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route make use of at least one smuggler during their journey. The actual number of smugglers used seems to vary depending on the migrants' citizenship as well as other factors (number of borders crossed, enforcement measures along the way, climate and terrain, and so on). For example, a 2015 survey targeting irregular migrants arrested in Istanbul by the local authorities found that nearly all the respondents (96 per cent) used at least three smugglers from their country of origin (mainly South and South-West Asia) in order to reach Istanbul.<sup>68</sup> Smugglers are key sources of information for many migrants and refugees. About 73 per cent of 779 Afghans<sup>c</sup> interviewed in February 2016 reported that smugglers provided information about their travel.<sup>69</sup>

Frontex reported in 2016 that smugglers operated in networks along the Turkish coast, with each network controlling a specific departure area and often serving migrants of specific origins. Beyond offering passage to Greece, or in some cases across the Turkish land border with the Syrian Arab Republic, smugglers also reportedly

<sup>c</sup> A similar set of interviews among Syrian refugees showed that only 16 per cent relied on information from smugglers, with most of them obtaining information from family or friends.

provide information on asylum processes in destination countries as well as forged documentation. The highest demand is for Syrian passports, identification cards, birth certificates and residence permits, which illustrates how smugglers cynically profit from the Syrian crisis.<sup>70</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Like in other parts of the world, in the major hubs along this route the smuggling business appears to be carried out publicly. In certain districts of major cities, people can easily find a smuggler or wait to be found by one in the street, in crowded squares, in coffeehouses. Migrants and refugees usually meet with intermediaries who inform them about the smuggling conditions.<sup>71</sup>

While waiting for their departure to Greece, smugglers may place migrants and refugees in substandard accommodation without heating, running water or sanitation, and with little food.<sup>72</sup> When a sufficiently large number of passengers has been gathered, drivers take the migrants to the departure point, whilst other members of the group look for a way to evade the security forces. Migrants undertake the crossing aboard a broad spectrum of vessels, although the most common vehicles are inflatable boats and speedboats.<sup>73</sup> The boat trip from Turkey to Greece usually takes a few hours.<sup>74</sup>

The price for the journey from Turkey's coasts to any of the Greek islands on the smallest inflatable boat reportedly ranges between €1,000 and 2,000 per person. The same route could be offered at €900 or up to €7,000 according to the demand, method of transportation or the season of the year<sup>75</sup>. According to some sources, the fee for the crossing from Turkey into Bulgaria and the onward travel to Sofia amounts to €2,500 - 3,000 per person<sup>76</sup>.

On the Eastern Mediterranean route, when advance payment is required, the 'package' may include several attempts. In case the first crossing fails, the migrant is entitled to travel again for free. Sometimes migrants pay half of the fee in advance and the other half upon arrival. When relatives or friends make the payment, smugglers may supply pictures of the migrant in the destination country as proof of safe arrival.<sup>77</sup>

The *hawala* system is widely used along the Eastern Mediterranean route, which makes it practically impossible to trace the money flow.<sup>78</sup> Alternatively, migrants may use a formal money transfer service that secures the fee by issuing the migrant with a code. Once the migrant has safely arrived at the agreed destination, the smuggler will then receive the security code to release the money.<sup>79</sup>

With regard to the land route, according to the IOM, most irregular migrants enter Bulgaria from the green border on foot. After reaching Edirne, migrants and refugees cross the land border irregularly on foot; either assisted by smugglers until the border or equipped with smartphones containing stored paths to follow. The smugglers instruct them to call the Bulgarian police for rescue in case they lose their way, and to apply for asylum so that they are transferred to an open reception centre from which they can easily escape to continue their journey.<sup>80</sup>

### The human cost

According to data from IOM's Missing Migrants project, deaths along the Eastern Mediterranean route have declined in line with the decreasing number of migrants using the route. In the first half of 2017, there were 29 reported fatalities, compared to 434 in 2016 and 806 in 2015. In 2015, IOM and UNICEF reported that at least 30 per cent of the deceased on this route were children; reflecting the fact that children make up a large share of smuggled migrants there.<sup>81</sup>

Boats carrying migrants are often overcrowded. Several sources report observations of refugees and migrants boarding dinghies carrying twice the number of passengers they were designed for, or even more. Smugglers may even threaten the migrants with guns in order to make them board.<sup>82</sup>

The land crossing from Turkey into Bulgaria appears to be far less dangerous. Still, during winter, temperatures could drop well below zero, and migrants and refugees who are often not properly equipped may die of exposure to the elements. In February 2016, for example, the Bulgarian police found the bodies of a girl and a woman who had frozen to death near the Malko Turnovo border crossing with Turkey. They were a part of a group of 19 Afghan migrants.<sup>83</sup>

IOM and UNICEF have highlighted that the wave of new arrivals in 2015 included some children who, lacking financial resources to continue their journey, found themselves stranded on the Greek islands and in Athens. The same sources emphasized the vulnerability of those children to trafficking, recruitment by criminal gangs, sexual abuse and exploitation.<sup>84</sup> A 2015-2016 IOM survey among migrants travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route indicated that some 7 per cent of the respondents had personal experience with trafficking and other exploitative practices.<sup>85</sup> Several sources have also denounced violence and mistreatments suffered by migrants in several countries along the route.<sup>86</sup>

## THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Western Mediterranean route departs from Morocco and arrives in Spain. This route is broadly comprised of four sub-routes; two overland and two by sea. The land sub-routes head towards the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla situated some 400 km apart in the North of Africa. The sea sub-routes run across the Strait of Gibraltar from the area around Tangier to the coast of Andalucia, Spain and from the north-west African coast to the Canary Islands, Spain.

Over the years, Spain and Morocco have put in place a broad operational cooperation, including coordination of law enforcement activities, such as joint patrolling of sea, land and air borders and the exchange of liaison officers. The operational cooperation includes the areas surrounding Ceuta and Melilla.<sup>87</sup>

### The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The overland crossing to Melilla typically occurs from Nador, Morocco, whereas the passage to Ceuta usually starts in Fnideq, Morocco. Both destinations are coastal cities, and some migrants try to reach them by sea. As for the other main smuggling routes into Europe, this passage is often only one leg of a longer journey.

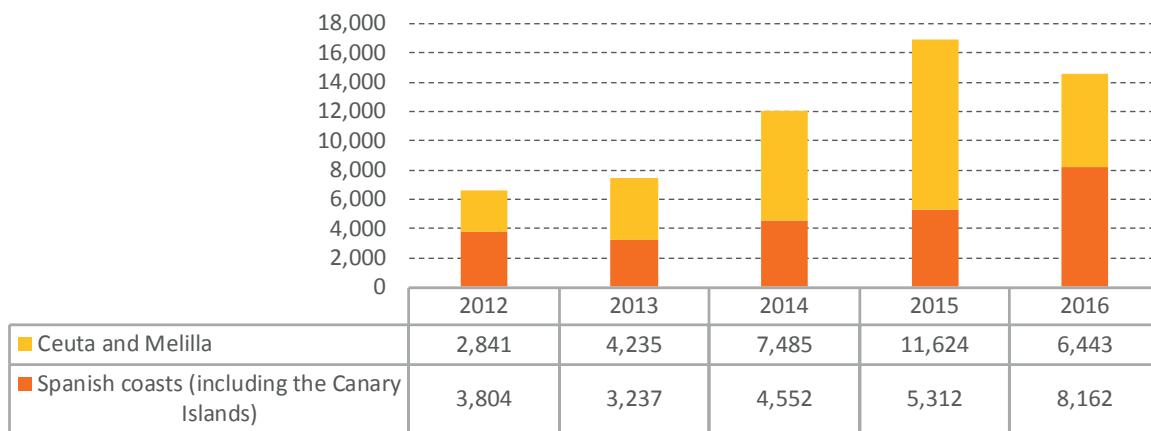
The route crossing the Alboran Sea and connecting the Moroccan north-eastern coast to Almeria, Spain and other locations in the eastern parts of Andalusia, Spain used to be popular but seems to be largely inactive nowadays, with most crossings taking place along the shorter route across the Strait of Gibraltar. As of May 2017, UNHCR reported that departure points along this route were Tangiers and Asilah close to the Strait of Gibraltar, and El Hoceima and Nador further east. A few boats also departed from Algeria. Most of the migrants on board these boats were rescued at sea and disembark on the Spanish shores.<sup>88</sup>

The main smuggling hubs to Ceuta and Melilla are the major cities geographically close by.<sup>89</sup> There, migrants and refugees can find smugglers and arrange for their journey to Europe. In Oujda, migrants live in settlements in the forest, away from the city, without proper housing and services.<sup>90</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Western Mediterranean

Over the years, the total flow along this route, as well as along the land and sea sub-routes, have fluctuated considerably. In 2017, the sea crossing departing from Tangier,

**FIG. 84: Trends in the number of arrivals of irregular migrants in Spain, both in continental territory and the Canary Islands, 2012-2016**



Source: Spain, Ministry of Interior.

Morocco and arriving in Spain, only 14 to 30 km long, was the most widely used sub-route among migrants and refugees travelling in the Western Mediterranean.

Between the two overland flows, that into Melilla is larger than the one into Ceuta. In 2016, 3,901 irregular migrants entered Melilla, whereas 2,542 entered Ceuta.<sup>91</sup> Moroccan passport holders who live near the two Spanish cities can enter them for limited periods without a visa. There is a trend of using Moroccan passports to cross the borders by car, or by hiding in the cars of Moroccans for the crossing. However, this is an expensive method, which puts it out of reach of most people from sub-Saharan Africa. Previously, this method was mostly used by North Africans; in recent years, by Syrians.<sup>92</sup>

The share of smuggled migrants among those travelling along the Western Mediterranean route is not easy to determine. Some migrants, who cross the land border to Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, do so with the help of smugglers, who provide them with fraudulent documents or transportation. On the other hand, many of those opting for the sea passage from Tangier to Tarifa, Spain are in a stronger financial position, allowing them to buy a small boat and attempt the sea crossing on their own.<sup>93</sup>

The route from Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco to the Spanish Canary Islands - located off the southern coast of Morocco - was once the busiest irregular entry point to Europe, peaking at almost 32,000 arrivals in 2006. Following the strengthening of border control and enforcement measures and the conclusion of bilateral agreements (including on repatriation) between Spain and the countries of origin and transit, arrivals along this route had significantly decreased as of 2008<sup>94</sup>, and have remained relatively low since then. Cooperation between the Span-

ish and Moroccan authorities, for instance, has led to the dismantling of smuggling rings operating along this route.

### The profile of the smuggled migrants

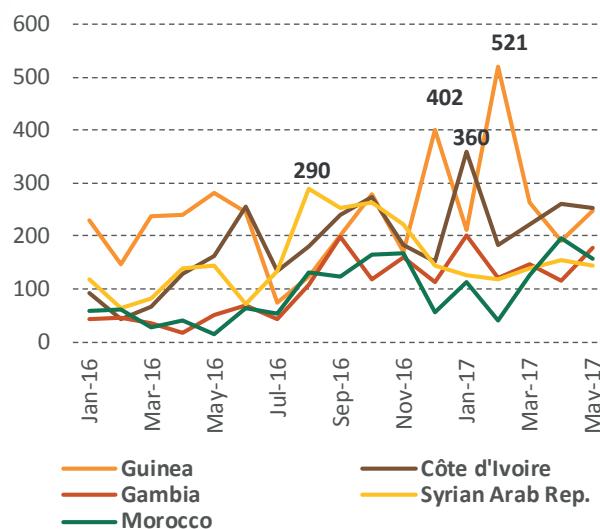
The Western Mediterranean used to be the most popular route among Algerians and Moroccans trying to reach Spain, either with the intention of staying or in order to move on to another European country. Since the late 1990s, increasing numbers of people from sub-Saharan Africa have also made use of this route. Many migrants travelling along this route are from West Africa. Passport holders from a number of West African countries can enter Morocco without a visa for a period of 90 days.<sup>95</sup>

As of 2010-2011, people from the Horn of Africa and from the Syrian Arab Republic also started to use this route to reach Spain. According to the Spanish authorities, in 2014, Syrians accounted for more than 3,300 irregular entries, mainly in the city of Melilla. In 2015, the number of Syrians increased to nearly 7,200, accounting for more than 78 per cent of irregular migrants arriving in Melilla. The number of arrivals of non-Syrians rose just over 5 per cent from 2014 to 2015.<sup>96</sup>

Between January 2016 and May 2017, the most common citizenship among arrivals to Spain was Guinean. Citizens of Guinea made up some 19 per cent of all arrivals, followed by nationals of Côte d'Ivoire with 15 per cent, and Syrians at some 12 per cent of arrivals. Syrian arrivals declined towards the end of 2015 and into 2016, but increased again as of late summer 2016. Arrivals of Gambians and Moroccans have also increased since early 2016.

The vast majority (81 per cent) of migrants and refugees travelling along the Western Mediterranean route – as on other routes – are young men. Most of the land arrivals originating in Sub-Saharan African countries were young

**FIG. 85:** Monthly trend of the five most common citizenships among sea and land arrivals in Spain, 2016 – May 2017



Source: UNHCR (Spain: Arrivals dashboard, May 2017).

men who had jumped over the border fences, whereas the few women and children travelling by land often hide inside vehicles to cross the border.<sup>97</sup>

There are no available statistics regarding the arrival of unaccompanied minors in Spain. Flows of unaccompanied minors into Morocco, however, tend to be boys aged between 14 and 18 from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon and Ghana. Sometimes they travel to join family members already in Europe, and other times they are sent ahead as ‘pioneers’ of the family.<sup>98</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

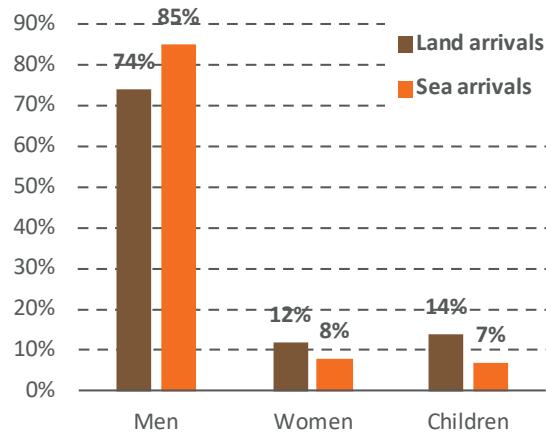
With regard to the sea crossing from Morocco to Spain, migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa rely on local smugglers for the crossing. They are often recruited by fellow citizens who work for the smugglers. Personal connections and recommendations from friends or family seem to be more prominent sources of information than internet and social media.<sup>99</sup>

The Moroccan authorities reported having dismantled 120 smuggling networks active along this route in 2017. Since 2002, more than 3,200 such networks have been broken up.<sup>100</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Migrants have been trying to reach Europe via the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla since the early 1990s.<sup>101</sup> Since then, the borders have become increasingly fortified. Both

**FIG. 86:** Shares of arrivals in Spain, by land or sea arrival, by sex and age, 2016 – May 2017



Source: UNHCR.

Spanish and Moroccan authorities heavily patrol the borders. As a result, apprehensions on the sea route into Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, rose in 2016. Attempts at scaling the border fences saw a decline.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the opening of asylum border posts in Ceuta and Melilla in September 2014, difficulties to access these two cities have been reported, including summary returns and ‘rejections at the border’.<sup>103</sup> Syrian citizens then started to pay smugglers to obtain fake Moroccan passports of residents of Tetuan and Nador in order to enter Ceuta and Melilla by posing as traders. Once inside, they would immediately apply for asylum. The number of Syrians using this approach declined sharply at the end of 2015 and into 2016.<sup>104</sup>

According to the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, the use of fraudulent documents to enter European Union countries is frequently reported along this route. Almost 950 alleged Moroccans were detected with fraudulent documents in 2015; a 15 per cent increase from the more than 800 who were detected in 2015. In the first half of 2016, the numbers seem to have remained stable. Most of the detected alleged Moroccans used the genuine travel documents of someone else in an attempt to enter Ceuta or Melilla, Spain.<sup>105</sup>

With the increased popularity of this route in 2016, the average price paid by migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa doubled, from €500 in 2015 to 1,000 in 2016. Some of those who cannot or do not want to pay smugglers may set off in small inflatable dinghies usually used in children’s play. Some 12–15 migrants may cram into these toys.<sup>106</sup> Moroccan migrants, who tend to have more financial resources, often choose safer and faster transportation.

They may travel to the Spanish coasts on board inflatable boats with powerful engines, or even on jet skis. Crossing the Straits of Gibraltar on a jet ski can take around 30 minutes at a cost of some €3,000.<sup>107</sup>

### The human cost

The numbers of deaths seem to be increasing in line with the growing use of this route. According to data from the IOM Missing Migrants Project, between 1 January and 11 August 2017, 121 migrants had lost their lives along the Western Mediterranean route. In 2016, the figure for the entire year was 83.<sup>108</sup> Most casualties occur at sea, but some also take place along the land route to Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, especially in connection with attempted crossings of the fence. However, it is difficult to assess whether there is a connection between these risks and the smuggling activity along this route.

The risk of trafficking in persons also appears to be high among much of the migrant population along this route. According to IOM, many of the Nigerian and Cameroonian women making use of this route have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.<sup>109</sup>

## OTHER SMUGGLING ROUTES IN EUROPE

The three Mediterranean routes are not the only smuggling routes in Europe. Several other routes – with varying extents of smuggling activity – criss-cross the continent. As for most of the routes discussed in this report, the magnitude of these other European routes, the departure, arrival and transit point, the modes of travel and the involvement of smugglers are all volatile and subject to sudden, drastic changes.

### The Eastern Borders route

There is some migrant smuggling activity along the European Union's 6,000 km-long eastern border. This includes parts of the eastern borders of Norway,<sup>f</sup> Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

Broadly speaking, the Eastern borders route can be split into two sub-routes. The Baltic sub-route comprises the crossing into one of the Baltic countries and the onward movement to the destination country via Poland. The second sub-route departs from Ukraine and enters any of its neighbouring EU countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary or Romania).

<sup>f</sup> Norway is not a European Union Member State, but is part of the Schengen area of free movement.

The flow at the European Union eastern border is much smaller than other flows into the EU. The number of illegal border crossings detected in 2015 at the EU's eastern border – less than 2,000 people – represented only 0.1 per cent of the total number of illegal border crossings into the EU that year. In 2016, this flow was even smaller, at some 1,350 detections.<sup>110</sup> Frontex noted in 2017 that detections of illegal border crossings might have been low along this route because irregular migrants tend to make use of visa fraud and counterfeit border-crossing stamps rather than attempting to cross the border irregularly.<sup>111</sup>

There is no data regarding the prevalence of migrant smuggling along this route, but there are some indications that its use is decreasing. Frontex reports that the number of detected smugglers ('facilitators') along the Eastern borders route significantly decreased in early 2016, from 205 in the first quarter to 45 in the second quarter of that year. The apprehended smugglers were from Eastern Europe and the European Union.<sup>112</sup> The decreasing trend continued into early 2017.<sup>113</sup> People from different countries seem to be smuggled across different sections of the EU eastern border.

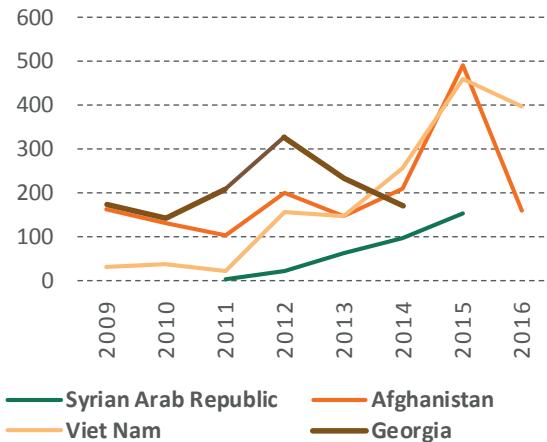
The Polish-Ukrainian border appears to be particularly attractive for irregular migrants using fraudulent documents. According to Frontex, most of the detected document fraud at the EU borders occurs at this border, which is largely attributable to Ukrainian citizens misusing fraudulently obtained Polish visas.<sup>114</sup>

Not all the irregular border crossings at the EU's eastern border are associated with the purpose of irregular migration. According to Frontex, in 2015, only half of the detected border crossings between border crossing points were associated with irregular migration. A big share of irregular border crossings were undertaken in order to smuggle goods or conduct illegal hunting or fishing.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, irregular migrants may cross the border without the assistance of smugglers.

The profile of migrants travelling along the EU Eastern borders route has drastically changed over the last few years. Until 2012, the route was mainly used by regional migrants. As of 2011, the number of Vietnamese, Afghan and Syrian citizens started to increase, and in 2016, Vietnamese and Afghans were the two most frequently detected citizenships, with Ukrainians comprising the third. Some of the detected Asians might have been smuggled by air prior to attempting to cross the EU eastern border illegally.

Along the Baltic sub-route, the Latvian authorities report having detected some 50 smugglers in 2016. In the same

**FIG. 87:** Trends in the number of illegal border crossings detected at the EU eastern borders among selected citizenships, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

year, about 500 irregular migrants were detained at Latvia's borders with the Russian Federation and Belarus; some 300 from Viet Nam, 44 from the Russian Federation, 30 from Afghanistan and 25 from India. In 2015, 463 irregular migrants were detained, including 309 citizens of Viet Nam.<sup>116</sup>

Migrant smuggling is also reported from Ukraine to different EU countries. Frontex reported the detection of about 1,200 Ukrainians attempting to cross the border with Poland with fraudulent documents in 2015; a number that remained broadly stable in 2016.<sup>117</sup> The widespread use of fraudulent documents suggests that there is significant smuggling along this border crossing.

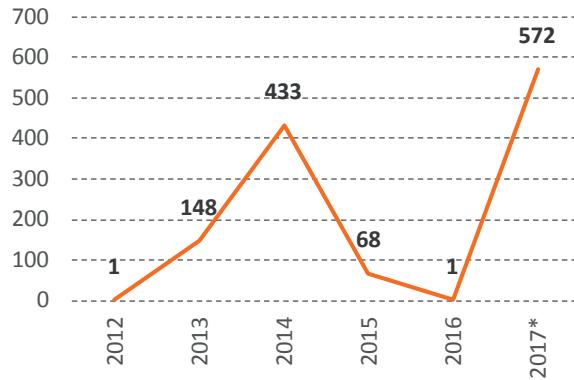
## The Black Sea route

A few migrants are smuggled from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania and Bulgaria. Although the numbers are small, the interception of six boats carrying nearly 600 smuggled migrants between January and mid-September 2017 could be an indication that smugglers are trying to revive this route. Most of the smuggled migrants aboard the boats that were detected in 2017 were Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and Pakistanis.<sup>118</sup>

## Migrant smuggling flows to European airports

According to Europol, migrant smuggling by air is currently less frequent, but is likely to become more attractive in the future due to increased controls along land and sea routes. Smuggling by air is generally perceived as a safer

**FIG. 88:** Number of detected illegal border crossings on the Black Sea route, 2012-2017



\* 2017 data covers January – mid-September only.

Source: Frontex.

**FIG. 89:** Trend in the number of persons detected using false travel documents to enter the EU by air, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

mode of travel, offering high chances of success and low risk of detection. However, it tends to be more expensive than other smuggling methods.<sup>119</sup>

Over the last few years, official detections of migrants smuggled by air into the European Union using false travel documents have ranged between 3,500 and 7,000 per year, with a declining trend since 2013. Passports are the most frequently detected type of fraudulent document (air, land and sea routes combined), followed by visas, identity cards and residence permits. The type of document seems to vary according to country of issuance, and appears to fluctuate between years. In 2016, fraudulent French passports, Spanish and Italian identity cards and residence permits, and Polish visas were frequently detected.<sup>120</sup>

In the EU, most detections of fraudulent documents take place on air routes. Large international transit airports are particularly at risk, but smaller airports with fewer officials, often not adequately trained in document control, may also be targeted.

Changes to regularly scheduled flight routes may directly impact detections of smuggling activities. Just as the opening of a new air route can bring about smuggling, cancellations can have the opposite effect. For example, the cancellation of direct services between Lagos and Rome in March 2015 brought detections on this route to a halt.<sup>121</sup>

### **Smuggling of migrants within Europe**

Smuggling of migrants has also been widely documented within Europe. Migrants and refugees not only resort to the services of smugglers to cross into the European Union, but also to move within the EU or to countries which do not belong to the Schengen area of free movement. The Western Balkans route is the main one, but there are also several others, which will be discussed together in the section ‘secondary movements’.

### **THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE**

Departing from Greece and Bulgaria, the Western Balkans route leaves European Union territory and then enters it again in Hungary, Croatia or Romania. Depending largely on the changing border control measures adopted by the countries along the way, the route passes northward through the countries of the Western Balkans.

For migrants arriving in Greece and Bulgaria along the Eastern Mediterranean route, the Western Balkans route is the natural continuation towards northern Europe, the intended destination for most refugees and migrants. While the vast majority resort to smugglers to move from Turkey to Greece - at least for the sea crossing - it is difficult to determine how many are smuggled along the Western Balkans route. Moreover, regional migrants on their way to central and northern Europe also use this route, and in fact undertook the majority of detected irregular border crossings there until the first quarter of 2015.

Although there is no data on the share of migrants who cover the Western Balkans route or part of it with the help of smugglers, the services of smugglers are perceived to be less needed there than along the Mediterranean routes, and many migrants cross the borders on their own. This seems to be particularly true for the passage between

Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>122</sup>

The exact travel routes vary and are subject to sudden and dramatic fluctuations according to changes in legislation and border controls in the countries concerned. According to Frontex, in 2016, the main migratory movement across the Western Balkans flowed from Greece to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, into Serbia and towards the Serbian-Hungarian border. Many irregular entry detections also took place at the Romanian and Bulgarian land borders with Serbia; mostly involving migrants who had illegally entered Bulgaria from Turkey and were trying to reach other EU countries.<sup>123</sup>

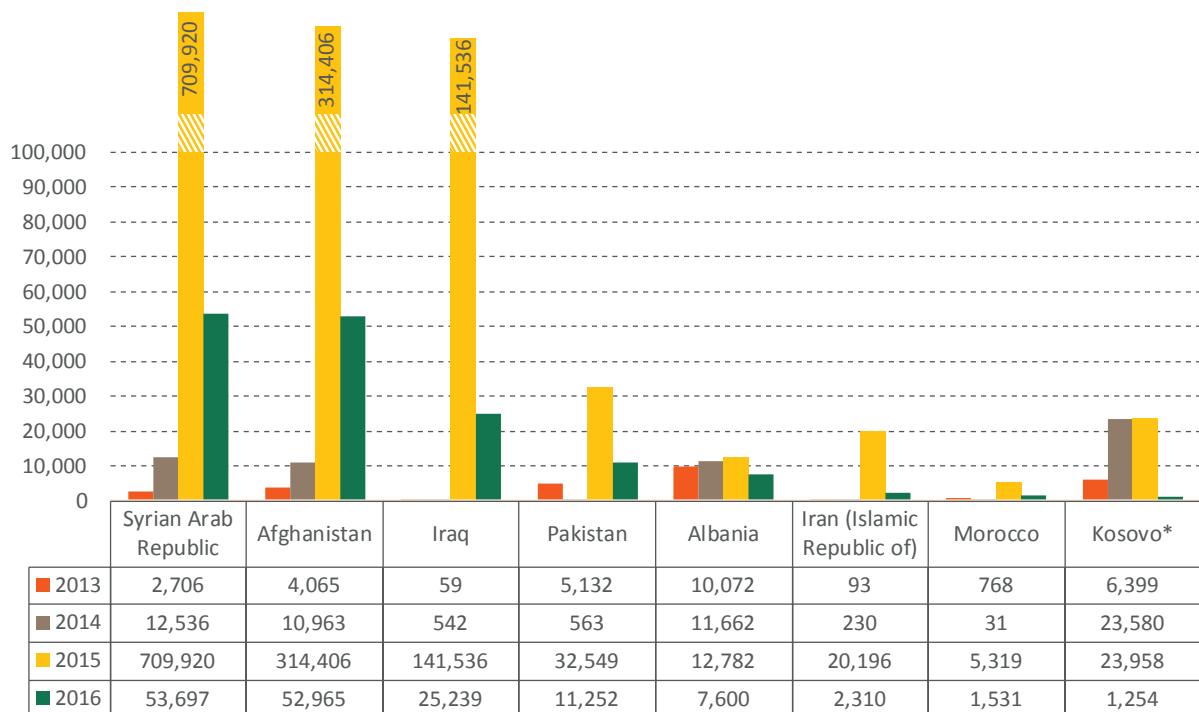
In Greece, the main exit point prior to the significant reduction in the flow along this route in 2016 was Idomeni, on the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>124</sup> Migrants would then reach the small town of Gevgelija in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and make their way through the country to the border with Serbia. Once in Serbia, many migrants headed north, to the border with Hungary. The Serbian-Hungarian border has been a key gateway from the Western Balkans into the European Union for several years. In spite of enhanced border controls, enforcement measures and legislative changes put into place by Hungary since 2014, Frontex reported in 2017 that the high pressure at this border still persisted.<sup>125</sup>

Irregular border crossings undertaken by Albanians trying to irregularly enter Greece comprise a very different, minor flow. This crossing is often carried out with fraudulent travel documents; a method that implies the use of some smuggling services.<sup>126</sup> Detections along this route declined from nearly 9,000 in 2015 to just over 5,000 in 2016.<sup>127</sup>

In terms of magnitude, the use of the Western Balkans route skyrocketed in 2015, reflecting the dramatic increases in arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The number of detections of irregular border crossings at the EU borders with Western Balkans countries reached more than 764,000. This number - unprecedented and beyond comparison with any previous period – was mainly determined by the influx of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi migrants and refugees travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route.<sup>128</sup> By 2016, these detections had decreased to just over 130,000; far lower than the year before, but high compared to the years prior to 2015.<sup>129</sup>

The citizenship composition among migrants travelling along the Western Balkans route has considerably changed over the past few years. Arrivals from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Iraq dominated in 2015 and

**FIG. 90:** Number of people detected for illegal border crossings between border crossing points, by main origins, reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring EU Member States, 2013-2016\*



\* The reference to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Source: Frontex, Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis, 2017.

2016. In 2014, however, there were more irregular border crossings by people originating within the region, such as Kosovars and Albanians.<sup>130</sup> Many Pakistanis also use the Western Balkans route.

Women and children appear to comprise a significant share of the migratory flows passing through the Balkans. A situation assessment undertaken by UN Women in 2015<sup>g</sup> found that in November 2015, women comprised some 18 per cent and children 24 per cent of migrants, with some minor variations depending on their national origins. The same assessment also found that the shares of women increased in the course of 2015.<sup>131</sup>

There is also a considerable number of unaccompanied or separated children within the Western Balkans flow. Statistics from Bulgaria reveal that 2,768 unaccompanied or separated children applied for asylum in that country in 2016; most of them from Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>132</sup> In Serbia, the number of unaccompanied minors registered between January and July

g The assessment included a literature review, in-depth interviews with officials of relevant governments, international organizations and NGOs, as well as semi-structured interviews with nearly 30 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan in reception and transit centers in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

2015 exceeded 4,000 people; also there, the vast majority were from the same three origin countries.<sup>133</sup>

According to a survey conducted by IOM between October 2015 and March 2016 in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary, the average Syrian respondent was 29 years old, the majority of respondents were male (76 per cent) and travelled with a group (86 per cent; more than three quarters with family). The average Afghan respondent was younger (average: 24 years) and even more likely to be male, whereas Iraqis were of similar average age to Syrians and also highly likely to be male.<sup>134</sup>

The Western Balkans countries do report detections of fraudulent travel document use, though the prevalence is relatively low. In 2016, there were 855 such cases, most of them carried out by persons from the region.<sup>135</sup> Europol has reported the use of counterfeit documents to travel along the Western Balkan route, and the dismantlement of a document counterfeiting activity in Albania. The main suspect, who was running the print shop, received orders from migrant smuggling networks to produce false documents. The documents were delivered via small parcels and couriers, and provided to irregular migrants in Greece.<sup>136</sup>

Smugglers facilitating the passage from Greece to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and onward to Serbia often share a citizenship with their clients. Afghans, Pakistanis and nationals of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa reportedly operate along those routes. There are reports of well-structured smuggling groups operating along this route. In 2016, the Hungarian Police dismantled a large, multinational criminal group that smuggled migrants from Serbia through Hungary and finally to Austria. The group smuggled between 30 and 100 migrants per journey, using several minivans and a large number of drivers who worked in shifts. The smugglers sent vehicles in advance on the highways, before the actual transportation process, to identify police presence and to alert the actual drivers. A financial investigation into the crime group's illegal activities revealed that large amounts of generated profits had been transferred to Afghanistan, where it was invested into real estate businesses.<sup>137</sup>

While deaths along the Western Balkans route are relatively rare, they do occur. According to IOM data, 27 migrants died along the Western Balkans route in 2015 and 2016.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, in August 2015, the bodies of 71 migrants from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan were found in an abandoned truck alongside an Austrian motorway.<sup>139</sup> Although it is not clear whether the migrants had moved along the Western Balkans route, the case still illustrates the risks migrants face and the smugglers' unscrupulous behaviour in their hunt for profits.

Women and children, traveling without male family members, depending on smugglers, may be at increased risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking. The same applies to unaccompanied minors. Women and girls may also suffer sex and gender-based violence en route, as well as physical harm from robbery or police brutality.<sup>140</sup> Migrants and refugees travelling across the Western Balkans, including those assisted by smugglers, may also be victims of human rights violations by some national authorities of the different countries along the route.<sup>h</sup>

## Secondary movements across the European Union

In the context of the European Union migration discourse, the term 'secondary movements' encompasses travel within the EU undertaken either by people who entered the EU territory irregularly with no intention of

<sup>h</sup> The European Court of Human Rights has found different countries along this route to be in breach of the ECHR in connection with the detention of asylum seekers. See, for instance, application no. 10816/10, judgment of 20 September 2011, application no. 13058/11, and application no. 13457/11, judgments of 23 October 2012.

applying for asylum, or by asylum seekers who choose to ignore the obligation under Dublin regulations to stay in the first country of arrival - often just a transit - and move further to lodge an asylum application in their country of choice. The arrival country, where an asylum seeker first entered the EU, is normally responsible for assessing that person's application for international protection. Asylum seekers should remain in their arrival country until the refugee status determination procedure has been completed.<sup>i</sup>

The 'Dublin system' operates on the assumption that, as the asylum laws and practices of the EU States are based on the same common standards, asylum seekers enjoy similar levels of protection in all EU Member States. But in reality, asylum legislation and practice vary greatly from country to country. This, together with other factors determining the migrant's choice to move to another destination country - such as the presence of family members or diaspora communities - push many asylum seekers to abscond during the asylum procedures and to continue their journey, often only a few days after having submitted their application.

Some asylum seekers resort to the services of smugglers to move irregularly across Europe. When smugglers are involved, their role tends to differ from what is observed along the smuggling routes leading into Europe. When it comes to secondary movements, it appears that the role of smugglers often includes the provision of fraudulent documents rather than transportation.<sup>141</sup>

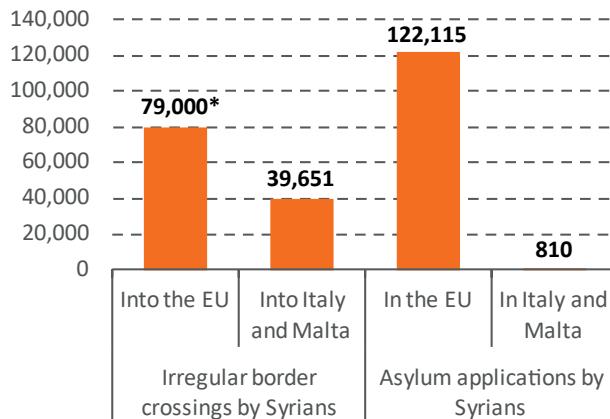
Secondary movements reached an unprecedented volume in 2015, in the wake of the massive increases in arrivals in Greece, as well as sustained high levels of arrivals in Italy.<sup>142</sup> In 2016, the level of secondary movements remained high. Border control and enforcement measures seem to have reduced the visibility of some flows. There may also have been some displacement of flows.<sup>143</sup>

It is not possible to determine how many migrants and refugees had their journeys facilitated by smugglers. However, a comparison between data on irregular arrivals and asylum application statistics can indicate where secondary movements take place within the EU. The total number

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<sup>i</sup> This regime was introduced in 2003 by the Dublin Convention; later replaced by the Dublin II Regulation and amended in 2013 with the adoption of Dublin III Regulation. The aim was to establish criteria to determine which State is responsible for examining an asylum application. The criteria for establishing responsibility run, in order of priority, from family considerations, to recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly. For more details, see European Commission, DG Migration and Home Affairs, *Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin)*, online briefing.

**FIG. 91: Comparison of the number of irregular border crossings and asylum applications by Syrians in the EU and in Italy/Malta, 2014**



\* Approximately.

Source: European Commission.

and distribution of asylum seekers in the EU-28 suggest that many do not apply for asylum in their first country of entry, but in another. Some others do apply for asylum upon arrival, but soon afterwards move on to another European country. The data on Syrian arrivals in Italy and Malta is illustrative (see figure).

Another indicator of intra-EU secondary movements by asylum seekers is the data about ‘Dublin requests.’<sup>j</sup> In cases where a member state has indications that an asylum seeker has transited through another country, the member state can submit such a request in order to assess which country should adjudicate the asylum application. An analysis of recent Dublin requests shows that secondary movements usually occur between countries of asylum located at Schengen external borders and northern European countries.

The joint police operation ‘Mos Maiorum’ was carried out in October 2014, with the goal of identifying the link between irregular EU external border crossings and secondary movements of irregular migrants within the EU and the Schengen area. 26 Member States and one Schengen Associate Country, Switzerland, participated. Almost half of the 19,234 irregular migrants detected during the operation were apprehended either at EU internal borders between Member States or inland. Syrian citizenship was by far the most frequently detected (2,459), followed by Eritrean (951) and Afghan (758).

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j Although a Dublin request does not necessarily mean that the asylum seeker had really submitted an application for international protection in another country, in most of the cases the request corresponds to a previous application.

Most detections at internal borders occurred at the borders of Germany (977), Austria (480), the United Kingdom (182), France (176) and Hungary (145).<sup>144</sup>

There is evidence that some migrants and asylum seekers are smuggled across Europe. Smugglers can be found at railway stations, markets, squares and even reception centres for asylum seekers in large European cities serving as smuggling hubs for secondary movements within Europe.<sup>145</sup>

Migrants are also smuggled between Malta and Italy. RMMS reports that a boat trip from Malta to Italy cost around US\$1,100 in 2013. Sometimes migrants use a fake passport or someone’s passport, which they then post back once they reached mainland Europe.<sup>146</sup>

The passage from France to the United Kingdom is undertaken either by boat, on inflatable dinghies or by lorry. In April 2016, UNICEF reported that smugglers charged between £4,000 and £5,500 per person to cross the English Channel – a higher price than ever before.<sup>147</sup>

Dangerous travel conditions are reported along many intra-European smuggling routes. Migrants may hide in lorries transporting goods, in very little space and with insufficient ventilation. Moreover, according to Interpol and Europol, irregular migrants are vulnerable to exploitation by criminals and criminal networks both prior to and after their arrival in the EU. They may be at a higher risk of experiencing labour or sexual exploitation, or they may be forced to serve as drug mules or to recruit and/or smuggle other migrants, especially if they contracted debt to pay for their travels.<sup>148</sup> There have also been reports of violence and exploitation in improvised ‘camps’ where migrants reside temporarily while waiting for onward transportation.<sup>149</sup>

## ENDNOTES - EUROPE

## Regional overviews - Europe

II

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