



**UNODC**

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

GLOBAL STUDY ON  
**SMUGGLING  
OF MIGRANTS**

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GLOBAL

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Research





## 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.

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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.

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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).

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

<sup>h</sup> 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.

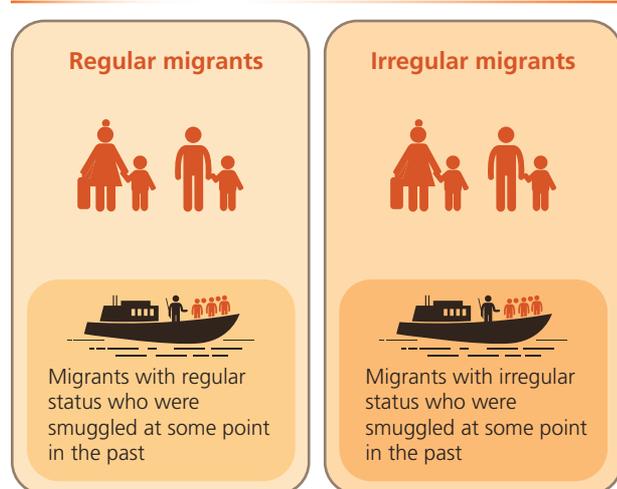
Looking at migration flows, movements across borders are either regular or irregular. Irregular entries may or may not be facilitated by smugglers, so while all entries facilitated by smugglers are irregular, some irregular entries may not be associated with smuggling. Some migrants irregularly cross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

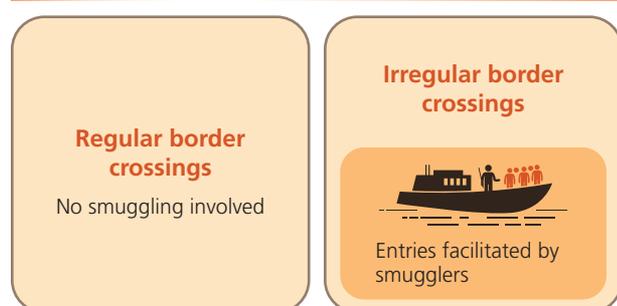
<sup>i</sup> Legal definition: A person who is outside his or her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his or her race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group of political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail 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.

<sup>j</sup> 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

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-

<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.

<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

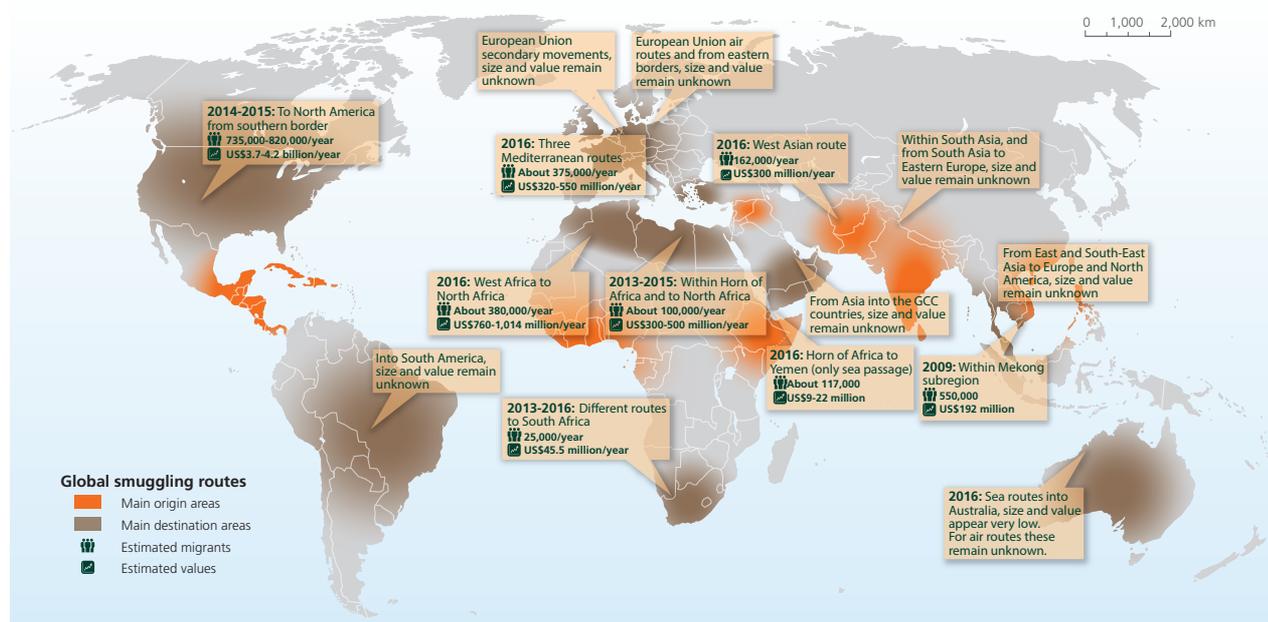
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m Estimates mainly calculated for the year 2016. However, for some routes, previous years were considered. In addition, in 2016, large numbers of migrants were smuggled from West Africa and the Horn of Africa into North Africa (about 480,000 per year) 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

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.

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



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.

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.

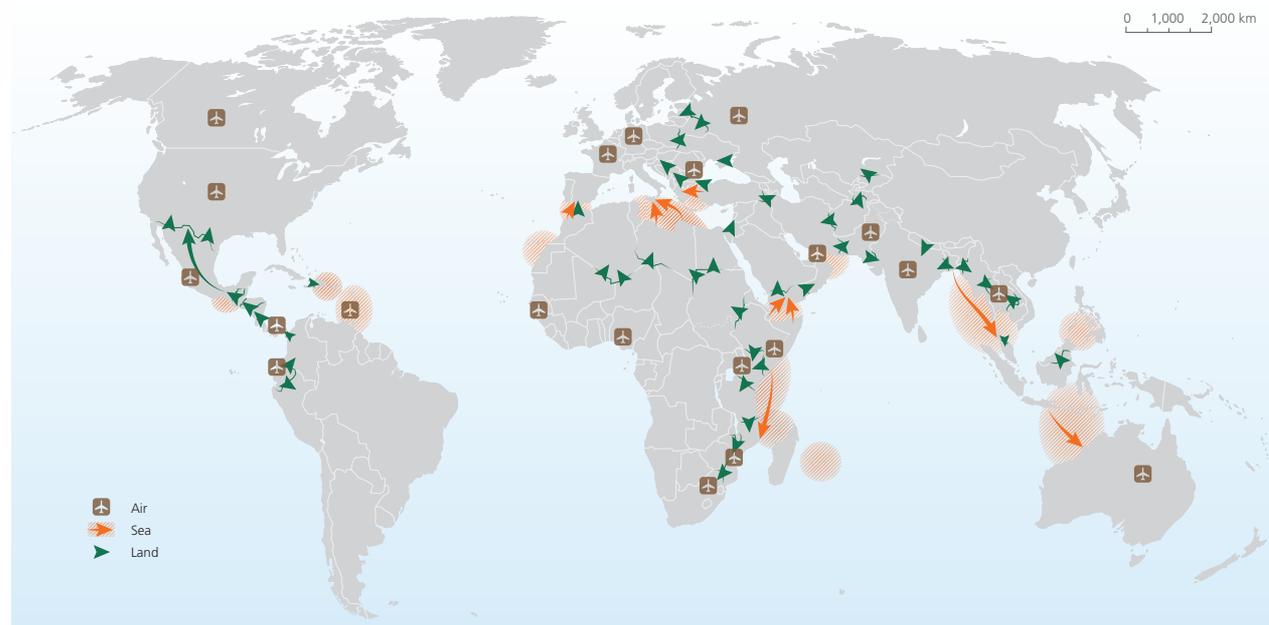
An analysis of the trends for the different smuggling routes shows the volatility of the smuggling routes and the stability of the smuggling hubs. If the demand for facilitating illegal entries and the supply of smuggling services remain the same, the sealing of certain routes does not necessarily change 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

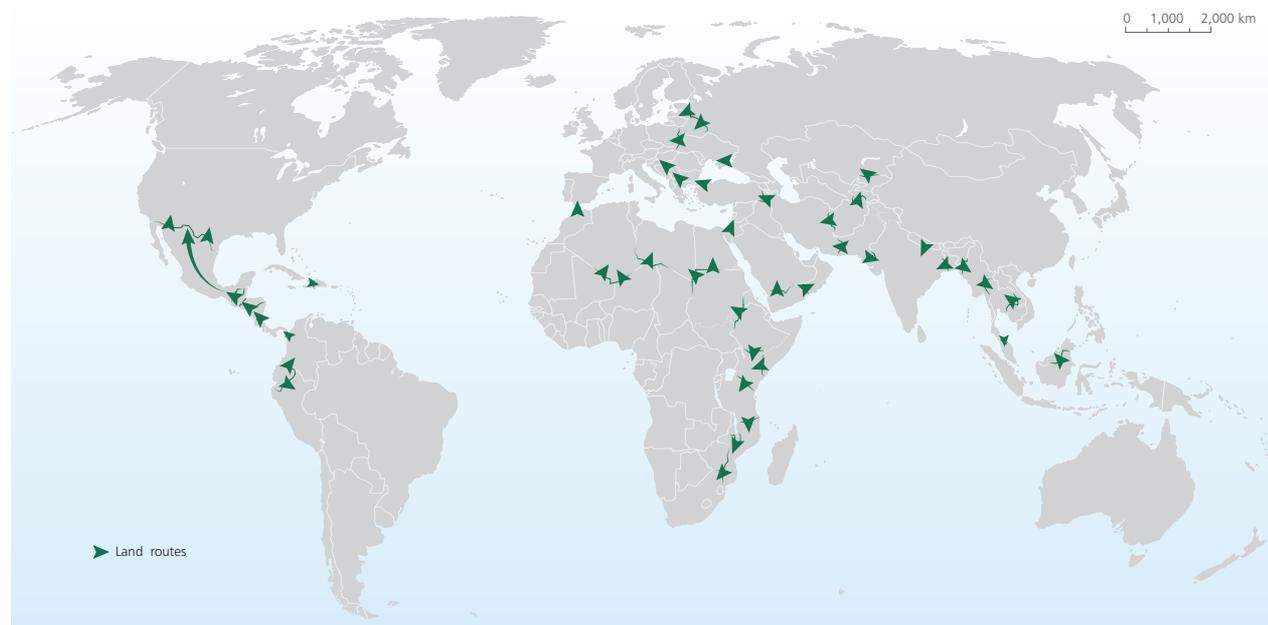
Migrant smuggling can be carried out in many ways. Different routes require certain smuggling methods and types of transportation to cross a variety of terrains and borders. Smuggling of migrants may entail arranging for the crossing of deserts, mountains, jungles, open sea, rivers and

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.

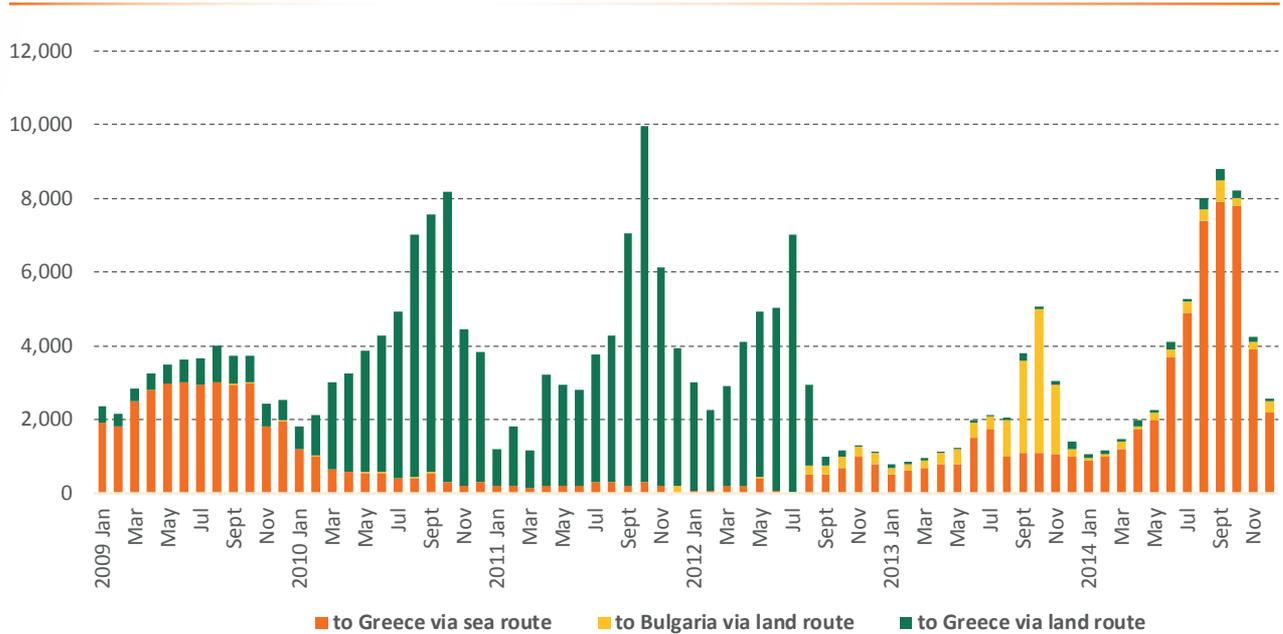
Nevertheless, these are exceptions rather than rules. Crossings of green borders often do require smugglers’ facilitation. Entering into Ceuta and Melilla is also possible by paying a smuggler to provide a counterfeit document or a safe passage hiding in trucks transiting in these cities.<sup>5</sup> 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

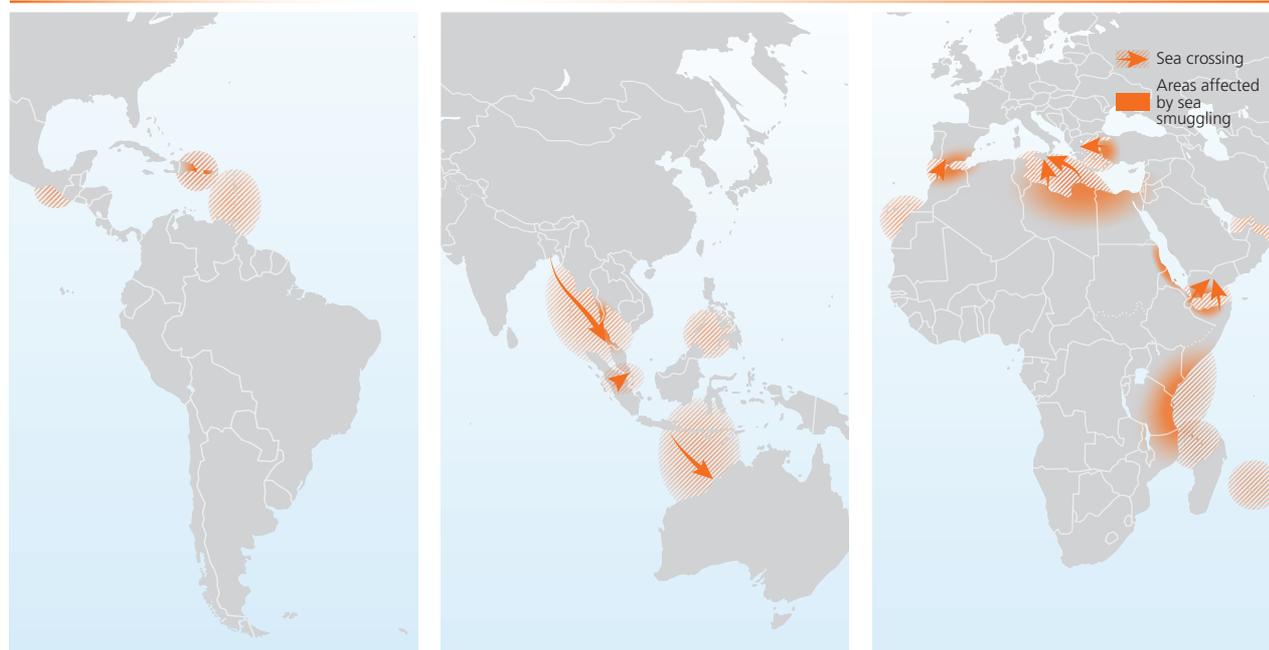
to locations to shelter large number of migrants for weeks before departure. Sometimes smugglers are also selective regarding the profiles of migrants to travel on board different vessels. Smuggling by sea requires specific logistics, access to tools and infrastructure, and the ability to move freely 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



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.

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 Rashaida 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>

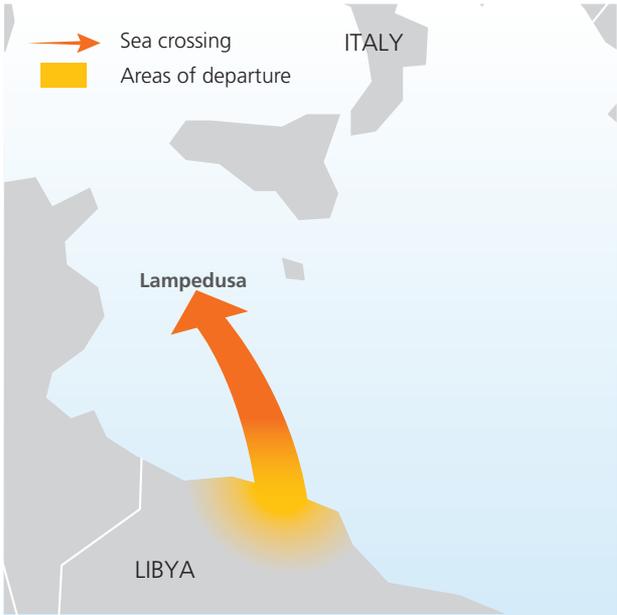
In some cases, smuggled migrants seek detection in order to apply for asylum or to be released with an expulsion.<sup>34</sup> In these cases, smugglers may opt to have the vessels intercepted at high seas by competent coast guards, leveraging international law to rescue people at sea in situations of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



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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.

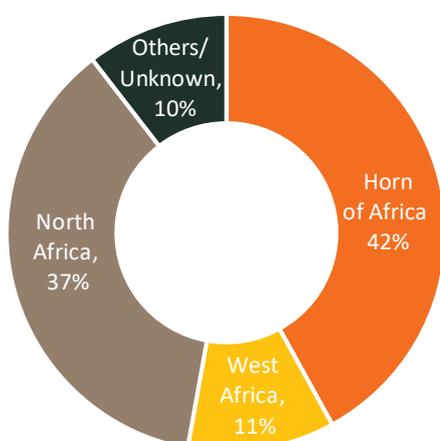
### 2.1 The profile of migrants: pushed and pulled

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.

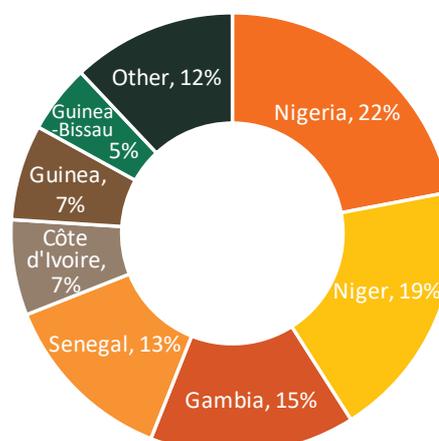
### Horn of Africa and West Africa as origins

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>

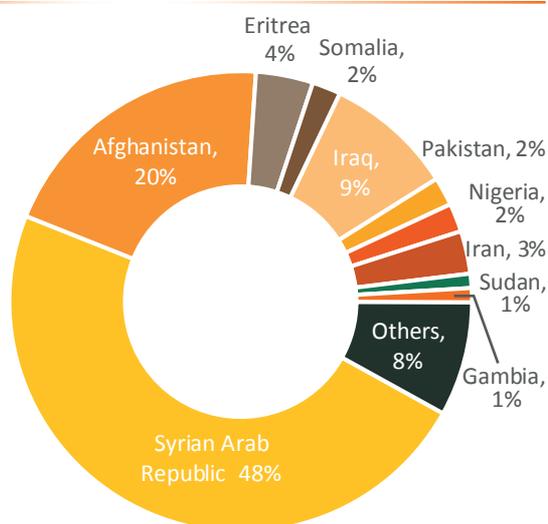
Migrants and refugees are smuggled from many different West African countries to Europe, as well as to North and Southern Africa. Niger is a key transit country for the smuggling route from West Africa towards North Africa and Europe. In 2016, there was no dominant citizenship among smuggled migrants 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.

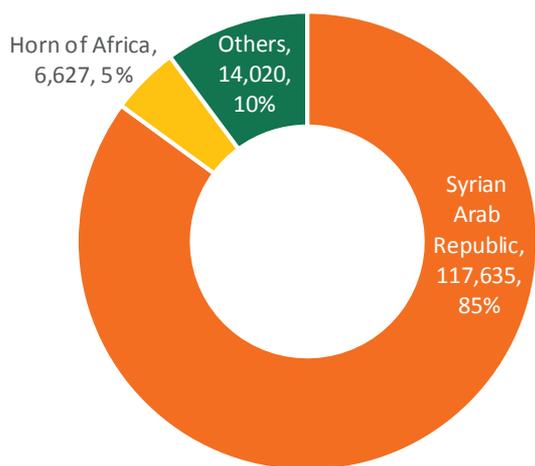
Citizens of many Asian countries are smuggled to a wide range of destinations. One significant origin country is Afghanistan. Afghan citizens are smuggled along different routes in Asia, either to South and West Asia, to South-East Asia and Australia, as well as to Western and Eastern

**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



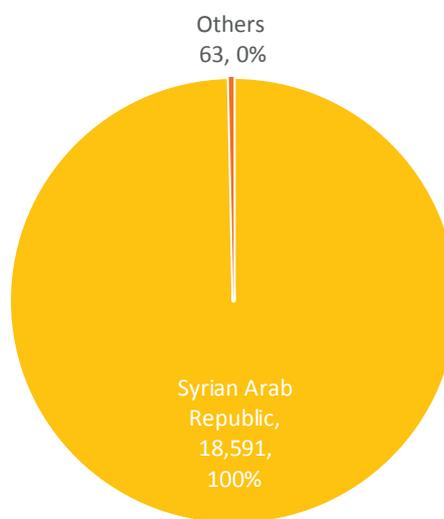
Source: UNHCR.

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>

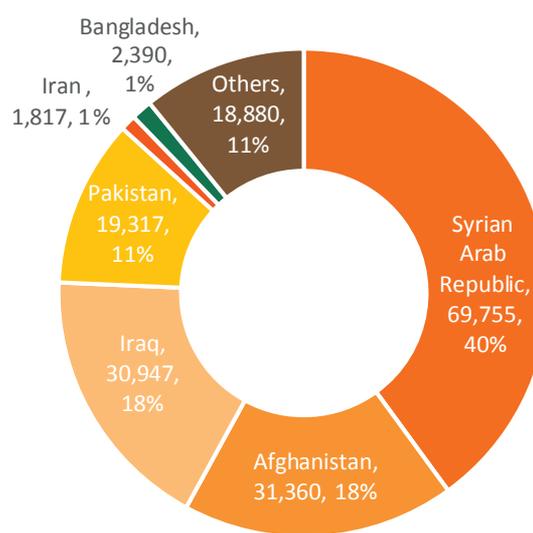
Migrants from other South and South-West Asian countries are also smuggled along the same land routes used

**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>

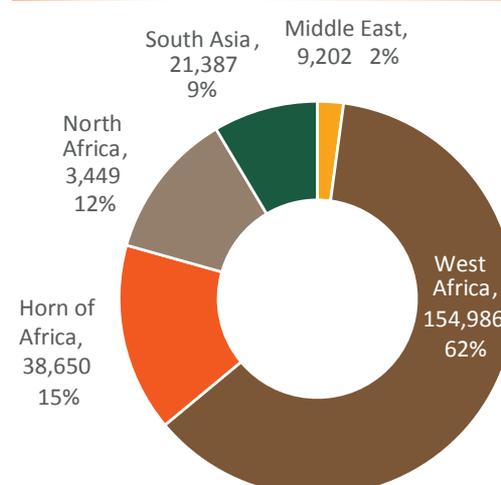
East Asian migrants are also smuggled to Europe, North America and South Africa, often combining air, land and/or sea passages.

### 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.

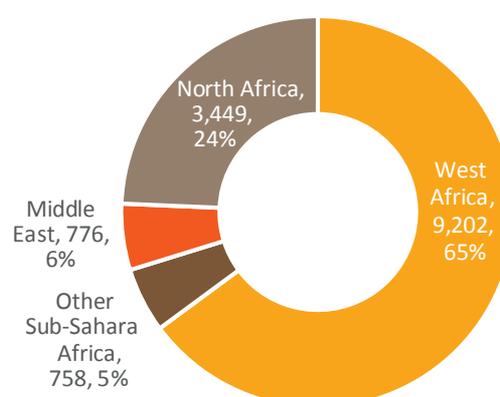
Sea arrivals in Greece, through the Eastern Mediterranean route, have different citizenship profiles, however. Most of these smuggled migrants are from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and other Middle Eastern countries (85 per cent); reflecting the relative geographical proximity of the key origins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

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



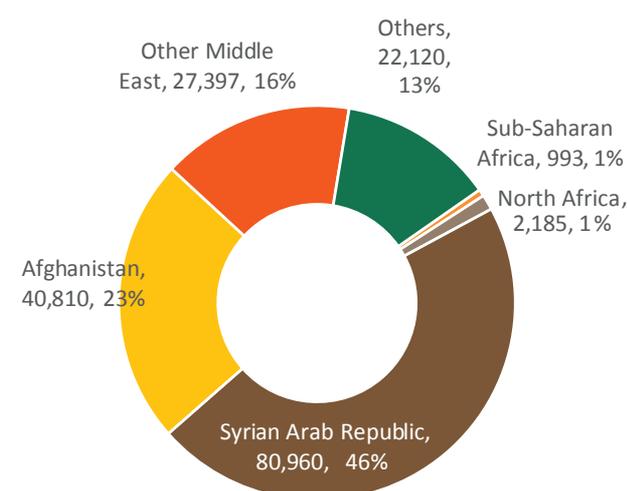
Source: UNHCR.

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



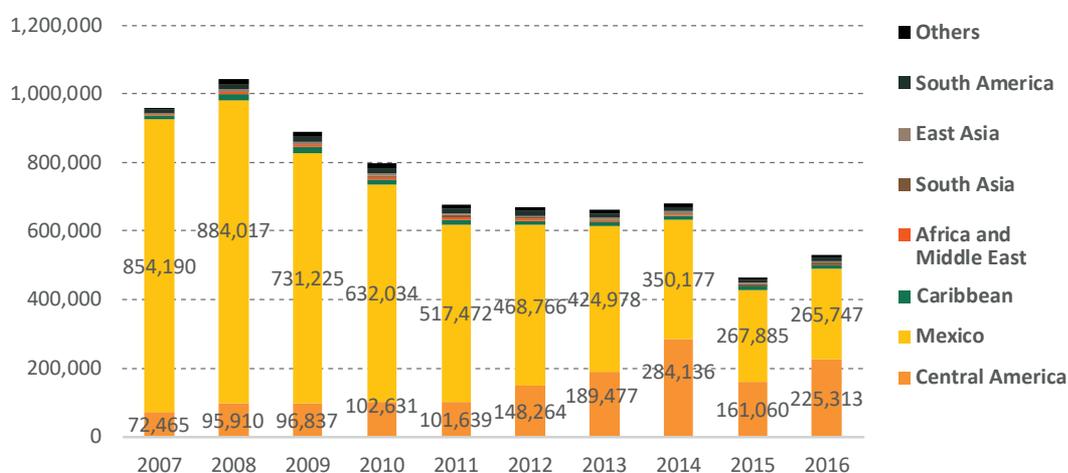
Source: UNHCR.

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

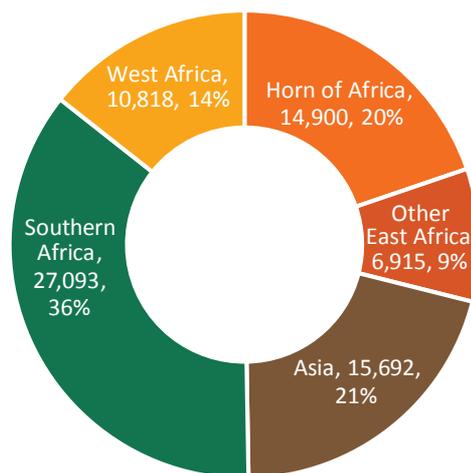
Southern African countries like Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Botswana might be increasingly viewed as alternative destinations.<sup>64</sup>

### 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



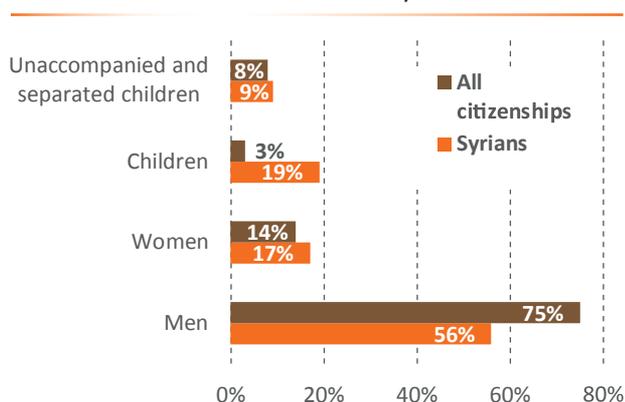
Source: UNHCR.

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>

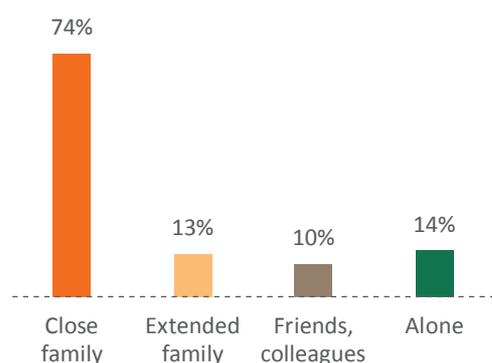
In Asia, Malaysia is a destination for smuggled migrants. Most of them are male, but there are also large shares of women from neighbouring countries.<sup>70</sup>

**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 join 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

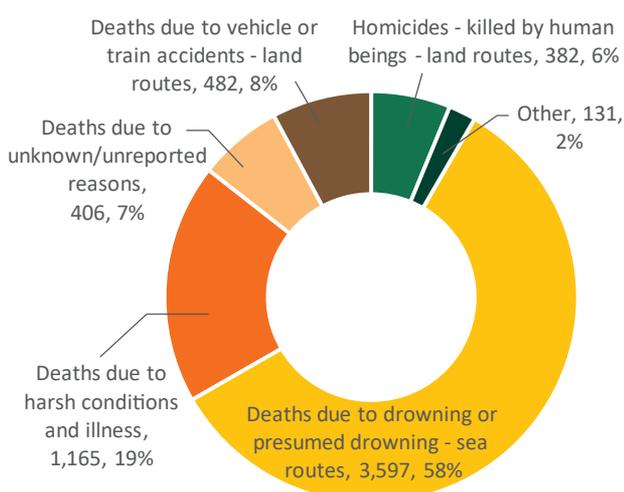
Dangerous transportation modes along with difficult terrain and unfavourable weather are key factors contributing to the high human costs of smuggling. Substandard vehicles and vessels as well as risky travel arrangements are reported along most smuggling routes. Smugglers may force migrants to use overcrowded, 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).

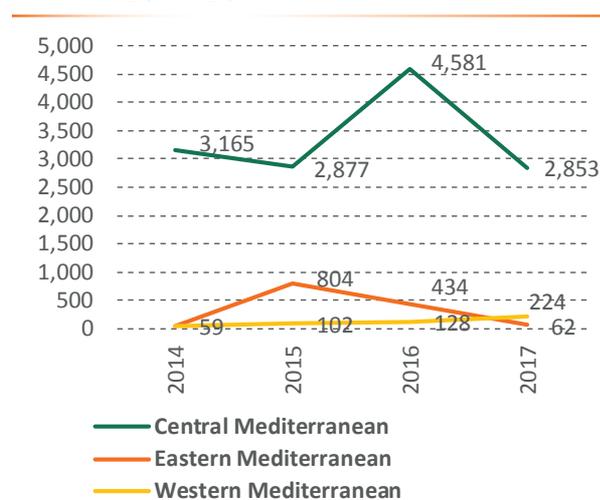
Two key reasons can explain why there are more deaths

**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



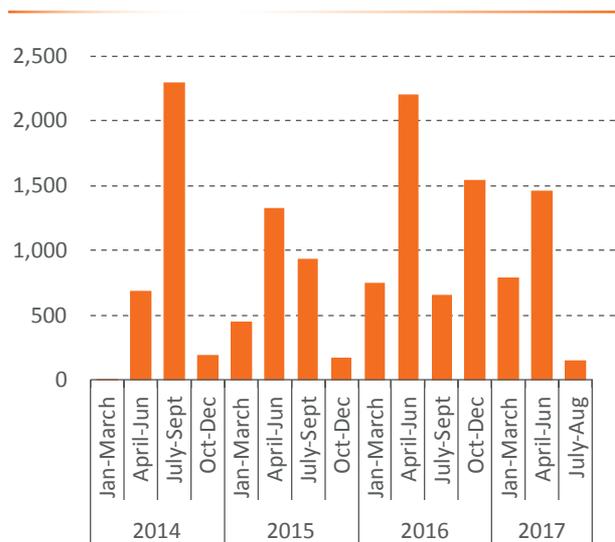
Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

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.

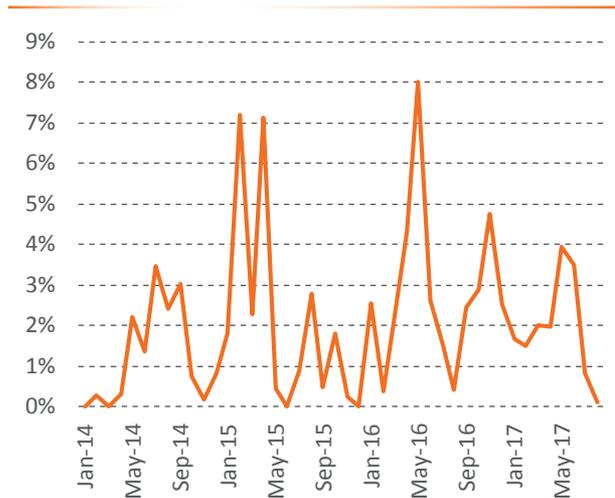
Drowning is a constant risk for migrants and refugees smuggled not only in the Mediterranean sea, but also in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea,<sup>86</sup> in the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.<sup>87</sup> The unscrupulousness of smugglers is evident on these routes as well, as there have been

**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

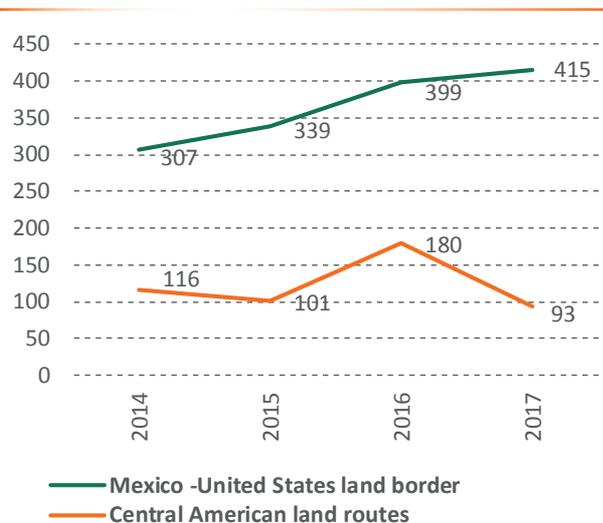
<sup>n</sup> The 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS Convention) imposes an obligation on every coastal State "...promote the establishment, operation and maintenance of an adequate and effective search and rescue service regarding safety on and over the sea and, where circumstances 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>

<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>

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 a 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 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)-Libyan coast	Land route	Around US\$2,000-3,000	The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, <i>Integrated responses to human smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Europe</i> , May 2017: 20.
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, <i>"Neither safe nor sound": 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. Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, <i>Going West: Contemporary Migration Trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya and Europe</i> , June 2014: 49.
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, <i>"Neither safe nor sound": 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 *malayitsha* 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.

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

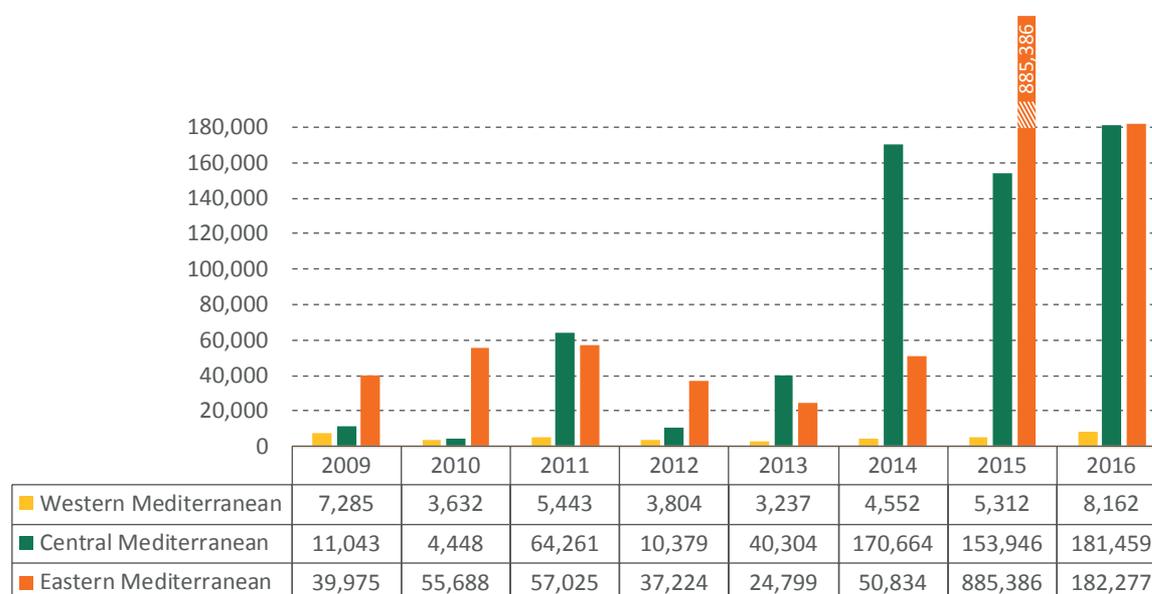
Measuring an illegal phenomenon is always a difficult exercise. National authorities normally record only those criminal events that come to the attention of the criminal justice system. Social research methods, such as population surveys, can be used to measure certain criminal activities beyond what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

<sup>r</sup> 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

<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>

<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>

•• is a conservative figure, as it does not consider those who remained in Libya or moved to other North African countries.

u 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

•• v Number of new applications for asylum per year in South Africa according to UNHCR.

w 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.

•• 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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