



# Survive and advance

## The economics of smuggling refugees and migrants into Europe

Tuesday Reitano and Peter Tinti

### Summary

Violent conflicts, terrorism, long-standing repressive regimes, chronic poverty and inequality have driven an unprecedented number of refugees and migrants to Europe. Those making the journey are assisted by an increasingly violent and opportunistic smuggling industry. Sustainable profits made by this industry have allowed transnational networks to develop where they previously did not exist, with serious implications for human security and state stability. Effective responses will require an understanding of the drivers and dynamics of the crisis. This understanding should be sufficiently nuanced to recognise that each journey of migration is defined by the ethnicity, income level and country of origin of the migrants, as well as by a highly responsive smuggling industry.

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SINCE 2011, EUROPE has faced a mounting migration crisis that has played out firstly on its borders, and then within them. A perfect storm of events, including the protracted war in Syria and subsequent mass displacement, instability caused by the Arab Spring, the disintegration of the Libyan state, the withdrawal of international troops in Afghanistan and persistent extremist insurgencies in sub-Saharan Africa, has prompted a scale of human movement that has not been seen since the end of World War II.

### The scene

In the past four years, more than 800 000 citizens from four regions – the Middle East, Africa, Asia and the extra-Schengen area of Europe – have targeted central and northern European countries to claim refuge and seek new opportunities for themselves and their families. At the time of writing this paper, the UN estimates that 700 000 migrants have arrived in Europe by sea in 2015 alone. They are moving away from conflict, terrorism, repressive regimes and varying degrees of poverty and lack of opportunities towards the relative safety and prosperity of Europe. In doing so, many have put their lives at grave risk, while others have died as they seek to evade heightening physical and political barriers.

Those making the journey to Europe are assisted by a rapidly proliferating set of smuggling networks that have different shifting sets of motives, nationalities, ways of operating and levels of criminality. The failures of Europe and the broader international community allow these smugglers to benefit from exacerbating the crisis by inciting migration and using unscrupulous practices, such as abuse, extortion and violence, to seek profits. Despite deploying task forces, fusion cells and warships, law enforcement agencies have failed to keep up with the chaotic and rapid multiplication of actors involved in the crisis. The multilateral system has been incapable of providing critical support to the needy, developing political solutions to the various crises or ensuring that legal obligations towards those in need of protection are met.

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The impact of the crisis has been dire. Europe is unable to find consensus or a coherent response as it finds itself caught in a Gordian knot of internal and external security concerns, constrained budgets and political impasses. The sheer number of people travelling en masse has overwhelmed destination and transit countries, which are unable or unwilling to meet their international human rights obligations and often struggle to understand what rules exist. In these states, people have been polarised over whether this mass movement presents a threat, an opportunity or a humanitarian obligation. The subsequent impact on electoral politics in Europe and North Africa has been profound.

This paper strives to provide a substantial, policy-orientated contribution to the evidence basis around Europe's current migration crisis. It combines the authors' experience, spanning more than a decade, of analysing smuggling networks, their characteristics and structures, and the role they play in migration as a development challenge. It is based on investigations conducted in 10 countries, and interviews with law enforcement and government officials, experts, analysts, practitioners, smugglers and migrants.

The study undertook nearly 200 long-form, semi-structured interviews with migrants in six locations along the main routes to Europe and in migrant destination countries (Libya, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Germany and Sweden). These provided an unprecedented and detailed understanding of the motivations and modus operandi of both migrants and smugglers. By building the evidence base in areas where the least is known, this paper seeks to help policymakers chart out a stronger response to the crisis.

The challenge posed by the migration crisis defies neat definitions. Even the use of basic terminologies and concepts – such as whether to describe those who move as migrants or refugees, and whether their desire to select their preferred destinations is deemed as legitimate or illegitimate – has become hotly contested. In this volatile and complex environment perhaps the only points where there is universal agreement are that, firstly, the dynamics driving this crisis are under-examined and poorly understood, and, secondly, this 'migration crisis' cannot be allowed to continue. That people and their right to a safe and productive future are literally being sacrificed at borders of our own creation speaks poorly of our collective civilisation and humanity.



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UNABLE TO AGREE ON A COHERENT RESPONSE, EUROPE IS CAUGHT IN A SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL GORDIAN KNOT

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## Who is moving?

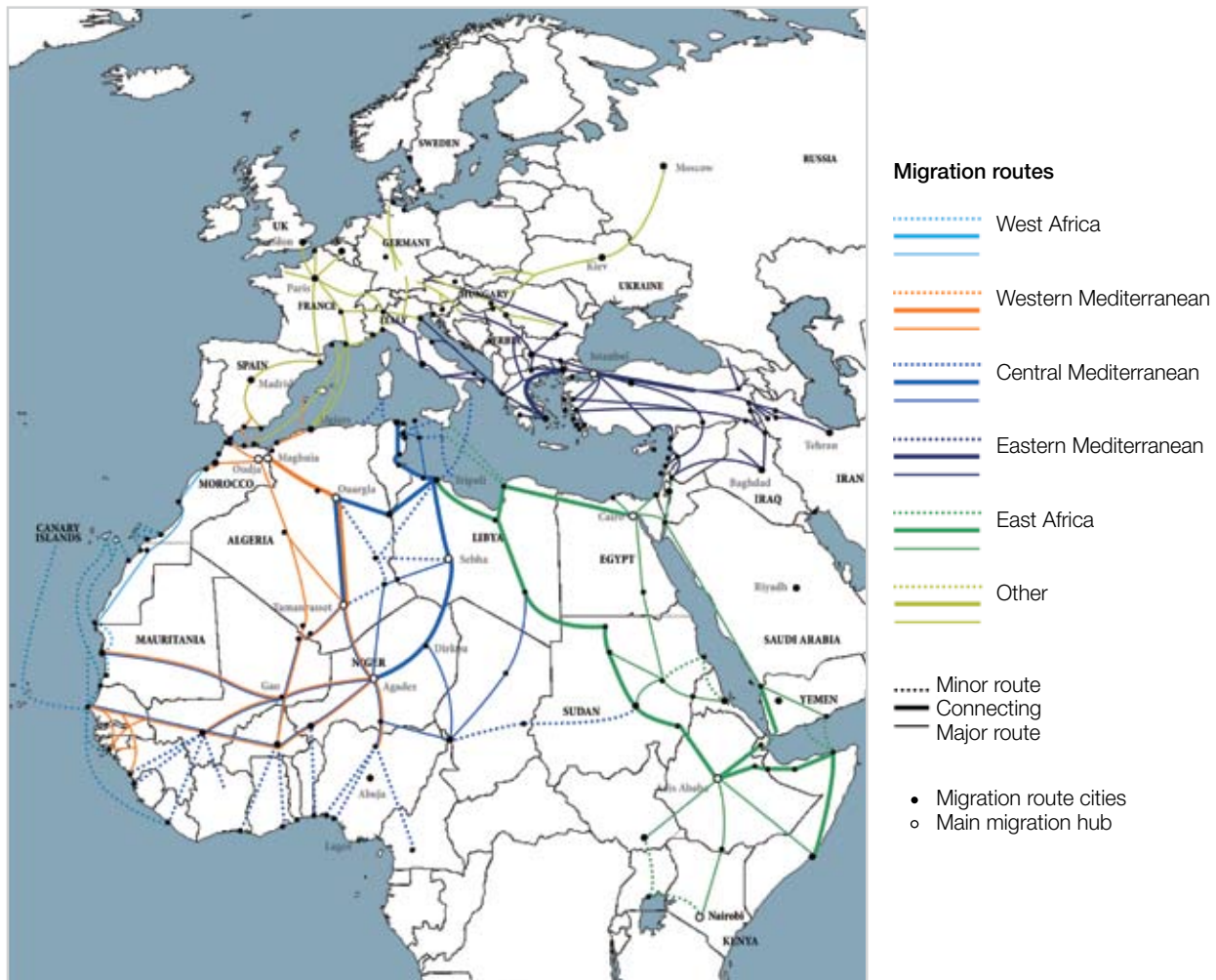
One of the greatest challenges in describing, analysing and addressing the current crisis is that it brings together so many people, travelling over extraordinary distances and driven by different motivations. They are determined by their experiences: the timing of their departure, the routes they take, the people they meet and sometimes simply their fortune or misfortune as they travel. These experiences are strongly shaped by the nationality of the migrants and the resources they have available during their journeys, which may follow an almost infinite number of permutations of land, sea and air routes. Together, these individual stories intertwine and become part of the larger narrative of the crisis.

In this migration situation, there are two major gateways to Europe's borders, both of which involve a sea crossing followed by onward movement after the migrants have reached Europe's shores. These two gateways have distinct characteristics, and

different nationalities pass through them, facilitated by different actors operating with varying degrees of criminality.

- Across the Mediterranean, the first epicentre of the migration crisis, there are two major crossing points. The first is from Libya and the second from Egypt. The majority of people using these crossings are rescued at sea or reach shore in Italy. In both cases, the largest groups who make these crossings are not Syrians – though Syrians used these routes in earlier phases of the crisis. Rather, the majority crossing from Libya and Egypt are people from West Africa, East Africa and the Horn of Africa. In July 2015 about 20 000 arrivals were reported in Italy, though, unlike the situation in Greece, these numbers are no longer increasing. Another traditional pressure point, entering Europe via Spain, through the Canary Islands or through the Spanish exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla bordering Morocco, is relatively quiet at the moment.<sup>1</sup>
- The Aegean crossing is currently the front line of entry into Europe. Following routes originating largely in

Figure 1: Migration routes to Europe



Source: Authors' own map.

Turkey, migrants cross the Aegean to Greece in extraordinary numbers and at an exponential rate. Nearly 50 000 migrants landed in July 2015 and 100 000 in August; nine out of 10 of them arrive on just four Greek islands. On this route, most of the refugees are from Syria, but large numbers are also arriving from Afghanistan and Iraq, and, to a lesser extent, Iran, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Upon arriving in Greece, these migrants travel by land, mainly through the Balkans and central Europe, where they are joined by migrants from the western Balkans (mostly from Kosovo and Albania).<sup>2</sup>

Neither the routes – nor the *roots* – of the current migration crisis are new. From the Silk Road to trans-Saharan caravan trails, the refugees and migrants of today are following paths that were carved centuries ago. Aside from those displaced from Syria, where civil war has created a refugee population of more than four million, there is little in terms of changed circumstances in the home countries of many of the nationalities arriving in Europe that would suggest a serious motive for the sharp rise in migration. With regard to conflict and repression that may lead people to attempt migration as refugees, there are a series of highly problematic settings, such as Eritrea, Somalia and Afghanistan. However, many of the other countries from which large numbers of migrants are fleeing at the moment, such as Nigeria, Senegal and the Gambia – and even EU accession states in the Balkans – have growing economies and little in their political, economic or social environments that would evidently motivate the sudden shift.

Neither the routes – nor the *roots* – of the current migration crisis are new: migrants are following paths that were carved out centuries ago

Policy responses focusing on migration, therefore, need to be informed by the dynamics of this particular migration crisis, recognising the features that make this distinct from migratory patterns that existed before. Policymakers need not only to understand what impels people to migrate, but also why they choose Europe and not elsewhere, and why they select the particular routes that they do.

Although they are not responsible for its cause, there is a group of actors who have flourished during the current crisis, and whose role in amplifying the crisis is in part responsible for its most acute humanitarian consequences: the traffickers and smugglers, who have historically traded along these routes. Though these networks operate at varying degrees of criminality and professionalism, their current proactivity in inciting movement and the profit levels being earned are unprecedented for the industry. In some cases, these profits may be permanently transforming relatively low-level trafficking groups into hardened criminal enterprises, around which sophisticated networks are developing to protect the clandestine smuggling economy.

### What is a smuggler?

There are various types of ‘services’ that could be considered migrant smuggling, but they tend to fall into two broad categories: the ‘full-package’ service, and the more informal ‘pay-as-you-go’ services operated by smaller players. Although often aggregated and overlapping, the crimes classified as human trafficking and smuggling of migrants are each afforded a dedicated protocol in the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which has been ratified by 141 states.

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100 000

THE NUMBER OF MIGRANTS  
WHO LANDED IN GREECE IN  
AUGUST 2015

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The UNTOC defines human trafficking as 'the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, of fraud or deception'.<sup>3</sup> Smuggling of migrants is defined 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>4</sup>

The protocols to the UNTOC on these two crimes therefore define both acts as organised crime, but they are not the same and cannot be used interchangeably. Smugglers offer a service to migrants, helping them to cross physical, political and cultural obstacles, and the relationship between a smuggler and a migrant is largely consensual and typically ends once the agreed journey is over. Although there are many grey areas in this typology, and cases where a consensual smuggling relationship morphs either temporarily or permanently into trafficking, this paper predominantly focuses on the networks and individuals who perpetuate the crime of human smuggling.

In many ways, however, the formal definition does not give credit to the actual function a smuggler performs for the migrant, or explain why there is a persistent and lucrative market for their services. Smugglers provide assistance when migrants cannot move without help. Smuggling networks are made up of actors with specialised, often highly localised knowledge and expertise, and, for many, these skills are also used in carrying out legal and legitimate economic activities. For example, smugglers' special local knowledge may enable them to chart a specific terrain, as in the case of nomadic tribes that facilitate smuggling across the Sahara, or they might be able to help navigate a customs regime at a remote border crossing. Smugglers serve as a bridge between two regions, communities, or countries, perhaps speaking two or more languages, and are almost always equipped with knowledge of local cultures. Either through integration or violence, they are able to operate in both environments.<sup>5</sup> As such, the role of diaspora populations has become critical to facilitating smuggling, as human-smuggling networks and patterns often develop along ethnic and linguistic lines.

The more vulnerable the migrant feels, the more likely he is to recruit a smuggler, and the higher the price he is likely to pay

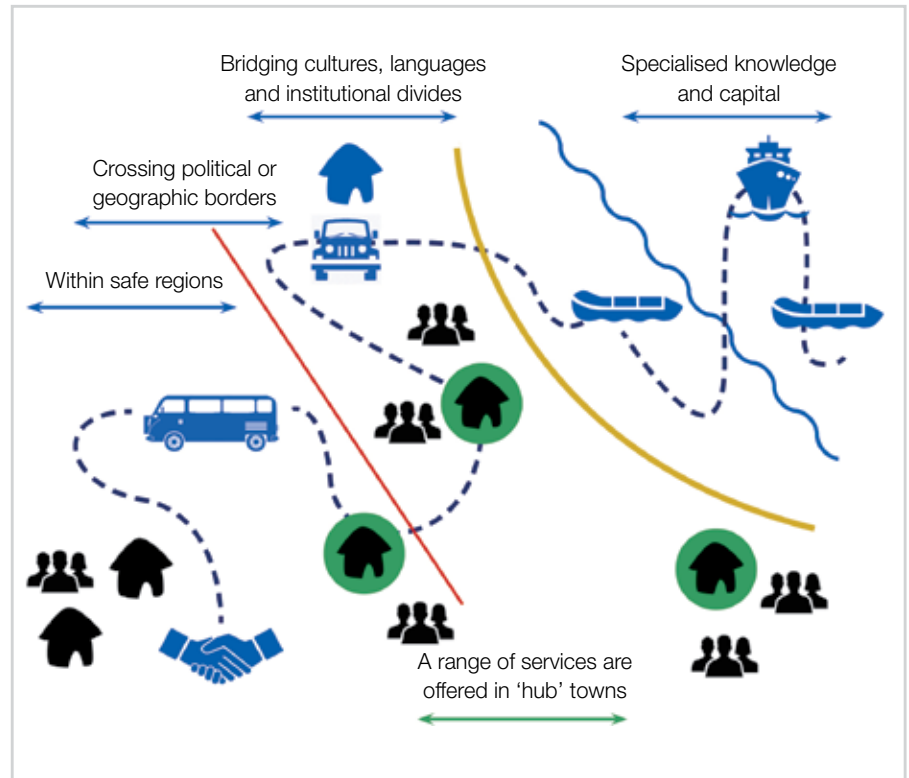
Smugglers universally trade on rumours, fears, inconsistencies and the illusion of trust. The more vulnerable the migrant feels, the more likely he is to recruit a smuggler, and the higher the price he is likely to agree to pay. Smugglers recruit by emphasising the sense of urgency: 'Go now, or they will build a wall and you won't be able to pass there any more,' they may say, for example, to the potential migrant. They will amplify or misrepresent inconsistencies in EU policies, playing on fears and portraying themselves as saviours – that they are the only hope that a migrant will have to reach his destination safely.

In this current crisis, many different actors have been drawn into some component of migrant smuggling – highly professional criminal groups, specialists in corruption and counterfeiting, militia groups, petty criminals and ordinary citizens (such as hotel owners, taxi and truck drivers, travel agents and money lenders). They are all drawn to the profits offered by the criminal economy.



SMUGGLING NETWORKS ARE MADE UP OF ACTORS WITH SPECIALISED KNOWLEDGE

**Figure 2: The role of a smuggler**



Source: Authors' own infographic.

### An evolving narrative

Migration to Europe is by no means a new phenomenon, but has centuries' old roots firstly in the slave trades, but then perpetuated by the long-standing economic disparities between the countries along the southern Mediterranean and those in the North. There are cyclical peaks and troughs, responding to a variety of push and pull factors, or perceived opportunities created along specific routes.

That we now refer to this as a “migration and refugee crisis” is somewhat fallacious: this is a crisis that has long been building, it could have been predicted, and indeed was predicted by some,<sup>6</sup> but the warnings were not heeded, and no preparations were made to deal with a large migrant community. There have been a mounting number of crises, all of which have triggered significant displaced populations, in the Central African Republic, Palestine, Iraq, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen. A number of protracted crises remain unresolved, in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. New waves of displacement have been triggered, while existing refugee populations are unable to return: levels of refugee repatriation are at a 25-year low, with little sign of improvement. While 85% of refugees are found in developing and middle-income countries, mobility is a growing phenomenon. Systemic inequalities in income, standards of living, access to basic rights and freedoms, as well as consumer goods are ever more apparent thanks to improvements in access to communication and information. Diaspora networks and smugglers available to facilitate movement has led to a growing number of people ‘voting with their feet’, abandoning chronic poverty and interminable futures in camps, and they are moving to cities and countries with better facilities, employment, education and healthcare.<sup>7</sup>



THE MAJORITY OF  
PASSPORTS THAT ARE  
PROCURED FRAUDULENTLY  
ARE SWEDISH

## The Syrian displaced seeking futures

One of the main catalysts of the current crisis is the mounting refugee flow from Syria's civil war, a conflict now in its fifth year. More than four million people have left Syria since the conflict began in 2011, driven by violent sectarian conflict, vicious aerial bombing campaigns targeting extremist and insurgent groups in predominantly civilian areas, and policies of depriving large portions of the population of access to electricity, clean water and humanitarian assistance.

Initially, this displacement took place within the region for the most part. Refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan swelled over the first three years. In Lebanon complex national policies left over a million Syrians trying to eke out livelihoods while living in informal situations among the already vulnerable Lebanese. In the words of a Syrian refugee interviewed during a focus group in Lebanon in May 2013:

When it first started, there were some areas in which there was no conflict, so people could actually flee from one area to another. But later the conflict spread to all areas and cities, even Homs and Damascus. At the end ... the air bombing forced us to leave. We were able to bear everything, but when there was air bombing, it was all too much.

In 2015, the protracted nature of the Syrian civil war has left the international community increasingly weary. As Syrian atrocities have moved further off the front pages of the news, levels of donations to the humanitarian appeals have declined. As millions of Syrians – those living in refugee camps or in neighbouring countries – face an intolerable, indefinite future without prospects, this protracted refugee crisis has evolved into a large-scale migration.

One of the main catalysts of the current crisis is the mounting refugee flow from Syria's civil war

As a result, a second wave of migration is under way, with Syrians moving out of the region in search of long-term prospects. With no end to the conflict in sight, Syrians want to ensure that they register in countries where they can secure a long-term livelihood. Various factors, including favourable asylum policies, existing family connections, or the presence of a pre-existing diaspora inform their preferences for a destination country.

Of the 60 Syrians interviewed in the course of the study whose findings are presented in this paper, 20% tried to follow

a legal route in order to resettle (i.e. by applying for visas at the embassies of either European or Gulf states). The lack of response, however, left them with few options other than to migrate illegally and to use the services of a smuggler. The following is an example:

I tried twice back in 2013 to apply for asylum with the British and German embassies, but they never gave us feedback or anything – like we never applied. I even tried to apply for a Saudi visa to go for Hajj but the tourism company said that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia doesn't allow Syrians to enter.

– 40-year-old Syrian male, with four children, interviewed in Alexandria, September 2015

## The path less travelled: migration journeys

A migrant's journey begins with a calculated first step. From Syria or its neighbouring countries, the next step for Syrian refugees is almost always to a country where they can enter without a visa. Early on in the crisis, Egypt was the preferred choice for many, as Syrians did not need a visa to enter Egypt, and Egypt's policies towards Syrians were considered relatively welcoming. The similarities between Syrian and Egyptian culture, combined with the common language, also made Egypt an appealing destination. Following the fall of the Morsi government in April 2013, however, attitudes towards Syrian refugees began to change, and the new administration was much more hostile to the Syrian refugee population.<sup>8</sup> In 2013 the visa regime changed and Syrians were required to obtain a visa before entering Egypt.

For Syrians seeking options further afield, in Europe, there are three possible ways for them to enter the EU. The most direct, and most expensive, is to travel by air to an EU member state. To travel to the EU by air, Syrians need a legitimate entry visa to Europe or use a facilitator to procure fraudulent travel documents. The first option is unavailable to most Syrians because of European immigration policies, and the latter is too expensive for the vast majority. Those who seek to obtain fraudulent documents for the most part head towards their preferred country of asylum, often Sweden, given its generous asylum package, including family reunification and full citizenship. It has been found that the largest number of passports that are procured fraudulently are Swedish. The Swedish government has detected criminal networks arranging marriages of convenience, false adoptions and fraudulent work permits to bring people illegally into Sweden. These networks reach into Syria and its neighbouring countries.<sup>9</sup>

A second avenue to Europe is by land through Turkey, a country Syrians can enter without a visa, from where they can cross into Greece or Bulgaria. To cross the border into Greece or Bulgaria, Syrians need either a legitimate travel visa, to apply for asylum, or use illicit means. Between 2011 and 2012, the number of illegal border detections of Syrian migrants in the western Balkans grew from 92 to 1 646 (about an 18-fold increase). In the first half of 2015 alone, nearly 39 000 had illegally entered Europe by the Western Balkans, of which approximately half were Syrian.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, there is the sea route across the Mediterranean from North Africa. After Egypt closed its borders to Syrians without visas, Syrians have sought to access Egypt and Libya, for onward journey to Europe, by first travelling to sub-Saharan Africa, and continuing on to North Africa.<sup>11</sup>

All along the journey, migrants are vulnerable to abuse, robbery, rape and other mistreatment by bandits, as well as by their smugglers

It is a considerable challenge to keep a quantifiable record of these numerous routes and journeys, and to try to understand the scale of the flow. Overwhelmed border personnel and EU officials struggle with issues of multiple registration and double counting, which make accurate assessment difficult and policymaking even more complex.<sup>12</sup>

There have been no systematic studies conducted with refugees or migrants in this current crisis, either at source or destination. However, the 200 or so interviews undertaken for this study indicate that the choice of route is commensurate with the profile of the migrant. The route a migrant chooses depends on his or her income, social status or diaspora connections. As the most hazardous and complex of border crossings, the sea route is most often taken by those with the lowest disposable income, by those who are most desperate or have no other alternatives. Regardless of where the Syrians stand on the income spectrum, however, as a consolidated group they have greater purchasing power and influence than the other nationalities along the same routes. Their higher income levels and ability to leverage resources to pay for better services have invigorated the smuggling networks and criminal groups already present.

### Professional smugglers in the Horn of Africa

Since 2014, there is evidence that some Syrians are flying to Sudan, where they do not need a visa, either directly from Syria, or from neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Once in Sudan, Syrian migrant flows intersected with a long-standing migration route from countries in the Horn of Africa, mainly Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. For migrants and refugees from these countries, the most common route runs north through Sudan and Egypt either to the Egyptian north coast or to Libya (see the dark-green routes on the map in Figure 1).

Although some nationalities might not need a visa for Sudan or countries in the Horn of Africa, they would certainly need a smuggler. For various reasons, the borders in the Horn of Africa are life-threateningly dangerous and impossible to navigate alone. Notwithstanding the geographic and temporal challenges of crossing the difficult desert terrain in the region, there is no freedom of movement in the Horn of Africa, where neighbouring states harbour long-standing enmities and, as a consequence, borders

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+39 000

THE NUMBER OF MIGRANTS WHO ILLEGALLY ENTERED EUROPE VIA THE WESTERN BALKANS IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2015

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tend to be highly militarised and dangerous. Additionally, a number of armed, violent militia groups operate across the region and engage in cross-border trafficking and trade.

Of all of the networks that have flourished in the current crisis, the smugglers operating in the Horn of Africa were the most professional, organised and profitable before the crisis, thanks to the consistent flow of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing from the repressive regime in Eritrea and conflict in Somalia. Numerous criminal networks are involved in recruiting and facilitating the smuggling of illegal migrants out of the Horn of Africa. In 2013 a survey by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat estimated that there were 1 000 illegal and unregistered 'agents' or 'brokers' and 406 registered private employment agencies at work in Addis Ababa alone.<sup>13</sup> These form only one part of the numerous interlinking networks operating across the Horn of Africa to help potential migrants reach their destination countries and this criminal infrastructure was very well placed to recalibrate itself around the incoming Syrian flow now heading for Europe.

The overland route north towards the Mediterranean runs through brutal terrain, in one of the hottest, harshest deserts on the planet. It is also a region rife with banditry, and where competing tribes and militias vie for control over smuggling networks. All along the journey, migrants are vulnerable to abuse, robbery, rape and other mistreatment by bandits as well as by their smugglers. In southern Egypt, near Aswan, the best known of these networks are run by the Rashaida, who specialise in the movement (and often trafficking) of the Sudanese and Eritreans, and whose trafficking networks are known for their brutality. Elements within the Rashaida networks run a very controlled network that kidnaps Eritreans for ransom.<sup>14</sup>

The number of Eritreans detected in the central Mediterranean attempting the sea crossing has reached record levels in the last two years

From Sudan, Syrian migrants cross into Egypt illegally, using the same networks that facilitate the movement of the Sudanese, Eritreans and Ethiopians into Egypt. Once in Egypt, they quickly link up with interlocutors who can take them to the north coast to board boats to Italy or Greece. People choosing this route tend to be in Egypt for between five days and two weeks. Often, Syrians make arrangements regarding the sea crossing from their departure country before flying to Sudan, from where

they are picked up in Khartoum by someone who can facilitate their passage all the way to the north coast. Syrians based in Lebanon and Turkey who take this route may pay US\$2 000 to obtain an Egyptian visa through backchannels – a more expensive variant. After arriving in Egypt, these people then move on to the north coast of Egypt, most frequently to Alexandria, to cross the Mediterranean.

Smuggling networks primarily dedicated to facilitating boat trips to Europe began to really flourish with the influx of Syrians, and Syrian cash. Then, more local clientele, such as Eritreans, increasingly began using the smuggling infrastructure built on Syrian demand to seek passage to Europe from Egypt and Libya. In 2013 Eritrean nationals constituted the largest increase in the number of illegal crossings into Europe compared to the previous year.<sup>15</sup> The number of Eritreans detected in the central Mediterranean attempting the sea crossing has reached record levels in the last two years, increasing tenfold in just the last quarter of 2014, from 1 522 to 16 027.<sup>16</sup> However, although the life chances for the average citizen in the Horn of Africa, in particular Somalia and Eritrea, are poor and there are limited socio-economic opportunities characterised by insecurity and greatly restricted political freedoms, these conditions have prevailed for much of the last decade and there has been no obvious domestic change that explains such a dramatic increase in the numbers of fleeing migrants. What has changed, however, is the smuggling networks, which have become more active and virulent and, to increase their profits, they have swelled the numbers by actively recruiting and offering their services to nationals from all over the the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

### Libya's chaos: a gateway to the Mediterranean

The aftermath of the 2011 revolution and outside military intervention in Libya that overthrew Gaddafi after 40 years of authoritarianism has been defined by the steady fragmentation of the Libyan state. Violent clashes between competing militias over political and economic control have left the country in anarchy, without a functioning government or state institutions. Criminal economies and illicit trafficking have become an important source of income as the chaos has empowered actors in pursuit of illegitimate profits, even within the formal banking sector and the critically important oil sector.

As the Syrian migrants moved northwards, skirting southern Libya on their way towards the coast, they encountered Libya's borderland criminal economies. The networked Tebu, an African clan with members dispersed over southern Libya, Chad and northern Niger, were particularly integrated in the trade, ferrying people north to Al Kufra and west to Sebha, towards the Mediterranean cities of Benghazi, Tripoli and Zuwara. As Egypt

tightened control over its borders and Libya increasingly lost control over its own, this swing westwards became even more pronounced.

Over 2013 and 2014, Libya grew into the main source of the migrant flow to Europe. As with the Horn of Africa, this was catalysed by the Syrians and amplified first by the huge population of foreign workers already resident in Libya, including those sub-Saharan Africans who had been drawn to the country for its economic opportunities and who had been resident there for many years. As smugglers' boats began to leave Libya's coastal towns, sub-Saharan Africans were added to swell profits.

**Table 1: Departure countries and numbers of migrants landing on the Italian shores, 2013–2014**

	Libya	Turkey	Greece	Tunisia	Egypt	Algeria	Others
2013	27 233	1 975	1 943	871	9 190	24	1 689
2014	141 293	10 371	1 508	1 215	15 413	155	86

Source: Italian Coastguard

As the market for the Mediterranean route to Europe exploded in Libya, it was paralleled in a quieter way by a similar industry in Egypt, which also targeted Italy as a final destination. The boat routes leaving from Egypt and from Libya are not quite the same. Boats leaving from Egypt take at least a week to get to Italy. It is a longer trip and one that requires more coordination to be successful, and these requirements have had an impact on the development of the smuggling market and networks in Egypt.

### The business model of sub-Saharan migration

The business model of smuggling migrants from the North African coast is one that benefits from significant economies of scale, and therefore one that encourages the mass movement of people. As Syrians first began to depart the Libyan shores, they were using relatively seaworthy vessels procured from local traders and fishermen. These boats had value – anywhere between US\$200 000 and \$300 000 – and represented a source of livelihoods for their owners. Therefore, to launch a boat with a human cargo that risked capture by the Italian Coastguard and still to be profitable, the value of the human cargo had to be sufficiently high. In 2011 and 2012, in the early days of the crisis, the average boat arriving in Italy had a capacity of 300 to 1 000 people – but Syrians were not moving in those numbers at that time. Therefore, to ensure the venture was profitable smugglers swelled the numbers from the pool of local sub-Saharan Africans, offering them reduced rates to make the crossing. Whereas between 2012 and 2013, Syrians reported paying an average of US\$2 000 to launch from Libya, sub-Saharan Africans were paying only US\$800 to US\$1 000 for the same journey. But with this price disparity came very different treatment: Syrians travelled on deck; Africans were often locked in the hold. Syrians often received life jackets; Africans often did not.

Those who own a boat worth several hundred thousand dollars do not interact with migrants on an individual basis. Rather, they liaise with those at the top of a pyramid of sub-Saharan migration networks in Libya, who, in turn, transact with a vast network of recruiters and brokers, whose main role is to bring together groups of 50 to 100 migrants at a time, and to negotiate the conditions of the boat launch. Brokers work along their own ethnic and linguistic lines to recruit from source countries in the main hub towns and points along the route to coastal Libya.

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\$2 000

THE AVERAGE PRICE PAID  
BY SYRIANS TO LAUNCH  
FROM LIBYA

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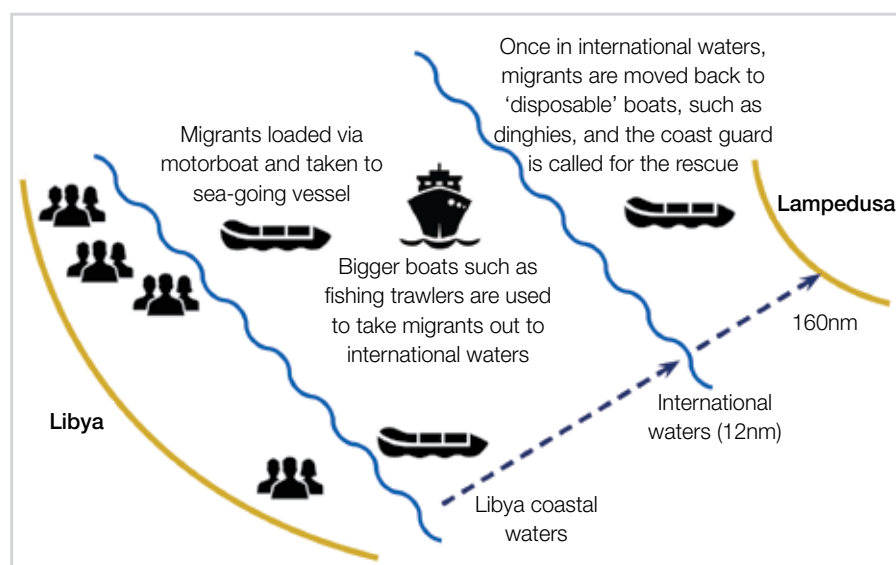
West Africans who come from countries in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)<sup>17</sup> have freedom of movement and the right to enter, work and resettle throughout much of West Africa. In the case of those trying to migrate to Europe via North Africa, ECOWAS citizens are able to travel as far as the northern borders of Niger and Mali, and do so in relative safety using public transport. These migrants have little need of the services of a smuggler. Crossing the Sahara, however, is a different matter. This is a journey of between three and seven days, in brutal, life-threatening conditions that would be impossible to complete without a smuggler who knows the terrain.

The smuggling groups operating along these routes are traditional trans-Saharan nomadic and semi-nomadic groups, which have worked these routes for centuries. Those most involved in human smuggling are the Tebu and the Tuareg, both nomadic minorities whose ethnic kin span several countries of the Sahel, and whose livelihoods have relied on cross-border trafficking and trade in everything from state-subsidised goods, such as oil and foodstuffs, to weapons, cigarettes, drugs and people. Although a lucrative business, facilitating human smuggling was never a primary industry for these groups and the profits were insufficient to prompt the development of genuine transnational crime networks.

Instead, it was an ancillary activity – smugglers moving other commodities along a particular route might add a few migrants to earn extra money. However, Libya’s chaotic political situation and the inability and/or unwillingness of state institutions or militias to secure the vast borders and coastlines of the country, have made it an open doorway to Europe. The Tebu, already actively involved in smuggling Syrians who reached Libya along the East African route, saw the potential for expansion, and began to recruit additional people from among sub-Saharan migrants living and working in Libya, and then recruiting migrants from along the route. Suddenly the migrant trade was booming.

After a shipwreck on 13 October 2013, which caused the death of over 300 migrants in the Mediterranean, the Italian government deployed its navy to Operation Mare Nostrum, a search-and-rescue, and anti-smuggling operation. While an important

**Figure 3: Mediterranean crossing from Libya**



Source: Authors' own infographic.

3 TO 7

THE NUMBER OF DAYS IT TAKES TO CROSS THE SAHARA, IN BRUTAL, LIFE-THREATENING CONDITIONS

and necessary contribution to mitigating the huge humanitarian consequences of the smuggling trade, in its 11 months of operation (from November 2013 to October 2014), Mare Nostrum also had the effect of significantly changing the dynamics of Libyan migration. With the onset of the Italian naval operation, the smugglers, instead of arranging the 160-nautical-mile crossing from Libya to Italy, now shifted their goal – their objective was now to just get the migrant boats 12 nautical miles into international waters (see Figure 3).

For smugglers, both the migrants and the rubber boats they are loaded onto are disposable and their fates inconsequential

This change in strategy had a number of significant effects on the smuggling market. Firstly, it reduced costs to smugglers and the barriers to entry for smuggling. Analysts immediately saw a reduction in the amount of fuel that was being carried on the smuggling boats. Secondly, boats that were rescued increasingly did not have a crew on board. Most importantly, in terms of humanitarian consequences, the boats being put to sea were significantly less seaworthy. Smugglers moved away from using fishing boats and switched to rubber Zodiacs, with less fuel on board. And allowed the boats to go out unmanned. According to the chief prosecutor of Catania, a town in Sicily,

Mare Nostrum had an unexpected effect. The criminal organizations handling the migrant trafficking took advantage from the new opportunities and deliberately enhanced [the] danger of the situation in order to force the Italian Navy to advance toward the African coast, so lowering their costs and consequently the prices required to the migrants.<sup>18</sup>

Migrants who left Libya in early 2014 reported that they were put onto small boats to get off the Libyan shoreline and were then transferred to a larger boat for several hours to get out into international waters. At this point, they would be transferred back to large rubber dinghies and one migrant would be given a satellite phone and a number to call, usually that of the Italian Coastguard. The boats were then pointed in one direction and the smugglers would then return to shore on different vessels. At this stage, from the smugglers' perspective, their job is done. For them, both the migrants and the rubber boats they are loaded onto are disposable and their fates inconsequential.

This reduction in logistical and operational costs removed a significant barrier to entry into the Libyan smuggling market, and with no government control over these criminal activities, the smuggling market began to rapidly proliferate into a free-for-all, open to anyone who could finance a boat and gather migrants. The transition from Mare Nostrum to the EU's naval operation Triton, with its more restricted patrol area, meant smugglers could not depend on unseaworthy vessels being rescued by European ships. But by that time the smuggling market had enjoyed 11 months of unfettered profits and had become significantly more entrenched in the local political economy. With the smuggling genie out of the bottle, a far more violent and ruthless smuggling industry emerged, with migrants bearing the brunt of this emerging lawlessness.

In the post-Mare Nostrum environment, boats depart from Libya regardless of the weather or sea conditions, and the degree of violence used to manage the migrants on land has increased considerably. According to interviews with migrants in Italy and



A FAR MORE VIOLENT AND RUTHLESS SMUGGLING INDUSTRY HAS EMERGED, WITH MIGRANTS BEARING THE BRUNT

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Libya, arms are used not only to 'protect' them in the so-called 'safe houses', but also to force them onto the boats. A large number of the migrants in Italy interviewed in the course of this study said that they were forced to board unsafe boats against their will, and they were sent to sea with no protection whatsoever as their smugglers threatened them with the use of force.

As the smuggling trade mushroomed in Libya, the impact reverberated all along the West African routes, as far back as coastal West African states. The 'back route' to Europe was open, and smugglers activated their networks of facilitators and recruiters to take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity. As the smuggling networks grew richer and more active, the trade regularised and became more professional. Convoys set off from near Agadez, in northern Niger, for Libya every Monday, in tacit coordination with elements of the Nigerien military who are unofficially part of the enterprise. By 2013, more than 100 trucks were departing each week, each carrying between 25 and 35 migrants. The recruitment brokers could secure a place on the convoy only once they had collected enough migrants to fill one truck – until then they would attempt to hold the migrants in ghetto accommodation on the fringes of Agadez.

### As the smuggling trade mushroomed in Libya, the impact reverberated all along the West African routes

Because of this need to negotiate transactions in groups of 20 or more, there was an energetic drive to recruit new migrants. The route northwards to Libya drew migrants from all over West Africa, many of whom already knew someone or had an acquaintance who had made the trip to Europe via Libya. The time it takes a migrant to get from the West African coast to the Libyan shore has subsequently contracted from what once might have taken months or even years of planning, pooling resources and earning income along the route to just a few weeks. The criminal economy forces migrants efficiently along its chain, and the migrant has increasingly little control over his journey: 'You can't cross on foot the borders, so they know you need them and they charge you so much, and they exploit you.' (25-year-old Senegalese builder interviewed in Messina, Italy, June 2015)

Payments to armed groups or local militia in order to have a secure departure point make up a large proportion of the costs incurred by smugglers operating through Libya. Other expenditures include bribes of up to US\$100 at each

land checkpoint while transporting migrants by truck; up to US\$5 000 a month for renting a 'safe house' where migrants are kept under surveillance while they await departure; up to US\$80 000 for a boat that will hold 250 migrants; around US\$4 000 for a rubber dinghy to ferry groups of 20 migrants to a waiting vessel; US\$5 000–7 000 paid to a captain to pilot the larger craft out to international waters; and roughly US\$800 to buy a satellite telephone for migrants to call for rescue in international waters. These costs are easily covered by the revenues generated by charging groups of 200 migrants, with each paying between US\$1 000 and US\$2 000, depending on circumstances.

As the smuggling trade has become more lucrative, it has also become more violent, to the point that even the Niger military are often no longer willing to travel north of Dirkou, a key town along the route from Agadez to southern Libya. The level of security provided by the smuggling groups to convoys leaving Agadez has significantly increased, and there are a growing number of reports of violence between Tuareg and Tebu convoys along the Saharan crossing. In addition, the smugglers have become more callous and inhumane. Nearly all of the migrants interviewed who had taken the Saharan crossing from Agadez spoke in horror at the number of people abandoned by smugglers, and the dead bodies they saw in the desert.

In addition, along the West African route and in Libya, there has been a growth in detainees from migrant holding centres being loaned or 'rented out' as unpaid labour. Forced domestic servitude and sexual exploitation are rife. Said a 19-year-old Nigerian interviewed in Italy in June 2015, showing burns and marks from beatings he had received: 'I didn't have money, so I was captured in Libya by a policeman and taken into prison. I saw many types of torture in Libya against black people. I was beaten and hurt.'

Some unverified reports from Libya describe 'torture camps' that have begun to emerge where militias hold Eritreans and Sudanese for ransom in groups that could be as large as 100 000 people.

### Libya's violence displaces routes

Organisations tracking migration routes through Africa have noticed increased flows through Tunisia and Algeria. In some cases, these are people leaving Libya in the hope of migrating to Europe from Tunisia and Algeria. In others, they are sub-Saharan Africans being rerouted from Agadez or Gao and Kidal, in Mali, by Tuareg smuggling networks who have better access to Algeria than to southern Libya, particularly as the highly networked Tebu are consolidating their control over routes throughout southern Libya and northern Niger. Lastly, there are Syrians flying directly into Tunisia with prearranged

transport onwards to Libya and Europe (this is believed to have significantly diminished with the emergence of the Balkan route, however – see Figure 1).

There is a sense that border control in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco preventing people from going to Europe has been backsliding since 2014, which was considered a ‘good year’ in terms of border control by most experts. That said, basing migration flows on statistics in the short term can be misleading, as it is unclear if flows out of Algeria are actually increasing, or if they are just being reported in greater numbers. In any event, neither country is sounding the alarm, which is an indication that these numbers are not high enough for either Algeria or Tunisia to consider irregular migrant flows to be a big concern domestically.

By contrast, smuggling in Egypt is growing and consolidating as a result of the increasing violence in Libya. The modus operandi of the smuggling networks in Egypt is not the same as in Libya. Leaving from the north coast in Egypt, in general, is perceived to be less risky than departing from Libya because the methodology is so different. As mentioned, in Libya, the goal of smugglers is simply to get migrants out to international waters, where they can be rescued. By contrast, the EU rescue mission does not extend as far as the Egyptian coastline. Hence, the smugglers using departure points from Egypt arrange a long voyage with the ultimate goal of arriving at a planned destination. As a consequence, it is more expensive to launch from Egypt than from Libya, though prices are falling along both these routes owing to the emergence of the Aegean route.

Migrants in the informal economy are forced into the shadows, unprotected by labour laws and incredibly vulnerable to exploitation

The status of refugees and migrants in Egypt remains a highly sensitive issue, in part because the Egyptian government would prefer to maintain the fiction that migrants and refugees are integrated into Egyptian society. Refugees who register with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Egypt are given ID cards that the Egyptian government recognises. In theory, these cards allow refugees to establish residency and access various goods and services. Although refugees registered in Egypt receive aid from organisations like the UNHCR, very few rely on aid as a means of survival. Most families supplement these stipends through some sort of income-generating activity, usually in the informal economy.

On paper, refugees in Egypt have rights to access schools and the formal economy but, in practice, they do not.

Syrian refugees, who tend to be better educated than their counterparts from Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia, are considerably more likely to find employment. They also have better access to healthcare and education in Egypt than their African counterparts. Yet even for skilled migrants, including those who speak Arabic and English, a mix of factors, including discrimination against certain ethnicities and nationalities, and cultural factors, such as attitudes towards women in the workplace, or beliefs that certain jobs are only appropriate for people of certain nationalities, conspire against them:

I worked for nearly 12 hours a day as a secretary in a medical centre with a wage of 1 000 EGP [US\$127], while they assigned me more work to do that is not relevant to my job. One of the employees asked his colleague if I am Syrian, then he asked me for marriage but I refused. When I was leaving the office and while passing in front of the guy who proposed, he said in a loud voice, ‘You shouldn’t act like this, lady, you are sold for only 500 EGP [US\$63.86] here in Egypt.’

– 24-year-old female student from Syria, interviewed in Cairo, August 2015

As a result, those migrants who are in the informal economy are forced into the shadows, unprotected by labour laws and incredibly vulnerable to exploitation. Experts have described the Egyptian government’s policies, on paper, as ‘pretty good’, with one going so far as to characterise them as ‘by far the best in the region’.<sup>19</sup> Yet in practice the status of a refugee or migrant in Egypt is one of extreme vulnerability, in large part due to Egypt’s political transitions over the last five years. The Egyptian government is hesitant to endorse programmes that specifically aid refugee and migrant populations for fear of upsetting Egyptian citizens many of whom themselves struggle to access basic goods and services. Several analysts, from a range of nationalities and professional backgrounds, have suggested that this ‘policy of not implementing policy’ is intentional, with the Egyptian government hoping that if refugees fail to attain decent livelihoods it will be an incentive for them to leave.

Internationally, few governments are willing to exert any pressure on the Egyptian government to improve its refugee/migrant policies, as most Western countries view Egypt as a vital security partner in the increasingly volatile Middle East and few want to jeopardise what is perceived as a productive security partnership over the second, possibly even third-tier issue of refugee policy, since Egypt is a transit country for a relatively small proportion of the total number of migrants moving towards Europe.

In terms of smuggling, in Egypt the model is to put people into small fishing boats that can take between 50 and 80, depending on the size of the boat. One analyst who has interviewed brokers and recruiters who work on behalf of smugglers reported that smugglers are trying to control the amount of migrants placed on fishing boats because it is the riskiest step in the process. It takes a long time to load migrants onto the boats, so the risk of being interrupted and seized by the Egyptian Coastguard is greatest at this point. The same analyst suggested, based on local sources and arrest figures, that fishing boats rarely sail with more than 45 to 50 people.

In 2014, according to one local analyst, smugglers would arrange six trips at the same time, from six locations along the coast. Members of the same family were in different boats and left from different cities, which indicates either that the same networks are operating out of several different cities, or that at this time, the nature of the relationship between smugglers is one of collaboration rather than competition.

## Smuggling in Egypt remains segregated along nationalistic lines, and people of sub-Saharan African origin are rarely afforded the same privileges as Syrians

According to local analysts and observers in Egypt, there are no strict set routes or itineraries at this time. Migrants who successfully made the trip to Europe via Egypt confirm that fishing boats are taken three or four kilometres out to sea, where they link up with a bigger ship. In general, three to four fishing boats are consolidated into a bigger vessel. In some cases, there may be yet another step, in which several boats are consolidated into yet another vessel once they reach international waters. From there, the 'mother ship' will travel for several days until it gets close to the territorial waters of Italy or Greece, at which point the migrants are transferred to dinghies and rafts (or in some cases they are thrown overboard and left to rely on their life vests) while smugglers or a designated migrant launches a flare or sends an SOS for local coastguards to find them. Before Italy's Mare Nostrum mission was wound down and replaced by the more restricted EU-led naval mission, Triton, in the Mediterranean, it was not uncommon for smugglers to abandon the large ship altogether and return home on a smaller vessel.

In 2013 the going rate for a Syrian to buy a place on a boat leaving from Egypt's north coast was believed to be between US\$3 000 and US\$4 000. In 2014 an increase in supply over demand is believed to have pushed that price down to an average of US\$2 500 to US\$3 500. In 2015 further increase in supply, combined with external factors, have pushed prices down to as little as US\$2 000. At the time of writing, discounts were being offered not only because the Mediterranean crossing has to compete with the Aegean route, but also because the sea-crossing season ended in mid-October. Fishermen are paid as much as US\$30 000 per trip, which, as one observer noted, 'is enough to give up fishing altogether'.

Smuggling in Egypt remains very much segregated along nationalistic lines, and people of sub-Saharan African nationality are rarely afforded the same privileges as the Syrians. Sudanese departing from Egypt pay more than Syrians because their networks leaving the north coast are less developed and they do not have the option of the Aegean route as a negotiating tool (Syrians can travel to Turkey without a visa;

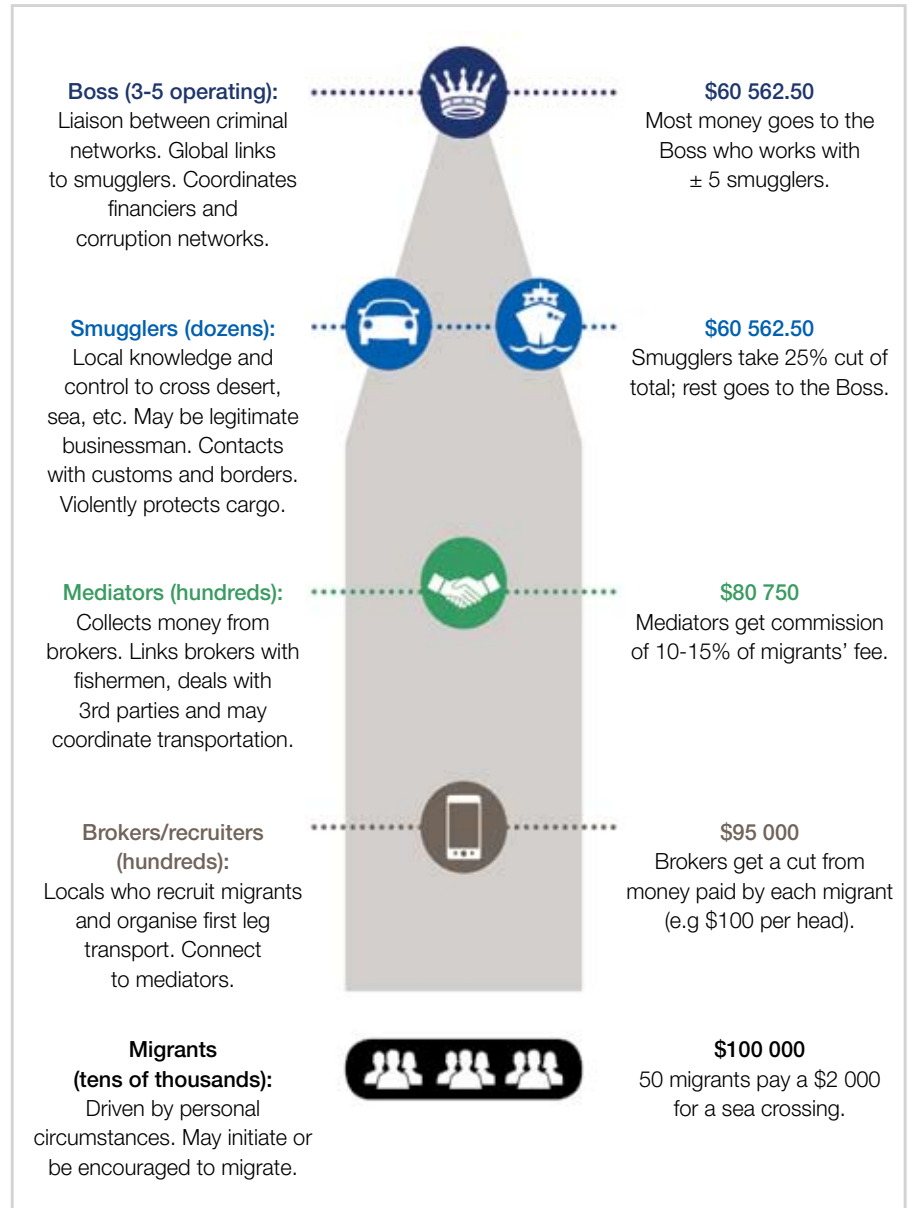
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\$2 000

THE GOING RATE IN 2015  
FOR A SYRIAN TO BUY  
A PLACE ON A BOAT  
LEAVING FROM EGYPT'S  
NORTH COAST

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Figure 4: The business model of smuggling through Egypt



Source: Authors' own infographic.



SMUGGLERS ARE STARTING TO SCHEDULE TRIPS SEASONALLY AND ACCORDING TO WEATHER FORECASTS

the Sudanese cannot). Somalis and Eritreans are reportedly paying even higher rates because, unlike the Sudanese, they cannot stay in Egypt and many of them have left from a regional refugee camp. Their options are very limited and, on average, they have neither the bargaining power nor the ability to pool resources in the same way that their Syrian and Sudanese counterparts do. These same dynamics are what make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation, especially in Libya, where any semblance of rule of law has completely dissipated.

As Figure 4 shows, the profits to be made from smuggling by boat in Egypt are considerable, particularly for those at the top of the criminal-economy chain and, as a consequence, there are a number of indications that the smuggling industry is professionalising and increasingly assuming the characteristics of an organised-crime industry. Firstly, smugglers are starting to schedule trips seasonally and according to



weather forecasts. During winter, smugglers might take money from migrants and tip off their departure location to security forces. Sudanese and Eritreans, who rarely have the kinds of networks and influence to pay in instalments or through escrow systems, are particularly susceptible to this scheme. The smuggler gets to pocket the money, and the security forces get to claim success in the phoney war against smuggling networks. One local organisation noticed that the authorities tend to catch one boat on the same night that several others leave at the same time, suggesting that smugglers are willing to sacrifice one boat to the authorities to ensure that the others successfully reach international waters.

Further evidence of the levels of professionalism and organisation within the smuggling trade in Egypt can be seen in the fact that names are beginning to surface of those who control the smuggling trade. One of the biggest smugglers in Egypt goes by the alias 'the Doctor'. His alias was used in interviews with smugglers, migrants and law-enforcement authorities in Egypt, and migrants in Europe who said they had been smuggled through his network. He is believed to have the connections to move migrants past established checkpoints and to coordinate with contacts within the Egyptian security apparatus. Most people believe he is an Egyptian national with connections in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan; others suggested that 'the Doctor' is a composite moniker affixed to one powerful network.

Others believed to be at the head of the smuggling rings in Egypt go by similar names. 'The General', for example, is rumoured to be a former general in the Egyptian military with considerable connections in Sudan and Libya. Meanwhile, another such character, 'the Captain', is rumoured to move migrants via the inner workings of his large shipping companies. It may very well be that these are mere caricatures that provide a convenient and cogent representation of what are very complex, impenetrable networks. Nevertheless, the types of people described, and the types of contacts they have are consistent with the typologies that experts, analysts and local activists all described both in Egypt and outside. With professional criminal networks of this kind, complex protection economies are required to protect the trade, and these have serious implications for the security and integrity of the state.

## The rise of the Aegean route to Europe

In 2014 the majority of people leaving from the north coast of Egypt to cross the Mediterranean were Syrian. By 2015 the majority of those leaving Egypt's north coast were Sudanese and a mix of other, sub-Saharan African nationalities. This is

reflected in the make-up of nationalities of those who are in detention on the north coast and caught trying to depart by boat. It is also an indication that Syrians are taking different routes, and further evidence that the route through the Balkans, via Turkey and Greece, is the preferred route these days for anyone who can afford it.

Human-smuggling routes through Turkey are not a new phenomenon. For decades, counter-traffickers have been aware of Turkey's central role in the movement of people from Asia and Africa to Europe. Many of the routes used today have been well-travelled over recent decades and have been used not only by smugglers of humans, but also by smugglers of various types of illicit substances.<sup>20</sup> But with more than two million refugees registered in Turkey,<sup>21</sup> the pool of migrants to swell this flow has been considerable. Furthermore, 2015 has seen, in equally large numbers to the Syrians, the arrival of Afghans and Pakistanis, travelling overland through Iran to Turkey, where they converged with the Syrian flow, to create an unprecedented surge along this route.<sup>22</sup> Whereas between 2008 and 2014, the numbers of people recorded along what Frontex refers to as the 'eastern Mediterranean route' hovered in the region of 50 000 a year, in the first nine months of 2015 alone, these figures skyrocketed, with almost 360 000 recorded between January and September.<sup>23</sup>

The route through the Balkans, via Turkey and Greece, is the preferred route for those who can afford it

This route includes a short sea crossing from Turkey to Greece, and then a long trek overland through Bulgaria, Macedonia, Hungary and other eastern European countries to western Europe. Although the Aegean crossing is a relatively easy journey compared to the Mediterranean route, taking at most a few hours from coast to coast, the land portion of the journey is long and very demanding, factors that previously served as a deterrent to many migrants considering this route:

I was working in Greece, but not regularly and without papers. In the last months, with the economic crisis getting deeper, I am planning to leave the country. I am trying to get a fake ID in order to leave by airport. I will not go by sea or by the land path through Macedonia and Hungary, because if they take my fingerprints in Italy or Hungary I will not be able to apply in any other country.

– 31-year-old Syrian schoolteacher, interviewed in Greece, August 2015

In 2013 and 2014, eastern European countries were strict in their adherence to the Dublin Regulation,<sup>24</sup> and would register all migrants found crossing their borders. Their low acceptance rate for asylum seekers and harsh detention policies were off-putting and risky for the Syrian migrants, who, as previously noted, were looking for a place to settle and re-establish, and not just seeking temporary protection. This route was used, but not on the scale that would be seen between 21 August and 21 October 2015, when Germany was not enforcing the Dublin Regulation for all Syrians, regardless of whether they had registered elsewhere before. Not only did the August announcement by Germany's chancellor reduce the risk of transiting by land across eastern Europe, but it also served to lure asylum seekers, refugees and migrants of all nationalities to flock to Germany's borders.

### Smugglers' cove: Izmir and Bodrum

Two Turkish towns, Izmir and Bodrum, which are close to a group of Greek islands in the Aegean, have become the key assembling points for migrants destined for the Greek islands of Lesbos and Kos. Given the ease of the sea crossing, Turkey's smuggling market is relatively uncontrolled, and in the key launch towns, dynamic local industries have sprung up selling life vests and other supplies for migrants. Notwithstanding, some interviews suggested that there are a number of high-level operators present on the scene, who are making significant profits. A nascent typology of operators in the Turkish market is beginning to develop, which is not dissimilar to that found in Egypt:

- The collectors: These are the front men of the operation and tend to be based in key migrant centres, like Bodrum and Izmir, and often further afield in Istanbul. They are often migrants themselves and speak the language of their 'customers'. These people identify migrants or are approached by them through word of mouth or social media. Sometimes they recruit 'spotters' to identify new customers for them. Migrants will communicate directly with these individuals and often pay the full fee to them. Collectors liaise with Turkish smugglers and pay them out of the money they receive from the migrants.
- Insurance offices or third-party guarantors: Sometimes the money is paid through a third party, who holds the money until a migrant successfully makes the journey across to Greece. The third party will give the migrant a code, which he or she can use at any point to reclaim the full amount. If the migrant is not heard from for an agreed number of days (usually due to successful transit or as a result of drowning), the money is released to the smuggler minus an agreed cut

taken by the third party. Some of these third-party guarantors have gone so far as to provide paperwork that has all the trappings of a legitimate business, complete with bar codes and QR codes.

- High-level Turkish smugglers: These individuals are unlikely to be implicated in the smuggling operation, as they maintain their distance from operations. They tend to have strong, financially beneficial links with local law enforcement (some say with politicians too) and therefore their operations are allowed to continue unabated. According to several studies in the last few years, some of the smugglers at this level operate in cooperation with both criminal organisations and/or terrorist groups.<sup>25</sup>
- Mid-level Turkish smugglers: These are the operations men who liaise with the collectors and organise the bulk of the transit, from the bus pickup of migrants from, say, Izmir to a drop-off point at a remote beach. They organise the purchase of boats and motors, as well as their delivery to the remote beaches. They liaise with their low-level smugglers on the beaches and with the high-level smugglers.
- Low-level Turkish smugglers: These are the men on the beaches who receive the boats, equip them with motors and manage the migrants onto the boats, often through a local translator. This process involves ensuring the boats have adequate weight distribution so they do not capsize. These smugglers reportedly earn a fixed rate per head, so it is in their interest to get as many people onboard each vessel as possible, which often leads to heated disputes with migrants who were promised by the collector that a smaller number would be on the vessels. Recent interviews carried out with migrants in Greece confirm that low-level Turkish smugglers at the coast are almost always armed, and often coerce migrants into compliance with the threat of violence.
- Other actors: Local communities in the Turkish coastal towns have become very heavily invested in the smuggling industry. Almost every shop now sells life jackets, and restaurants and hotels offer meals and accommodation to migrants before their departure. Some interviewees mentioned the presence of tractor drivers, who tow vessels to the beaches, as well as spotters positioned at vantage points, who look out for the Turkish Coastguard at sea or security authorities on land. There are likely to be other actors operating in various cities along the smuggling route; indeed, some migrants were referred to collectors in their home countries.

Prices for the Turkey–Greece Aegean crossing range from US\$900 to US\$2 000, though this rate is not fixed, and depends on the number of people who are crammed onto the

rubber dinghies, which are by far the most commonly used type of vessel for human smuggling from Turkey to Greece. Dinghies are also readily for sale in the coastal towns, prompting some migrants to attempt to make the crossing on their own without a smuggler. Migrants are instructed to slash the boats upon arriving in Greece, or if they are approached by the Greek Coastguard, to prevent them being towed back to Turkey. They are told to leave the engines intact on the beach, however, as associates in Greece will collect them and return them to Turkey for further use.

According to research undertaken by our associates in Turkey, the Turkey–Greece crossing is only highly lucrative if conducted with large numbers of migrants. Carrying 50 people, the average dinghy departing from Turkey would be worth approximately US\$50 000. However, according to a smuggler quoted by *The Washington Post*, each crossing costs US\$40 000, ‘including US\$7,000 for the disposable dinghy and fees to others in the smuggling chain’.<sup>26</sup> Hence, at the height of the summer months, when an average of 100 vessels were crossing every day, the total profit is equivalent to around US\$1 million a day – money that is distributed along the chain of actors explained in the typology above. This has created an injection of resources into these Turkish towns, playing heavily into the local economy, and creating among the local communities a degree of support for and complicity in the trade.

There seems to be little genuine interest on the part of the Turkish authorities to address the smuggling industry

Although Bodrum is much closer to the popular launch points, Izmir is a far bigger city, with a population of 2.8 million compared to Bodrum’s 40 000. This means refugees are less conspicuous and facilities are more plentiful there. In Izmir there is a plethora of hotels that cater exclusively to migrants, with certain establishments that are set up for certain nationalities and even ethnic groups within those nationalities. Some clothing stores have moved their inventory to the basement, opting to sell only a lucrative range of life vests. Certain travel agencies, which also double as money-transfer houses, have taken on the role of third-party guarantors where migrants can pay their smugglers through escrow schemes. All of these services are readily and openly available in the heart of Izmir.

Following images, shown worldwide, of the body of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, washed up on a beach near Bodrum, authorities made a number of arrests on purported human smugglers, but there seems to be little genuine interest on the part of the Turkish authorities to address the smuggling industry.<sup>27</sup> The brief crackdown in Bodrum drove some smugglers and migrants to Izmir, where smugglers continue to operate in the full knowledge – and sometimes under the plain sight – of local authorities.

Once a migrant has made the necessary arrangements with a smuggler in Izmir, he or she is usually transported to an undisclosed location with other migrants, under the supervision of armed guards. As such, migrants rarely have any say, let alone any knowledge, of where exactly they are going once they have left Izmir. Many of the migrants arriving in Greece therefore have no idea exactly where they are once they have arrived.

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\$900  
to  
\$2 000

THE PRICE FOR THE TURKEY–  
GREECE AEGEAN CROSSING

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## The Balkan route: the gateway to Germany

Having landed on the shores of Greece, refugees must register on the island where they arrive. This process was initially relatively swift, but as the volume of people landing has risen to thousands and tens of thousands a day, is now rising to several days or more. In the interim, those that have landed are left to sleep on the streets, with very little in terms of support, the capacity of the local authorities, aid workers and volunteers long-since overwhelmed.

Syrians can register for a six-month transit permit that allows them to move on without a formal registration for asylum, thereby allowing them to avoid the Dublin Regulation. Non-Syrians, mainly those arriving from Iraq and Afghanistan, are given a one-month permit. This preferential treatment given to Syrians has often caused animosity among migrants at registration centres. Those from other countries resent the fact the system tends to privilege Syrians, while Syrians, who consider themselves 'real' refugees, bemoan the presence of other nationalities, whom they accuse of clogging up the woefully understaffed and under-resourced registration centres. Once they are registered, nearly all the refugees move on from the islands towards Athens using a combination of government provided transport, public transport or private assistance. For migrants of all nationalities, Athens is the launching point for the final leg of their journeys within the Schengen zone to their preferred final destination in Europe.

Germany became the target destination not only for migrants who wanted to settle there, but also for those who want to go to other countries in Europe

Of the 30 interviews conducted with Syrian migrants in Greece in the course of this study, only one, a 28-year-old Christian soldier from Syria, had chosen to register in Greece, and even he said: 'I tried to leave Greece for Sweden with smuggler, but was repeatedly cheated. So I decided to register for asylum here, so that I could get travel documents and travel legally to Sweden.' All the others in Greece were looking to move as soon as they could gather the resources and coordinate their travel to other destinations, most citing Germany or Sweden as their preferred destinations. Others also mentioned the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium and Denmark.

As previously mentioned, migrants choose their country of preference on the basis of several factors, which may include perceived treatment of migrants in certain countries, existing diasporas in a certain country, or the fact they have family or friends in a given country. With Germany's decision to suspend the Dublin Regulation, however, Germany became the target destination not only for migrants who wanted to settle there, but also for those who ultimately want to go to other countries in western Europe, namely Sweden. With the common European policy in place, a successful application in Germany would give that person the right to live and work in any EU member country.

A 26-year-old Syrian filmmaker, interviewed in Germany in September 2015, speaks of his journey from Greece to Germany:



SYRIANS CAN REGISTER FOR A SIX-MONTH TRANSIT PERMIT THAT ALLOWS THEM TO MOVE ON WITHOUT A FORMAL REGISTRATION FOR ASYLUM

I walked from Greece to Macedonia with the group. Everyone thought the idea of almost walking to Germany, was absurd. It took 11 days. We followed the train tracks. We got attacked by Afghans, Pakistanis and Algerians on the road. They are shit. We knew about them, so we were prepared, thanks to Facebook. We hid our money in secret pockets in our clothes and carried knives for self-defence. The hardest part was the walk. Knowing that these armed men can come out and cut you any minute – it is terrifying. When we reached Kosovo, an armed group of men appeared and forced us to pay 200 euros each for a ride to Serbia. We got caught on the border. The driver ran, but the police let us all carry on. We stayed in Belgrade, the capital, for the night. Some received money from families back home. We took a bus to Kanjiza [a Serbian town] and then we took the bus to Hungary ... to Budapest for 200 euros. We knew from Facebook that there were smugglers in Turkish restaurants in Hungary. So we went there and met one, who agreed to take us to Germany for 600 euros. He abandoned us halfway and so we borrowed bicycles [pauses to laugh] and cycled the rest of the way.

Greece's unofficial policy at the moment is to facilitate the flow of migrants to the Macedonian border. Once migrants cross the border, they are typically put onto buses provided by government and taken directly to the border with Serbia. Once in Serbia, the migrants move quickly to the Hungarian border. Even after Hungary closed its border, those migrants who managed to enter were ushered to the Austrian border in buses and trains provided by the Hungarian government. Austria, in turn, facilitated the flow of migrants into Germany.

When taking this route to western Europe, migrants have to pass through the Balkan Peninsula, a mountainous region that lies along the borders of the traditional Austrian, Russian and Ottoman empires. This is a region rich in history, conflict and steeped in cross-border crime, where local communities are used to smuggling whatever is in demand – weapons, drugs, women or refugees – and they can adapt with alacrity. The politics and economies of these countries are still fragile and contested, and there has been great unwillingness by these new EU accession states to see their hard-won gains undone by the refugee movement.

The approach of many of these front-line eastern European states has been to take the Dublin Regulation seriously and, consequently, the policing of their borders has been harsh. Many of the refugees who have taken the Balkan route have reported being turned back many times, and being beaten or verbally abused by the border guards.

The unofficial policy of 'we don't want you and you don't want to be here', which at times has led to governments facilitating the flow of migrants through their territories, however, has broken down. Hungary has actively sought to close its border, and Croatia and Slovenia, overwhelmed and no longer willing to bear the responsibilities of being 'transit countries' are quickly considering more restrictive measures. Hungary has since built a wall and closed its border with Serbia, which as of the time of writing this report, means that migrants now divert their route into Croatia, from where they can also cross into Hungary (and the Hungarian government still quietly facilitates their onward movement to Austria). Or they continue into Slovenia, from where they cross into Austria.

### The Syrian super-highway of refugees presents opportunities for extraordinary profits, and is more lucrative than other criminal activities

A large number of actors are facilitating smuggling in Eastern Europe. They range from concerned ordinary citizens who offer migrants a 'ride' out of a sense of duty, to sophisticated, violent organised-crime groups, which are plentiful and ethnically diverse. As with elsewhere, the Syrian super-highway of refugees presents opportunities here for extraordinary profits, and at current levels it is more lucrative than other criminal activities. It has therefore attracted a panoply of criminal elements, with demand now so high that it is overloading even the established smuggling groups' logistical capacity. Criminal organisations are recruiting additional drivers and facilitators, using people who may not be "capable" or "reliable" criminals, which can translate to greater risk to migrants. The discovery of 70 dead migrants in a refrigerated meat truck in Austria in August 2015 was one indication that "non-professionals" were involved in what was an organized criminal enterprise, and there have been subsequent rescues of migrants in similar conditions, which may suggest a degree of amateurism is at work.

The smuggling market is highly responsive to the changing policies of the European states. Prices and routes change noticeably when announcements are made of new security measures, or when new resettlement policies are agreed in Europe. The smugglers do not hesitate to turn this to their advantage. Wil van Gemert, Europol's deputy director of operations, observed that closing borders 'opens up new opportunities for criminals to benefit from smuggling', as migrants are then more likely to hire a smuggler, and the

smugglers can charge higher prices.<sup>28</sup> When, in September 2015, the Hungarian government provided free buses for the massive wave of migrants that began to move in response to German Chancellor Merkel's announcement that the country would no longer enforce the Dublin Regulation for Syrians, the smuggling trade on the Austrian border almost completely disappeared. Once the state convoys stopped, the smuggling started up again.

As long as the war in Syria continues, the rate of migration is unlikely to slow, particularly along the Aegean–Balkan route

As long as the war in Syria continues, the rate of migration is unlikely to slow, particularly along the Aegean–Balkan route, as it is far less dependent on weather conditions than the harsher Mediterranean route. And as long as the Syrian super-highway continues, it will draw with it a range of other populations eager to migrate, including from west and central Asia, from Syria's neighbouring states in the Middle East, and even from among states contiguous to Europe. Even once the Syrian migratory flow begins to die down, as nascent evidence in the Sahara has shown, the protracted nature of the crisis will have created a possibly irrevocable change in the nature and dynamism of the criminal economies in these transit states.

### Impact of the Aegean route on Mediterranean smuggling

The impact of the emergence and codification of the Aegean route on the Mediterranean route cannot be overstated, and the implications for African governments and policymakers are profound. Though fewer and fewer Syrians are passing through North Africa in the hope of reaching Europe, the smuggling networks that developed during earlier stages of the crisis remain entrenched in the political economies of Egypt and Libya. They will seek continued profits through active recruitment of prospective migrants, or they may diversify their activities, putting them in direct competition with state institutions or other networks that specialise in those activities.

Similarly, because the demographics of those crossing from Libya have changed, so too might the behaviour of these networks in the future. Despite the fact that Syrians are no longer travelling through Libya, the rate of launches from the North African coast headed for Italy has not diminished significantly. This is because the route continues to be popular with sub-Saharan Africans keen to exploit this opportunity before it closes. Experts have estimated that the smuggling market in Libya alone could have been worth as much as US\$325 million in 2014,<sup>29</sup> making it an industry that the smugglers are keen to sustain. However, as the paper mentioned earlier, migrants from countries such as Eritrea and Somalia are generally not able to pool and leverage resources in the same way that Syrians were, meaning they are more susceptible to exploitation.

As is the case in Europe, where long-established transnational organised crime networks have moved in on the human-smuggling business as demand for their specialised skills increases, the same dynamic is emerging in West Africa. Recent research conducted in the region suggests that with the current profits to be had, ad hoc facilitators have transformed into professional, transnational organised-criminal networks that have embedded themselves into state structures in an unprecedented

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\$325 MILLION

THE ESTIMATED VALUE OF  
THE SMUGGLING MARKET IN  
LIBYA ALONE IN 2014

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way, with hitherto unseen levels of coordination between groups in coastal West African states closely collaborating with groups in the Sahel and North Africa. Human smuggling may just be the activity that paves the way for genuine, transnational crime to emerge in West Africa.

To sustain the artificially inflated level of demand, the smuggling groups are actively recruiting both along the main routes and in the source countries across the sub-Saharan region. An interview with a humanitarian worker based in Mali revealed that a Tuareg family had bought a bus line from Burkina Faso, allowing them greater control over the migrant supply chain. Furthermore, while the process of smuggling has become more efficient, there is evidence that the price is falling, both for the trans-Saharan crossing, as well as for the boat trip. The Italian authorities and humanitarian workers are reporting a greater number of people being coerced onto boats, or victims of human trafficking, including women from West African coastal states, such as Nigeria and Ghana, being brought over to Europe for sex work. Therefore, local governments and regional bodies will have to provide support to these vulnerable groups.

As the networks in Libya become more developed and the militia groups who control them translate their wealth into political power, the more likely they are to confound international efforts to broker a peace agreement in Libya. At best, they will demand a seat at the table; at worst, they will act as spoilers within the delicate ongoing processes of state formation. In many cases, the quest for continued profits gives these groups every incentive to actively block peace deals, or play the role of spoilers early on in post-peace-process negotiations. For example, Tebu militia leader Barka Wardougou, who is said to be involved in human smuggling and gold smuggling, serves as head of the Murzuq Military Council and is the leader of at least two Murzuq-based militias, including Libya Shield, has proven a controversial figure in negotiations around the future of the Libyan central state. Apparently, Wardougou barter his support for the Libyan national army in return for rights to control Ubari, a small town in southern Libya, on the main route between Agadez and Sebha, over which the Tebu and Tuareg have been increasingly coming into conflict.<sup>30</sup>

## Human smuggling may just be the activity that paves the way for genuine, transnational crime to emerge in West Africa

There has been some backlash from communities in Libya, who are appalled by the humanitarian consequences of the human-smuggling trade. Social protests have been organised in Zuwarah, the Libyan port town that has become the hub for smuggling, and reports of vigilante groups hoping to interrupt smuggling groups have begun to surface. Those ethnic groups working further back in the chain will have similar potential – despite the signing of the Algiers Accords for Northern Mali in May 2015, the separatist Tuareg group remains fragmented, with ongoing attacks against international peacekeeping forces and domestic targets. The funds gained from smuggling migrants have translated into military strength and the opportunity to corrupt local governors for the right to continue operations. The extent to which the trade enriches local economies makes it a great challenge to combat effectively.

In East Africa and the Horn of Africa, smuggling groups are linked to violent groups seeking to destabilise states and threaten communities. In doing so, they create



IN EAST AFRICA AND THE HORN OF AFRICA, SMUGGLING GROUPS ARE LINKED TO VIOLENT GROUPS SEEKING TO DESTABILISE STATES AND THREATEN COMMUNITIES

contexts in which demand for their services thrives. Smuggling networks are quick to identify new areas of insecurity, and prey on the vulnerable displaced populations with false promises of new lives and bright futures.

## The future in western Europe

While Europe works to prevent and deter more migrants from coming, how it chooses to absorb and address the 800 000 or more people who have illegally crossed its borders will have important implications for the security of the continent. Without a managed reception policy, many migrants find themselves waiting months or years while their asylum claims are processed. In the meantime, they sustain themselves by begging or working in the informal shadow economy.

Large numbers of undocumented immigrants will undercut attempts to regulate labour-market conditions and protect workers. This may contribute to tension between migrant and domestic populations, and may create low-income urban neighbourhoods or marginalised underclasses of society, which may create an environment for conflict, violence, crime or even terrorism.

Furthermore, the perceived rejection of migrants and the criminalisation of migration do little to enhance socio-economic goals in those regions in the destination countries where migrants choose to reside. Sweden, which was the first country in Europe to attract significant numbers of migrants in the earlier phases of this crisis, has struggled with a number of these challenges. Sweden has witnessed a growing number of attacks by domestic groups on refugee facilities and symbols of Islam, and friction between migrant populations, including aggression towards minority migrant groups. For its part, Germany has seen a surge in the popularity of far-right movements.

Many migrants find themselves waiting months or years while their asylum claims are processed

In almost all cases, migration to Europe is a dignity-seeking journey, born out of the aspirations of people whose lives have been marred by conflict, repression, poverty and perceived inequality. Failure to recognise their aspirations, their possible traumas, and their rights, or to protect them will place a far higher burden on Europe in the long term. Supporting their human rights with dignity and providing opportunities for them to integrate, build skills and make a positive contribution to society would be optimal, both for the migrants and for the long-term future of Europe. As a 20-year-old female student from Syria, interviewed in Germany in September 2015, puts it:

I plan to stay here. I have gone through so much to get here in the first place. Why would I leave? I want to study the language and get any job just to support myself and pay off my debts. I don't think anyone that has made it to Europe will go back to Syria or any Arab state. It would be stupid. I don't know the exact legal details of rights here, but we know that this is the land of freedom. We know the police can't harass you, for example. This is good enough on its own.

## Consequences for policy responses to the migrant crisis

The analysis presented above has articulated that the dialogue around the migration crisis conflates different streams of migrants, facilitators, routes and local dynamics into an inaccurate narrative. The crisis at hand requires policymakers and practitioners

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>800 000

THE NUMBER OF  
PEOPLE WHO HAVE  
ILLEGALLY CROSSED  
EUROPE'S BORDERS

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to pursue policies specific to individual components of the problem they are trying to solve. The current migration crisis, with its high death toll and protection costs, cannot be allowed to continue, for it fails to offer a safe or legitimate development opportunity for either the migrants involved or their host countries.

Although the proactive and unscrupulous nature of the migrant-smuggling trade has unquestionably played a part in amplifying the problem, and although smuggling networks are responsible for some of the most devastating humanitarian outcomes, they are not the cause. Similarly, erecting barriers and demonising smugglers is an expensive distraction. Smugglers are responding to a prevailing need, aspirational migration, which is fundamentally a development challenge and, accordingly, one that requires development solutions. The question, however, is whether a new combination of factors have taken us into a new age of migration where the old categories, definitions and responses are no longer as relevant as they were. If we have in fact entered new territory, it is worth asking what the implications will be because old policy responses will no longer suffice.

The pool of refugees in countries neighbouring Syria is in excess of four million. Ongoing instability in west and central Asia, in West Africa and central Africa, and across the Sahel and Maghreb will create a ready clientele for the lucrative and aggressive smuggling markets. Until the conflicts in Syria and Libya are concluded, it is hard to see how there can be any hope of significantly stemming the flow of refugees or addressing the smuggling groups that thrive in areas of low state reach and instability. Clearly, greater efforts will be needed to address these ongoing conflicts through diplomatic solutions, and the international community could consider stronger leverage against those states with longstanding rule of law and human rights concerns that feature prominently in this migration crisis.

But even when this particular migration crisis has subsided, we have every reason to believe that migration is a trend that is on the rise. Even in the best-case scenario, where transformation outpaces the various economic, social and political crises that prompted these flows, and even if the countries concerned are able to build capacity and reform at a rate that can counter some of the systemic economic, demographic and climatic challenges, all evidence from other regions and from 'migration theory' still indicates that migration will continue to increase.

Migration experts have emphasised the need for safe, legal channels to address the legitimate protection needs of the

Syrian people and other nationalities whose stability, human rights or political freedoms are considered seriously at risk. For those nationalities for which granting asylum is a less obvious decision, providing the opportunity to have claims for asylum verified closer to home would immediately reduce demand for smuggling services, though it would not eradicate them altogether. As EU policy on asylum and migration currently stands, these applications can only be made once the applicant has landed on EU soil – which means that the vast majority of applicants must first enter the EU illegally, thereby creating a demand for smugglers.

Even when this particular migration crisis has subsided, we have every reason to believe that migration is a trend that is on the rise

Making sense of the shifting policies of the EU, let alone the incoherent and often contradictory policies pursued unilaterally by individual EU member states, is beyond the scope of this study. But there are several conclusions that we can reach based on interviews with migrants, personal observations by the researchers and authors who contributed to this study, and expertise and experience drawn from the study of migrant movements and transnational crime groups in other contexts.

The first is that due to modern communication technology and the proliferation of social media there is near constant communication among migrants at source and in transit, with common messaging boards and apps providing the average price along key legs of the journey. Syrian migrants feed back about the service they receive and the conditions that they encounter. Migrants of all nationalities are aware of policy changes within minutes of their being announced or implemented. News of a border closure or opening instantly spreads throughout migrant communities. Decisions made by local authorities, and often implemented without consulting the national authorities, are brought to light not by local reporting or government press releases, but by migrants on social media:

I was following Facebook pages which were created by Syrians to give advice for a safer journey to Europe and I contacted many people who were posting about their experience in crossing to Europe. So I knew that right now the only way to reach Europe is to cross by boat.

– 28-year-old Syrian teacher of English literature, interviewed in Greece, August 2015

Secondly, there is a serious and sustained disconnect between official government policies and what is playing out in reality. These ad hoc decisions, understandably made in the name of crisis management, and often made by local governments without consulting, or in active defiance of national governments, mean that migrants often have no idea where they can and cannot go. For example, in the course of researching this study, one of the authors of this paper tried to cross a border legally using an American passport, and was blocked at one Balkan border because it was officially 'closed'. Only a few kilometres from this official border crossing, plain-clothed migration officials were ushering hundreds of migrants across the same, officially closed border. These sorts of contradictory implementation of policies notwithstanding, the smuggling market also feeds off misinformation, discrepancies and lack of clarity, and these ambiguities provide them much space to peddle their services and aggressively attempt to corrupt front-line officials in an effort to maintain an open door. Those migrants who are from communities that do not have the same level of collective social-media savvy as the Syrians must rely on their smugglers to provide information.

### There is a serious disconnect between official government policies and what is playing out in reality

Thirdly, it has become increasingly clear that migration cannot be managed effectively by unilateral action: too many countries simultaneously serve as origin, transit and destination for various mobile populations. The strong cross-border connections between societies created by transnationalism mean that migration policies are likely to produce an impact outside of the domestic sphere for which they are universally intended. The challenge therefore will be for policymakers to look beyond domestic priorities and national borders in analysing the scope, purpose and impact of their policies. Instead, it is imperative that there is a move towards the formulation and implementation of appropriate collective strategic responses. Furthermore, the success or failure of those policies will be determined, to varying extents, by realities that lie beyond the borders of a single country. Cooperation between the governments of sending, transit and destination countries is also crucial because strict immigration policies in developed countries can fuel markets for trafficking and smuggling, and exacerbate irregular and illicit migration.

The implications of these conclusions weigh most heavily on the dominant strategies applied thus far to combat illicit migration: border control and deportation. Large sums of money are spent annually by European countries on erecting physical barriers, patrolling borders and supporting detentions in transit states to Europe. The EU dedicates several millions of dollars to such activities. For example, between 2007 and 2013, the EU spent €1.64 billion on border surveillance; the EU border surveillance agency, Frontex, costs just short of €100 million a year to maintain; and its sister agency, Eurosur, which provides coordination and surveillance, costs a further €35 million a year. This does not include a number of individual projects that have been committed to various countries in Africa targeting migration or border security issues from a range of EU funding instruments, including through the European Development Funds (EDF). For example, in the period 2004–2013, the European Commission committed more than €1 billion to more than 400 migration-related projects, with

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€1.64 BILLION

THE AMOUNT SPENT BY THE  
EU BETWEEN 2007 AND 2013  
ON BORDER SURVEILLANCE

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southern Mediterranean and sub-Saharan African countries as the leading beneficiaries of this funding.

These numbers pale in comparison with the costs spent by the EU and its member countries on deportation. The EU European Return Fund was valued at €635 million between 2007 and 2013.<sup>31</sup> But, in addition to this collective resource pool, the 28 EU member states plus Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and Iceland have been estimated to spend an incredible €11 billion a year on deportations.<sup>32</sup> In 2014 more than 250 000 third country nationals were issued with a returns obligation from the EU and 161 309 were physically returned.<sup>33</sup>

However, of greater concern than the enormous amounts spent on these border-control and deportation strategies is their simple lack of efficacy as a deterrent. Year on year, the numbers attempting to illegally migrate to Europe have increased, and the creativity and professionalism of those facilitating illicit migration has improved. Building borders, however high, long or thick, is not effective in the face of the compelling drive to migrate. Without the provision of alternative legal channels, border-control strategies simply increase the vulnerability of migrants, even when the intention is for purposes of protection. Stringent border protection also increases the financial costs for the migrant to undertake a migrant journey, which, in turn, increases the demand for the services of migrant smugglers.

A clearly communicated policy of welcome and support for those migrants with a valid claim for refugee or asylum, with facilities available to review the justification of claims closer to source countries, would simultaneously enhance refugee protection and reduce the smuggling market. A system is needed whereby multiple application points could be provided in or near open conflict zones (e.g. Syria), in major urban hubs or in neighbouring countries where political or humanitarian justifications are strong (e.g. Somalia and Eritrea), and there should be national or regional offices in cases where the majority of migrants are moving for predominantly economic reasons (such as in the ECOWAS zone). It should be emphasised that even within countries in this final category, there may well be marginalised groups whose lives or civil liberties are at risk – the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in West and North Africa is one such example.

## Year on year, the numbers attempting to illegally migrate to Europe have increased

Furthermore, rights to protection and resettlement do not necessarily have to be provided in European states if safe and viable alternatives can be provided elsewhere. Agreement could be reached, for example, with neighbouring countries, or countries in the region, to provide resettlement opportunities for those populations deemed at risk in nearby states. Development assistance for this could be funded by the international community. Having said that, it should be noted, however, that refugee camps currently in existence are dramatically failing to provide sustainable options for large displaced populations, and this is one of the drivers of migration in the current crisis. Refugee camps are also vulnerable to recruitment drives by smugglers, including through violence or threats of violence against residents, and this has largely not been addressed by the humanitarian community managing the camps.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, when seeking safe resettlement alternatives, planning should be made for long-term

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€11 BILLION

THE ESTIMATED ANNUAL  
AMOUNT SPENT ON  
DEPORTATIONS BY THE  
28 EU MEMBER STATES PLUS  
NORWAY, LIECHTENSTEIN,  
SWITZERLAND AND ICELAND

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sustainable options providing livelihoods, integration support and genuine opportunities for these people to realise safe and positive futures.

Migration pressures from many African and other countries stem from people's aspirations, genuine and perceived opportunities in Europe, and the perception that these aspirations and opportunities do not exist at home. But the default assumption – that 'development' alone is the only long-term solution to addressing these perceptions and aspirations – has been challenged. Our interviews suggest that many migrants who choose to move along illegal or irregular routes are typically both somewhat better off and tend to be risk takers: they are not the usual target group for 'classic' development interventions. Many of these are not the poorest of the poor – migration is an expensive business – and many are middle class by domestic standards, with relatively substantial opportunities at home. It follows that if authorities were to focus on them, spending on them would have to be based on criteria that are not simply developmental, but would need to be tailored to those with the greatest likelihood to migrate. A better understanding is needed of who takes the risk and why. This is an important question and one that is largely unaddressed in research.<sup>35</sup>

## Migrants play a crucial role in helping both legal and illegal businesses to cater to migrant communities

Fourth, although demonising smuggling seems an obvious policy line to take, in fact migrants themselves in the Middle East, Turkey, North Africa and Europe are often important cogs in the smuggling networks. Not only do they regularly operate as recruiters, but they also play a crucial role in helping businesses, both legal and illegal, to cater to migrant communities. This is particularly true in border towns, where migrants often need to arrange to buy supplies, such as foodstuffs, life vests, local cellphone cards, waterproof bags, etc., before moving on to the next step in their journey. Migrants also play a crucial role in helping smugglers, businesses and facilitators collect information from migrants, which better informs their activities, and in disseminating information to other migrants. Their language skills are invaluable, as is their knowledge of which media platforms are the best ways to spread information – and in some cases misinformation – to target communities. Therefore, migrants may be more likely to support the smuggling industry than national authorities, particularly in those countries where governments are perceived as hostile or provide insufficient support to the refugee population. This type of cooperation is evident in the following interview:

In Athens I am working with new transportation companies which are moving refugees from the capital to the Macedonian border. I am able to earn more than 1 800 euro monthly helping them identify clients and building their trust. I live in a rented flat, shared with other 10 refugees, organised by a Syrian smuggler who passes refugees through the airport with fake papers. The police have raided these flats in several occasions, arresting some of the refugees and questioning them about the place where they get their fake documents.

– 55-year-old Syrian male engineer, interviewed in Greece, August 2015

There is such a wide range of actors engaged in the smuggling market that addressing it effectively will be a challenge. Europol has estimated that there are 30 000 individuals

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30 000

THE NUMBER OF  
INDIVIDUALS ESTIMATED  
BY EUROPOL TO BE INVOLVED  
IN HUMAN SMUGGLING

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involved in human smuggling. Proactive law enforcement authorities, keen to have a demonstrable effect, can easily access individual facilitators<sup>36</sup> but these are replaced front men, and such interventions will have little to no effect on hampering the trade. If lessons can be learnt from the fight against other criminal industries, strategies need to be appropriately targeted to the typology, organisation and structure of the criminal industry and the networks. Prosecutions are an effective strategy only in the cases of those groups with a high level of organisation (in this case, for example, the 'full-package' service providers and hierarchical networks emerging in Egypt).

## Most transactions in the smuggling industry occur outside of the formal banking system

As the 'war on drugs' has shown, arresting low-level facilitators in a network serves only to place overwhelming strain on national criminal-justice systems and creates burgeoning prison populations at risk of further criminalisation or recidivism. It has little impact on curtailing the criminal industry. Instead, in those regions where trafficking is deeply ingrained in the economies and cultures of the communities, and carries little stigma, development-led approaches coupled with efforts to reduce demand and change attitudes may prove a more effective strategy. In those countries or regions where the actors involved in and enriched by smuggling are affiliated with ongoing conflict or political negotiations this would need some degree of acknowledgement within those negotiations (Libya and Mali, for example). Ignoring a source of illicit financing, particularly at the current profit levels, will serve as a continual centrifugal force against central state consolidation and genuine political stability.

Finally, it is important to note that most transactions in the smuggling industry occur outside of the formal banking system. As our survey found, 100% of the financial transactions with smugglers were made outside of the formal banking system: 64% were made in cash, and the remainder were made through informal value transfer systems, though migrants use money-transfer operators, such as Western Union or Moneygram, to transfer money within their own families. Syrians using these services are less likely to pay up front, and more likely to use a system by which they pay for legs of their journey in instalments, with money being held in escrow by a trusted third party and released to the smuggler as they safely reach certain checkpoints or their final destination. Furthermore, many of the source and transit countries have large informal economies (in the countries of the Sahel, for example, an estimated 80% of transactions occur outside the formal economy). This will confound traditional law-enforcement analysis to 'follow the money'. New approaches will be needed.

The challenges to develop a successful strategy to end the migrant crisis and break down the smuggling trade are numerous, and they necessitate a more urgent, focused and strategic response. Europe's response thus far has been too reactive and piecemeal, always concentrated on the latest front of the crisis while ignoring the relatively smaller flows. The problem with this approach is that as any route is allowed to continue longer, more money will flow to criminal groups. This allows them to enrich, entrench and begin to drive their own market. Thus, the migration crisis becomes self-perpetuating and smuggling groups become increasingly difficult to address.



64% OF FINANCIAL  
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SMUGGLERS WERE MADE  
IN CASH

## Notes

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## About the authors

Tuesday Reitano heads the secretariat at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and is a senior research consultant for the Institute for Security Studies. Tuesday has extensive experience as a policy specialist in the UN. She serves as an independent expert advisor to the EU and the European Parliament on illicit migration, and is the lead author of a 2015 OECD study on the smuggling of migrants from Africa to Europe. She is based in Beirut.

Peter Tinti is a research fellow at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime and an investigative journalist. In 2013, Action on Armed Violence included him in its list of the top 100 most influential journalists covering armed violence. He has reported from the Sahel since 2008, where he interviewed smugglers, traffickers and affected communities. He has spent much of 2015 travelling along migrant routes from Africa to Europe.

## About the ISS

The Institute for Security Studies is an African organisation that aims to enhance human security on the continent. It does independent and authoritative research, provides expert policy analysis and advice, and delivers practical training and technical assistance.

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## ISS Pretoria

Block C, Brooklyn Court  
361 Veale Street  
New Muckleneuk  
Pretoria, South Africa  
Tel: +27 12 346 9500  
Fax: +27 12 460 0998

## ISS Addis Ababa

5th Floor, Get House  
Building, Africa Avenue  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: +251 11 515 6320  
Fax: +251 11 515 6449

## ISS Dakar

4th Floor, Immeuble Atryum  
Route de Ouakam  
Dakar, Senegal  
Tel: +221 33 860 3304/42  
Fax: +221 33 860 3343

## ISS Nairobi

Braeside Gardens  
off Muthangari Road  
Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya  
Cell: +254 72 860 7642  
Cell: +254 73 565 0300

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