



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

GLOBAL STUDY ON
**SMUGGLING
OF MIGRANTS**

2018

EUROPE

UNODC
Research



EUROPE



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Profile of migrants:

Along the Central Mediterranean route, most smuggled migrants are from the Horn of Africa and West Africa. Along the Eastern Mediterranean route, many people from South-West Asia, mainly the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as Afghans and Iraqis. Most of those using the Western Mediterranean route are West Africans, plus Syrians and Moroccans. Most of the smuggled migrants are men.

Human cost:

Thousands of smuggled migrants have died during the sea passage, mostly along the Central Mediterranean route. Deaths have also been reported along the other European routes. Exploitation of migrants and gross human rights violations have been recorded in origin, transit and destination countries.

Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries of departure or of the same citizenship as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smuggling organizers are based in destination countries.

Organization:

Depending on the route, a mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journey and larger transnational networks. Sea journeys generally require more organization than overland travel.

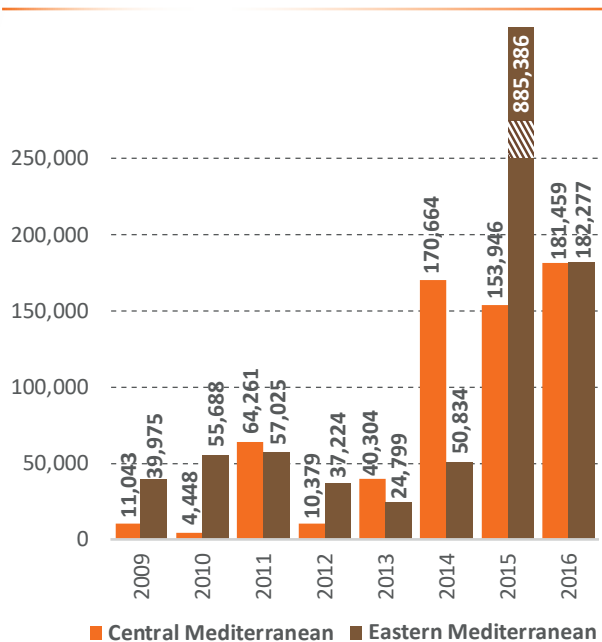
PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING TO AND ACROSS EUROPE

Since 2014, Europe has seen a significant increase in the number of arrivals of irregular migrants and refugees compared to the first few years of this decade. Flows along some traditional migratory routes have increased and some new routes have emerged.

Although so far no accurate and comprehensive statistics on migrant smuggling to and within Europe have been produced, there is extensive evidence that many of the irregular migrants and refugees arriving in European countries have been smuggled. Europol has reported that more than 90 per cent of irregular migrants use facilitation services – usually migrant smugglers – at some point during their journey to Europe.¹ In early 2016, Europol launched the European Migrant Smuggling Centre in response to the unprecedented increase in the number of irregular migrants arriving in the European Union since 2014.

There are currently three major smuggling routes into Europe. The Central Mediterranean route departs from North Africa, most commonly Libya, and arrives in Italy, usually in Sicily. The Eastern Mediterranean route connects the Turkish coast to various Greek islands, and the Western Mediterranean route departs from Morocco and arrives in Spain, either by sea or overland. For most of the migrants and refugees who make use of these routes, being smuggled across the Mediterranean is only one part of a longer journey that may have started in South-West Asia, the Horn of Africa, West Africa or elsewhere.

FIG. 69: Number of detected irregular border crossings along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

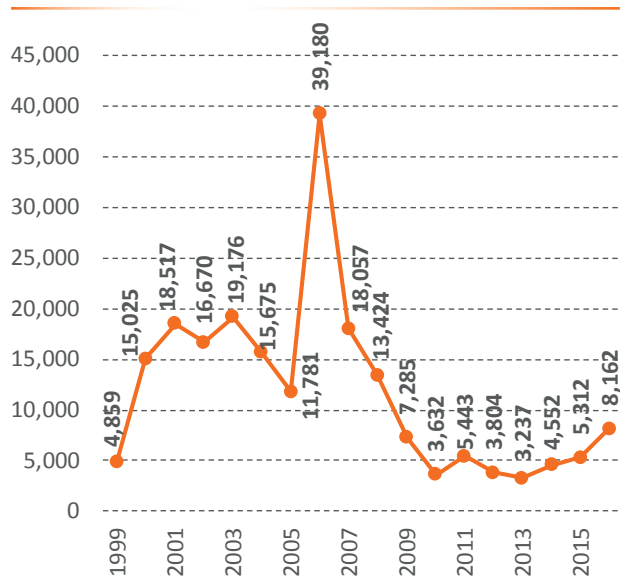
The Western Mediterranean route has consistently seen the lowest arrival numbers, ranging between some 4,000 and 20,000 per year between 1999 and 2016, apart from a sharp rise to nearly 40,000 arrivals in 2006.² Arrivals on the Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes fluctuated sharply between 2009 and 2013, although yearly arrival numbers on either route never exceeded 65,000 during these years.³

In 2014, however, the number of arrivals increased significantly, driven by more than 170,000 arrivals on the Central Mediterranean route. This was followed by an even more dramatic increase in 2015, when more than 1 million people arrived, mostly along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The years 2016 and 2017 saw a stark decrease compared to the year 2015, however the number of arrivals remained above the number recorded in 2014 and before.^a While nearly half of the arrivals in 2015 were from the Syrian Arab Republic, in 2016, this share had decreased to 23 per cent, alongside a diversification of the origins of migrants smuggled into the European Union.

The three Mediterranean routes dominate, but migrant smuggling also occurs elsewhere in Europe. Irregular

a Several international organizations, including Frontex, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, as well as national authorities in some destination countries, monitor arrivals along the Mediterranean routes and regularly report data. The exact figures vary somewhat between agencies, but these variations do not affect overall trends.

FIG. 70: Trend in the number of irregular migrants arrived at Spanish coasts, both in continental territory and the Canary Islands, 1999-2016



Source: Spanish Ministry of Interior.

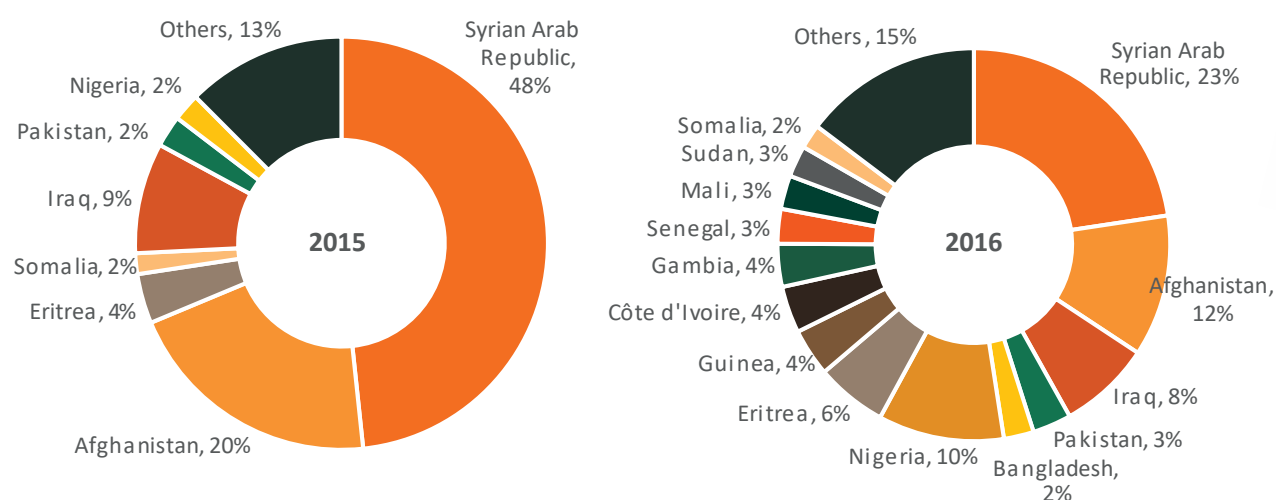
entries are reported through the European Union's eastern borders every year, although it is difficult to determine how many of those are facilitated by migrant smugglers. In 2016, some 1,350 irregular border crossings were detected along the Eastern Borders route.⁴ In autumn 2017, detections of migrants who had been smuggled across the Black Sea increased, although the numbers were small compared to the other sea routes.⁵

Moreover, smugglers facilitate some of the movements of migrants and refugees along the Western Balkans route. The use of the Western Balkans route peaked in 2015, with detections of irregular border crossings of more than 764,000. By 2016, these detections had decreased to just over 130,000.⁶ Smugglers also facilitate 'secondary movements'^b within the European Union. It is difficult to gauge how many of the 'secondary movements' involve smuggling as irregular migrants use a variety of *modi operandi* and means of transport.⁷

Migrants are also smuggled to a range of major airports in Europe, often using fraudulent documents. The number of detections of fraudulent documents on entry from third countries into the EU or Schengen area has been decreasing in recent years. From a peak of more than 11,000 in 2013,⁸ there has been a gradual decline to just

b The phenomenon of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for various reasons move from the country in which they first arrived, to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere. (European Parliament, *Secondary movements of asylum-seekers in the EU asylum system*, Briefing, October 2017).

FIG. 71: Shares of citizenships among people who arrived in the European Union along the three Mediterranean routes, by country of citizenship, 2015 and 2016



Source: UNHCR.

more than 8,000 in 2016. The most frequently detected type of fraudulent document is passports (34 per cent in 2016), followed by visas.⁹

THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Central Mediterranean route – from North Africa to Italy (and Malta) – is a common entry point to Europe for irregular migrants and refugees travelling by sea. Apart from the year 2015, when arrivals in Greece on the Eastern Mediterranean route surpassed those in Italy, most migrants who travel by sea use the Central Mediterranean route. The route's arrival and departure points, the magnitude, and the profiles of the people comprising the flows along this route have changed considerably over time. For many migrants smuggled across the Mediterranean, this is but one leg in a longer journey.

Accurate data specific to migrant smuggling is not available. Nevertheless, according to the extensive literature available, it can be concluded that virtually all migrants travelling along this route depend on smugglers for the sea crossing.¹⁰ Such a crossing, by boat, is far more difficult to accomplish alone than traversing a land border. It can thus be assumed that data about irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean route also broadly depict the migrant smuggling situation.

The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

Libya has traditionally been and is still the main departure point for this route. The exact share is difficult to determine and may also fluctuate, but up to 90 per cent of

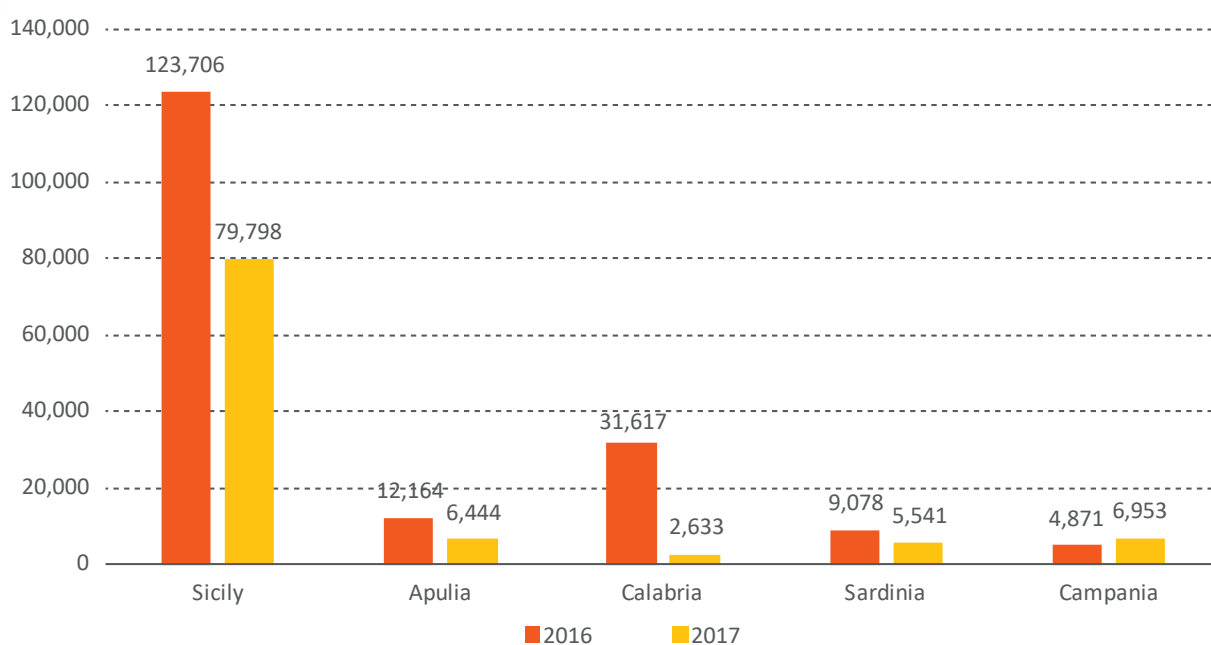
those using the Central Mediterranean route to reach Italy depart from Libya.¹¹ Smuggled migrants usually leave from Tripoli and its surroundings, including Zawiyah and Zuwara to the west of the capital and Misrata to the east. Some migrants also leave from Benghazi, which is some 1,000 km east of Tripoli.¹²

Libyan departure points to Europe change quickly depending on a number of factors, including the actions of local communities, the local security situation and the presence of checkpoints. For example, in 2016, smuggling departures moved eastwards along the Libyan coast, with departures from Zuwara decreasing significantly. One of the drivers of this decrease was the capsizing of a boat and subsequent drowning of 183 migrants off the coast of Zuwara. This sparked a wave of public outrage, and many locals turned against the smugglers.¹³ Sabratha – some 40 km to the east of Zuwara – then became the main departure point along the Libyan coast.

Egypt is much less significant as a transit and departure point. Until 2013, people departing from Egypt were mainly Syrian refugees. After 2013, the majority of migrants departing from the northern Egyptian coast were people claiming to be Sudanese, Eritreans and Somalis.¹⁴ According to Frontex, in 2017, the migrant smuggling flow from the Horn of Africa to Europe via Egypt virtually stopped.¹⁵ When the route was still active, departures mainly took place between Damietta to the east of Alexandria and El-Hamam to the west.¹⁶

The route connecting Tunisia to Sicily was popular among Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian seasonal workers in the 1990s. Since 1998, the signing of a readmission agreement

FIG. 72: Sea arrivals in Italy, by point of arrival, 2016-2017



Source: Italian Police, Direzione Centrale Anticrimine, Servizio Centrale Operativo.

between Italy and Tunisia^c and increased controls have contributed to reduce the number and size of landings. Boats would leave from several areas, including Cap Bon in the north-east and the area south of Monastir.¹⁷

Data from the Italian authorities indicates that this smuggling route is, to some extent, active again. In 2017, more than 5,900 migrants were smuggled by sea to Italy with Tunisia as departing country. This represents a large increase compared to the 999 migrants recorded in 2016 and 569 in 2015 who used this departure point to reach Italy.¹⁸

Most of the Central Mediterranean route arrivals occur in Italy, where 181,436 migrants and refugees landed in 2016; an increase of nearly 18 per cent compared to the 153,842 arrivals in 2015. In 2017, the number of landings recorded in Italy dropped to 119,369.¹⁹ The vast majority of arrivals take place on the island of Sicily, including Lampedusa, a small island between the vastly larger Sicily and Libya.

^c Tunisia and Italy signed an agreement on both readmission and police cooperation in August 1998. The countries committed to readmitting their own nationals as well as third-country nationals (with the exception of the nationals of the Arab Maghreb Union) who transited from their respective national territories. The agreement entered into force on September 23, 1999. See: Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana, January 15, 2000 *Atti internazionali entrati in vigore per l'Italia nel periodo 16 settembre - 15 dicembre 1999 non soggetti a legge di autorizzazione alla ratifica*. Supplemento ordinario alla GAZZETTA UFFICIALE.

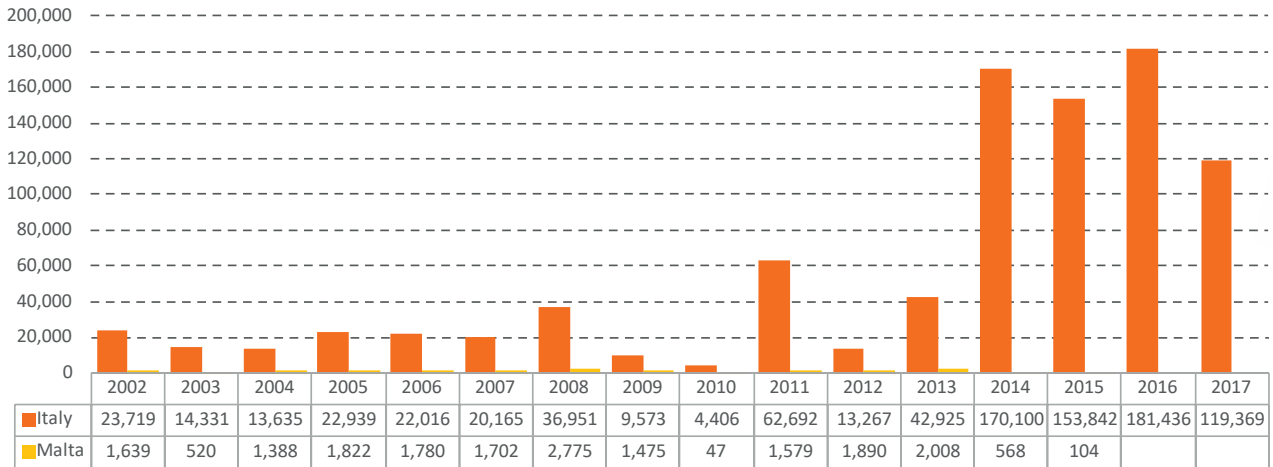
As of 2014, sea arrivals in Malta have significantly decreased, and in 2016, IOM reported no arrivals in Malta. Some research has attributed this decrease mainly to the Operation Mare Nostrum, started by Italy in October 2013, which envisaged disembarkation in Italy only.²⁰ The number of arrivals in Malta decreased even further in 2015, after the end of Mare Nostrum and its replacement by the Frontex Operation Triton, which does not foresee disembarkation in Malta either.

For most of the migrants travelling along the Central Mediterranean route, the sea crossing to Europe is part of a longer journey, which starts in West or East Africa, the Middle East or Asia, and often continues to northern Europe. Those legs of the journey do not necessarily involve migrant smuggling.

The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Central Mediterranean route

Between 2002 and 2010, the number of irregular migrants and refugees entering the European Union along the Central Mediterranean route fluctuated, but remained at a level of less than 40,000 per year. In 2011, there was a sharp increase, with more than 64,000 migrants and refugees arriving in Italy and Malta. Three years later, the number of arrivals marked a new order of magnitude, reaching more than 170,000. This high level remained relatively stable in 2015 and 2016. The year 2017 marked some decrease compared to the previous three years, with about 120,000 sea arrivals.

FIG. 73: Trend in the number of sea arrivals in Italy and Malta*, 2002-2017



* Data on Malta for 2016 and 2017 was not available.

Source: IOM and Italian Police.

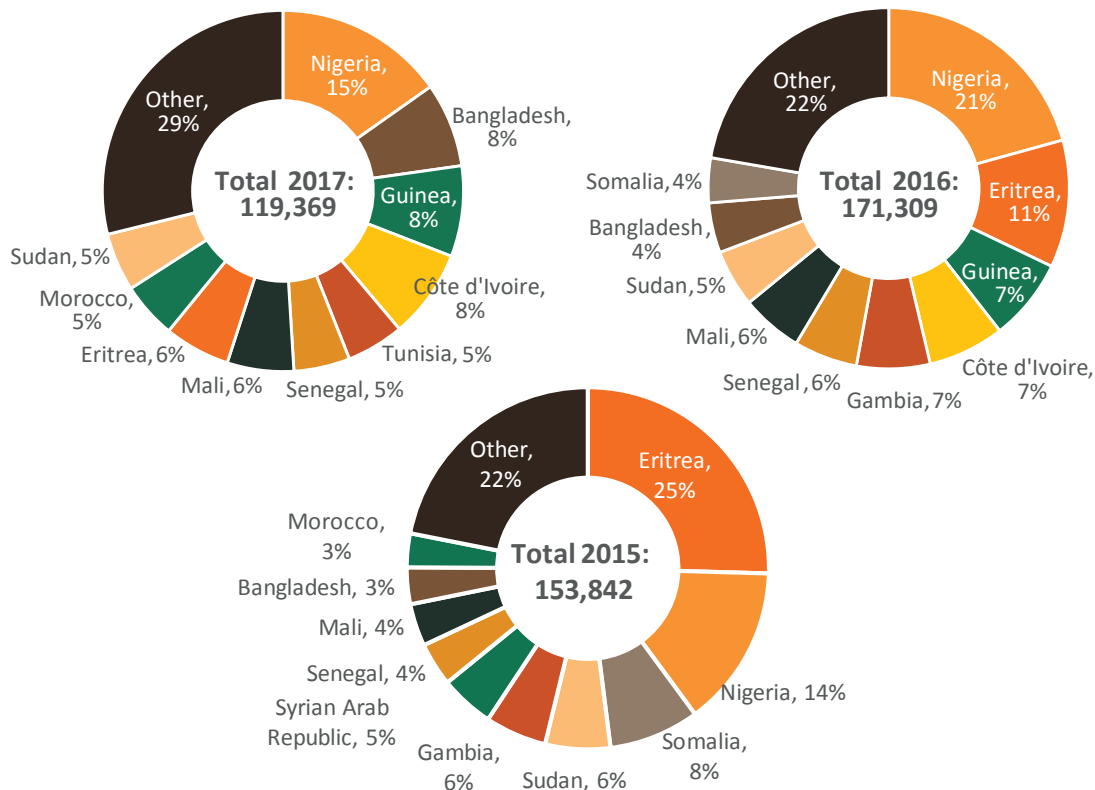
The profile of the smuggled migrants

The vast majority of the smuggled migrants making use of the Central Mediterranean route are originally from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East or Asia, but among them are also a few citizens of North African countries.²¹ Many have been smuggled from West Africa or the Horn

of Africa along the routes described in other sections of this report.

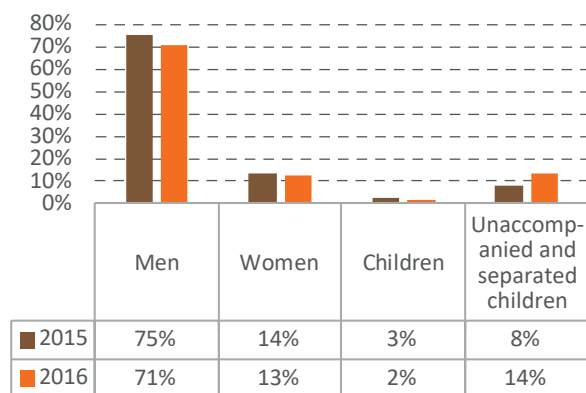
The citizenship profiles of the smuggled migrants arriving in Italy via the Central Mediterranean route are broadly stable, though with some significant fluctuations. Whereas in 2015, Eritreans (or people claiming to be Eritreans)

FIG. 74: Shares of arrivals in Italy by the Central Mediterranean route, by citizenship declared at landing, 2015-2017



Source: Italian Police, Direzione Centrale Anticrimine, Servizio Centrale Operativo.

FIG. 75: Share of arrivals in Italy along the Central Mediterranean route by age and sex, 2015-2016



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

comprised the largest share of arrivals, followed by Nigerians, in 2016, the situation was the opposite. In the year 2017, Nigerians were more frequently reported, with Eritreans not even among the five most commonly reported citizenships. Moreover, in 2017, there was a surge in arrivals of Bangladeshi citizens; particularly noticeable in the month of May.

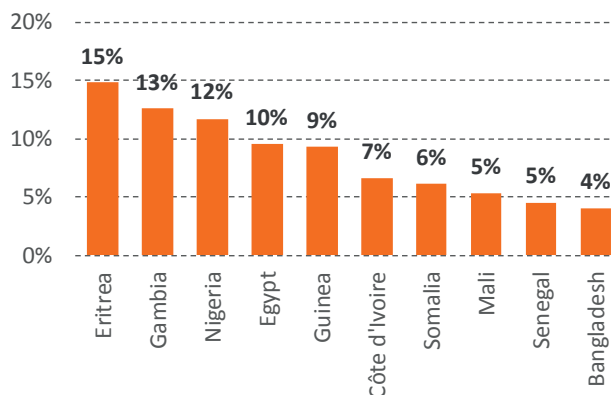
The vast majority of arrivals in Italy, more than 7 in 10, involve men. The share of women remained stable at nearly 15 per cent of arrivals in 2015 and 2016. The most significant change has been the recent increase in arrivals of unaccompanied minors. Some 26,000 unaccompanied minors – nearly all teenage boys – reached Italy in 2016; more than a doubling of the total for the previous year.²²

Nearly all the unaccompanied minors (UAMs) who arrive in Italy come from countries in West, North and East Africa. The number of African UAMs increased significantly in 2016.²³ Eritrean UAMs tend to see Italy as a transit country, moving north as soon as they can, whereas for example Egyptians are more likely to settle in Italy, where they look for a job in order to send money back to their families.²⁴

The smugglers' profile and organization

Migrant smuggling into Europe seems to be largely based on flexible and *ad hoc* agreements and interactions among different local and transnational networks, rather than on highly structured and hierarchical organizations.²⁵ Usually, the organizations which sell the sea crossing to Europe are different from those that recruit and move migrants by land to the departure points of the Central Mediterranean route, but the two types of organization tend to establish stable relationships.²⁶ This allows for easy geographical

FIG. 76: Top ten citizenships among unaccompanied minors who arrived in Italy by sea, 2016 (n=25,846)



Source: UNHCR.

shifts and adjustments, as well as fast replacement and turnover of network components.

Some unique information about the organization and functioning of smuggling networks operating towards Libya and along the Central Mediterranean route can be gleaned from criminal investigations carried out by the Italian authorities (such as the Glauco I case, followed by Glauco II and III²⁷). These cases revealed the existence of an organized criminal group operating in smuggling hubs along the route. The criminal group, which included cells composed of Eritrean nationals in Italy, smuggled migrants and refugees from Libya to Sicily, onwards to mainland Italy, and then to other European and North American countries. The cell operating in North Africa and in Italy would contact associates in other European countries in order for them to organize the last part of the migrants' journeys or to make financial transactions linked to the smuggling. The financial transactions revealed payments originating from 10 different countries in Europe and North America.²⁸

The available literature also identifies a link between migrant smuggling and illicit trade and trafficking of numerous commodities to, within and from Libya. The routes used by migrant smugglers are the same routes traditionally used by smugglers of different goods from Sub-Saharan Africa to Libya and there is evidence suggesting that different illicit activities are often linked.²⁹

The smuggling of migrants across North Africa and the Mediterranean Sea also appears to be linked to drug trafficking. Since the mid-2000s some migrants have reportedly made money by carrying drugs across the desert for sale in North Africa. Since then there have been reports

of significant quantities of cocaine being transported across the desert from West Africa to North Africa.³⁰ Although it is not clear who the key intermediaries in these cocaine trades are, the prominence of the main *passeurs* involved in migrant smuggling and their relations with the security forces suggest that it is quite likely that, at the very least, their businesses intersect those of the major drug traders.³¹

At the same time, Italian investigators highlight that no structured connections are recorded between transnational smuggling networks and the traditional Italian mafia-like organized crime groups.³²

According to a 2015 study, the heads of smuggling organizations are usually older than 35, whereas guides and other actors operating on the ground are usually younger. Migrant smuggling is a male dominated business, but women - often the smugglers' girlfriends and wives - are also involved to a certain extent. For instance, women may be tasked with the recruitment of migrants, handling payments, and women may also receive and escort migrants to temporary accommodation between different legs of the route.³³

Citizenship and ethnicity seem to play crucial roles in the internal organization of the networks, in their cross-border connections and in smuggler-migrant relations. Smuggling networks operating transnationally generally include members with different citizenships, usually involving citizens of the countries where the organization is operating and/or smugglers who share migrants' citizenships.³⁴ Smugglers involved in recruitment and communication with the migrant's family generally share the same citizenship as the migrants.

According to RMMS, in Libya migrants refer to smugglers of their own national or ethnic community, the so-called "connection men", at all stages of the smuggling process. These "connection men" work for Libyan smugglers.³⁵ Other research points to the role played by migrants themselves in the smuggling business: they operate as recruiters, liaise with other migrants and collect information relevant to their business from them.³⁶

The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Migrants proactively engage smugglers, but smugglers may also approach migrants to offer them their services. Smugglers advertise their services in places where migrants can typically be found, such as railway stations, cafes or bazaars. One example is the neighbourhood of Abu Salim in Tripoli, an area with a large Somali community.

Migrants reported that smugglers came to their neighbourhood and asked them if they wanted to board a boat to Europe.³⁷

When migrants look for smugglers, diaspora communities often play a key role in facilitating contact. These communities can also often recommend or advise against particular smugglers. While much information is shared by word of mouth, social media is also widely used for pre-departure research. Syrians, in particular, make extensive use of technology such as Facebook, Viber, Skype and WhatsApp, to share comments and reviews of smugglers.³⁸

The smuggling fees depend on the services included in the package, but also on the migrants' citizenship, sex and age. Along the different Central Mediterranean sub-routes, smugglers tailor the prices to the - real or perceived - economic means of the migrants. Syrians, who are usually wealthier than African migrants, pay more for safer journeys. Negotiations are possible and the prices may vary significantly.³⁹

One study reported that migrants from sub-Saharan Africa would pay around US\$1,000 to be smuggled below deck on a boat from Libya to Europe, whereas a Syrian would pay \$2,500 or more for a safer seat.⁴⁰ In February 2015, new arrivals to Italy from Libya reported having paid smugglers between US\$700 and 1,000 per person to undertake the journey. Some reported having paid as little as \$400 for the journey to Lampedusa.⁴¹ The EUNAVFOR MED Operation in the Mediterranean Sea estimated that smuggling businesses generate between 250 and 300 million euros in annual revenue for smugglers in Libya.⁴²

Departures from Egypt are fewer and appear to be somewhat pricier. Migrants leaving from Alexandria reported having paid US\$2,500 in advance to board a boat to Italy in 2015.⁴³ According to IOM, Syrians departing from the Egyptian shores paid around US\$3,000, whereas for Palestinians, the sea crossing cost around US\$2,000.⁴⁴ Other sources reported fees ranging between US\$2,000 and 4,000.⁴⁵

When it comes to sea crossings, the contact between the smuggler who will facilitate the sea crossing and the migrant usually takes place along the Libyan coast, close to the boat departure points. This smuggler is the migrant's link with the Libyan smugglers or other intermediaries, with whom the price and travel arrangements will be discussed. Migrants usually pay the full amount in advance. Some migrants travelling along this route pay for the entire journey from their country of departure or hub to their country of destination. This payment method is

called “integrated system”.⁴⁶ In this case, migrants often buy their journey to a specific destination in Europe, not just to Italy. Once they reach Italy, they are put in touch with someone in the smuggler’s network to facilitate their journey across Europe.⁴⁷

The departure time depends on several factors, including weather conditions, the number of clients gathered by the smugglers and the activities of the border control and search operations. During the waiting period, which can vary from one day to several months, migrants are hosted in temporary accommodation referred to as ‘connection houses.’ These are often crowded and have limited kitchen and sanitary facilities. Migrants are generally not allowed to leave. Sexual violence and forced labour are reportedly widespread in many migrant holding facilities in Libya.⁴⁸

The vessels used for the sea crossings range from small wooden boats or rubber inflatable dinghies to larger ships.⁴⁹ The former are usually driven by migrants, who in exchange travel for free, whereas the latter are generally driven by professionals. When the driver is a migrant, he is usually chosen by the intermediary some time before departure, lodged with intermediaries and briefly trained by Libyan smugglers. He may even receive some money for his services.⁵⁰ Sometimes, when questioned on arrival, all migrants claim that they drove the vessel, in order to protect the actual driver.⁵¹

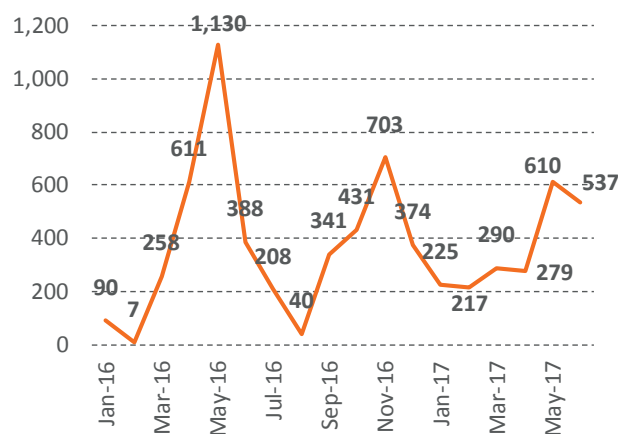
Boats usually leave the coast at night in order to avoid apprehension by the Libyan authorities.⁵² They do not display any flag, number or name to impede identification. The boats are usually not returned to the smugglers, but used only once.⁵³

The human cost

The Central Mediterranean is considered to be the deadliest migration route in the world.⁵⁴ According to IOM, 4,581 persons died along this route in 2016, compared to 2,876 deaths registered in 2015.⁵⁵ As of 30 June, 2,232 persons had lost their lives at sea on the way between North Africa and Europe in 2017. While the monthly numbers of deaths fluctuate, travelling along the Central Mediterranean route is clearly imbued with a significant risk of drowning for migrants.

Conditions for migrants in Libya who are waiting to be smuggled to Europe are appalling. Some migrants are reportedly sold as slaves, whereas others are tortured, raped or exploited in forced labour. Compounding the difficulties of the thousands of refugees and migrants in detention in Libya is the fact that many of the smugglers and traffickers are protected by well-known militias.⁵⁶

FIG. 77: Trend in the number of deaths along the Central Mediterranean route, by month, January 2016 – June 2017



Source: IOM Missing Migrants Project.

The sea crossing is generally described by migrants and refugees as a horrific experience. The boats used are often unseaworthy and overcrowded, sufficient food and water are usually not provided and lifejackets may not be distributed. People smuggled on board of these boats often have little information about the journey.⁵⁷ It is very common that vessels run out of fuel, have engine problems, lose their way at sea or fill up with water.⁵⁸

Sometimes border control measures may also result in violations of the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees. According to the available literature, asylum seekers and refugees are sometimes returned to their countries of origin or deported to third countries where their life and security may be at risk, in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*. Moreover, in countries of arrival, migrants may face collective expulsions, inadequate reception conditions and lack of access to justice.^d

THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Eastern Mediterranean route, which saw an unprecedented growth in the number of arrivals in 2015,

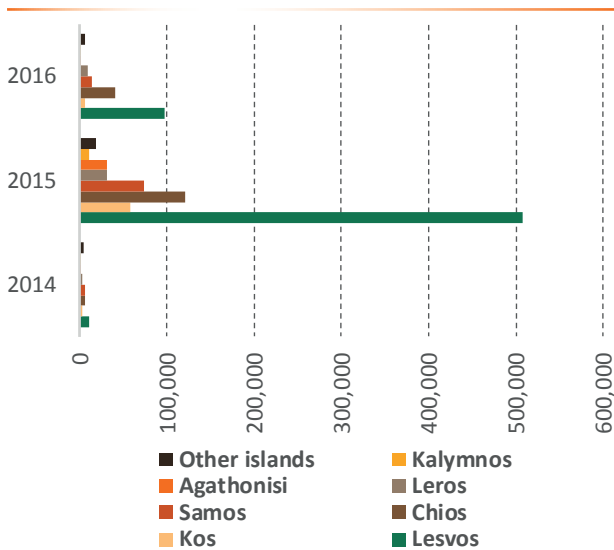
d In 2012, the European Court of Human Rights found different EU countries violated international law for high sea interception and push-back practice (EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), *Fundamental rights at Europe’s southern sea borders*, 2013: 49). In his 2015 report, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants expressed concerns about the practice of mandatory detention of smuggled migrants (A/HRC/29/36/Add.3, *Report by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau*, pp. 13-14). As observed by the EU FRA, mandatory detention policies complicate the identification of vulnerable migrants: persons with “non-visible” vulnerabilities, such as victims of trafficking or people with mental health problems, may be overlooked (EU FRA, *op. cit.*, p. 95).

connects Turkey to the European Union by sea and land. Many of those making use of this route have been smuggled along the South-West Asian route. The Eastern Mediterranean route comprises two major sub-routes: a sea route leaving from the Turkish shores and heading to the Greek islands, and a land route departing from Turkey and arriving in north-eastern Greece or Bulgaria.

The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

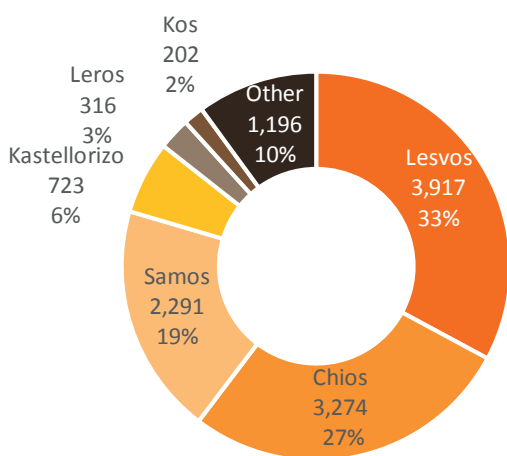
Many Turkish coastal towns serve as departure points for migrants heading to the nearby Greek islands. During the first half of 2017, IOM reported that most migrants were apprehended along the western Turkish coast facing the

FIG. 78: Number of irregular sea arrivals in Greece, by port of arrival, 2014-2016



Source: UNHCR.

FIG. 79: Numbers and shares of irregular sea arrivals in Greece, by port of arrival, 1 Jan – 6 Aug 2017



Source: UNHCR.

Greek islands. The sea close to the town of Çeşme – close to both the large Turkish city of Izmir and the Greek island of Chios – saw the largest number of apprehended migrants.⁵⁹ Other towns, such as Balıkesir or Edirne are also transits for smuggling to the Greek islands⁶⁰.

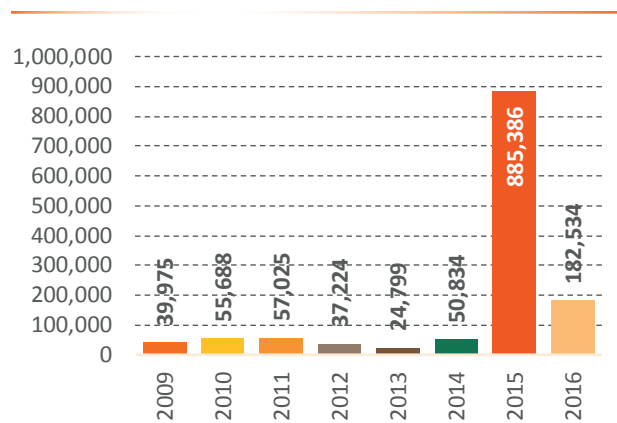
The main landing point for boats departing from the Western shores of Turkey is the Greek island of Lesvos. In 2015, when arrivals skyrocketed, this island was the epicentre of events with more than half a million arrivals, according to UNHCR data. The island of Chios is the second most common landing point, albeit with far fewer arrivals than Lesvos throughout 2015 and 2016.

Smuggling activity is also recorded along the land sub-route. The Greek-Turkish land border is approximately 200 km long and follows almost entirely the Maritsa/Evros river. Crossing this river is extremely difficult due to the enhanced surveillance on both sides. Migrants travelling along the land route between Turkey and Bulgaria usually cross the border at the Kapitan Andreevo - Kapikule checkpoint.⁶¹ Migrants and refugees coming from Greece often cross the land border in the area of the Kulata-Proimahon border crossing point or via routes in the Petrich region.⁶²

The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Eastern Mediterranean route

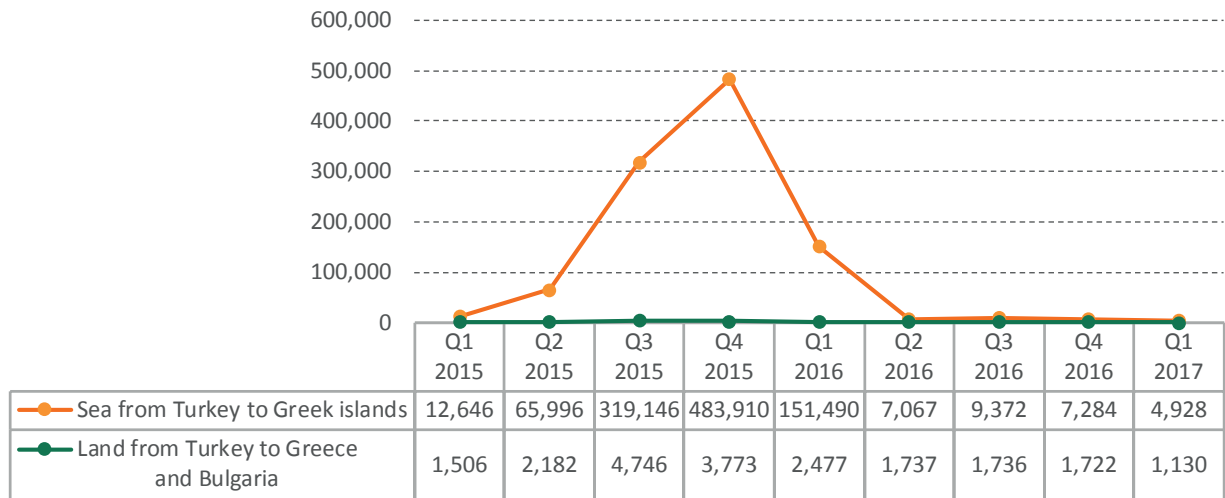
Over the period 2009–2014, the number of migrants irregularly entering the EU through the Eastern Mediterranean route ranged between 25,000 and 57,000 per year. In 2015, the flow skyrocketed, with more than 850,000 irregular border crossings; making the Eastern Mediterranean route the main entry point to Europe for irregular migrants and refugees. In 2016, the flow declined rapidly; a decline that has continued into 2017.

FIG. 80: Trend in the number of irregular arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

FIG. 81: Trend in the number of irregular border crossings from Turkey to the EU, by land or sea route, by quarter, 2015 – Q1 2017



Source: Frontex.

arrivals on the Greek islands, some migrants also depart from Turkey via the northern border with Bulgaria. According to information from Frontex, in 2017, a few hundred migrants have used this land route each month.

The sudden drop in arrivals on the Greek islands has been ascribed to the impact of the European Union - Turkey Statement agreed by the EU heads of state and the Turkish government on 18 March 2016. Under this agreement, ‘all new irregular migrants or asylum seekers crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey, after an individual assessment of their asylum claims in line with EU and international law. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey, another Syrian will be resettled to the EU from Turkey directly (1:1 mechanism)’.⁶³

The profile of the smuggled migrants

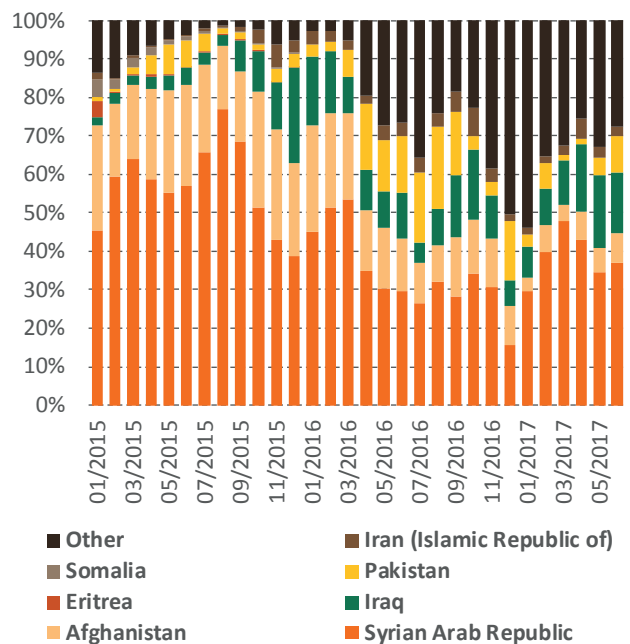
Syrians comprise the largest share of citizenships among those crossing the Turkish borders to Greece, although their share among arrivals has declined. In the first half of 2017, Syrian citizens accounted for some 38 per cent of arrivals in Greece, compared to 45 per cent in 2016 and 57 per cent in 2015. Citizens of Afghanistan and Iraq also comprise sizable shares. While Afghan arrivals comprised a larger share of the total than Iraqis in 2016, in early 2017, the situation seems to have reversed, with Iraqi citizens comprising the second most commonly reported group of irregular arrivals in Greece, followed by Pakistani and Afghans.⁶⁴

Since a large part of the flow is made up of Syrian refugees fleeing war or leaving their countries of first refuge, more families travel along this route than along most other mixed migration routes where young males tend to dom-

inate. According to a survey conducted by UNHCR among Syrian arrivals on the Greek islands in February 2016,⁶⁵ the vast majority - 88 per cent - travelled with a close family member (child, spouse, parent and/or sibling). Only 7 per cent travelled alone.

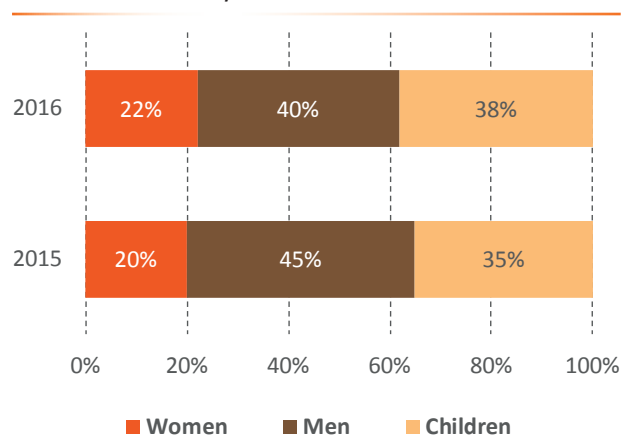
Women made up 22 per cent of the total number of arrivals in Greece in 2016, and 38 per cent were children. In contrast to the situation in Italy, the vast majority - 92 per

FIG. 82: Shares of citizenships among arrivals in Greece, by month, Jan 2015 – Jun 2017



Source: UNHCR

FIG. 83: Profiles of arrivals in Greece by the Eastern Mediterranean route by age and sex, 2015-2016



Source: UNHCR; Greek national authorities.

cent - of the children who arrived in Greece were accompanied. Some 8 per cent - more than 5,000 children - were unaccompanied; many of them teenage boys from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan or Pakistan.⁶⁶ Many of the Afghan unaccompanied adolescents travel in groups, sometimes accompanied by a non-family member adult.⁶⁷

The smugglers' profile and organization

In addition to the general observation that most migrants travelling along sea routes rely on smugglers, there are strong indications that most migrants travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route make use of at least one smuggler during their journey. The actual number of smugglers used seems to vary depending on the migrants' citizenship as well as other factors (number of borders crossed, enforcement measures along the way, climate and terrain, and so on). For example, a 2015 survey targeting irregular migrants arrested in Istanbul by the local authorities found that nearly all the respondents (96 per cent) used at least three smugglers from their country of origin (mainly South and South-West Asia) in order to reach Istanbul.⁶⁸ Smugglers are key sources of information for many migrants and refugees. About 73 per cent of 779 Afghans^e interviewed in February 2016 reported that smugglers provided information about their travel.⁶⁹

Frontex reported in 2016 that smugglers operated in networks along the Turkish coast, with each network controlling a specific departure area and often serving migrants of specific origins. Beyond offering passage to Greece, or in some cases across the Turkish land border with the Syrian Arab Republic, smugglers also reportedly

••

e A similar set of interviews among Syrian refugees showed that only 16 per cent relied on information from smugglers, with most of them obtaining information from family or friends.

provide information on asylum processes in destination countries as well as forged documentation. The highest demand is for Syrian passports, identification cards, birth certificates and residence permits, which illustrates how smugglers cynically profit from the Syrian crisis.⁷⁰

The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Like in other parts of the world, in the major hubs along this route the smuggling business appears to be carried out publicly. In certain districts of major cities, people can easily find a smuggler or wait to be found by one in the street, in crowded squares, in coffeehouses. Migrants and refugees usually meet with intermediaries who inform them about the smuggling conditions.⁷¹

While waiting for their departure to Greece, smugglers may place migrants and refugees in substandard accommodation without heating, running water or sanitation, and with little food.⁷² When a sufficiently large number of passengers has been gathered, drivers take the migrants to the departure point, whilst other members of the group look for a way to evade the security forces. Migrants undertake the crossing aboard a broad spectrum of vessels, although the most common vehicles are inflatable boats and speedboats.⁷³ The boat trip from Turkey to Greece usually takes a few hours.⁷⁴

The price for the journey from Turkey's coasts to any of the Greek islands on the smallest inflatable boat reportedly ranges between €1,000 and 2,000 per person. The same route could be offered at €900 or up to €7,000 according to the demand, method of transportation or the season of the year⁷⁵. According to some sources, the fee for the crossing from Turkey into Bulgaria and the onward travel to Sofia amounts to €2,500 - 3,000 per person⁷⁶.

On the Eastern Mediterranean route, when advance payment is required, the 'package' may include several attempts. In case the first crossing fails, the migrant is entitled to travel again for free. Sometimes migrants pay half of the fee in advance and the other half upon arrival. When relatives or friends make the payment, smugglers may supply pictures of the migrant in the destination country as proof of safe arrival.⁷⁷

The *hawala* system is widely used along the Eastern Mediterranean route, which makes it practically impossible to trace the money flow.⁷⁸ Alternatively, migrants may use a formal money transfer service that secures the fee by issuing the migrant with a code. Once the migrant has safely arrived at the agreed destination, the smuggler will then receive the security code to release the money.⁷⁹

With regard to the land route, according to the IOM, most irregular migrants enter Bulgaria from the green border on foot. After reaching Edirne, migrants and refugees cross the land border irregularly on foot; either assisted by smugglers until the border or equipped with smartphones containing stored paths to follow. The smugglers instruct them to call the Bulgarian police for rescue in case they lose their way, and to apply for asylum so that they are transferred to an open reception centre from which they can easily escape to continue their journey.⁸⁰

The human cost

According to data from IOM's Missing Migrants project, deaths along the Eastern Mediterranean route have declined in line with the decreasing number of migrants using the route. In the first half of 2017, there were 29 reported fatalities, compared to 434 in 2016 and 806 in 2015. In 2015, IOM and UNICEF reported that at least 30 per cent of the deceased on this route were children; reflecting the fact that children make up a large share of smuggled migrants there.⁸¹

Boats carrying migrants are often overcrowded. Several sources report observations of refugees and migrants boarding dinghies carrying twice the number of passengers they were designed for, or even more. Smugglers may even threaten the migrants with guns in order to make them board.⁸²

The land crossing from Turkey into Bulgaria appears to be far less dangerous. Still, during winter, temperatures could drop well below zero, and migrants and refugees who are often not properly equipped may die of exposure to the elements. In February 2016, for example, the Bulgarian police found the bodies of a girl and a woman who had frozen to death near the Malko Turnovo border crossing with Turkey. They were a part of a group of 19 Afghan migrants.⁸³

IOM and UNICEF have highlighted that the wave of new arrivals in 2015 included some children who, lacking financial resources to continue their journey, found themselves stranded on the Greek islands and in Athens. The same sources emphasized the vulnerability of those children to trafficking, recruitment by criminal gangs, sexual abuse and exploitation.⁸⁴ A 2015-2016 IOM survey among migrants travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route indicated that some 7 per cent of the respondents had personal experience with trafficking and other exploitative practices.⁸⁵ Several sources have also denounced violence and mistreatments suffered by migrants in several countries along the route.⁸⁶

THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE

The Western Mediterranean route departs from Morocco and arrives in Spain. This route is broadly comprised of four sub-routes; two overland and two by sea. The land sub-routes head towards the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla situated some 400 km apart in the North of Africa. The sea sub-routes run across the Strait of Gibraltar from the area around Tangier to the coast of Andalucia, Spain and from the north-west African coast to the Canary Islands, Spain.

Over the years, Spain and Morocco have put in place a broad operational cooperation, including coordination of law enforcement activities, such as joint patrolling of sea, land and air borders and the exchange of liaison officers. The operational cooperation includes the areas surrounding Ceuta and Melilla.⁸⁷

The main smuggling hubs, departure and arrival points

The overland crossing to Melilla typically occurs from Nador, Morocco, whereas the passage to Ceuta usually starts in Fnideq, Morocco. Both destinations are coastal cities, and some migrants try to reach them by sea. As for the other main smuggling routes into Europe, this passage is often only one leg of a longer journey.

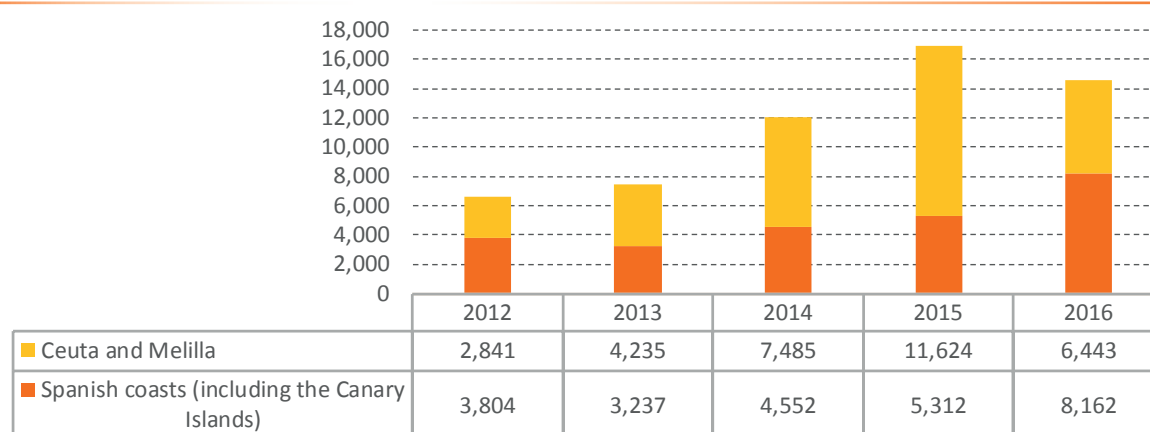
The route crossing the Alboran Sea and connecting the Moroccan north-eastern coast to Almeria, Spain and other locations in the eastern parts of Andalusia, Spain used to be popular but seems to be largely inactive nowadays, with most crossings taking place along the shorter route across the Strait of Gibraltar. As of May 2017, UNHCR reported that departure points along this route were Tangiers and Asilah close to the Strait of Gibraltar, and El Hoceima and Nador further east. A few boats also departed from Algeria. Most of the migrants on board these boats were rescued at sea and disembark on the Spanish shores.⁸⁸

The main smuggling hubs to Ceuta and Melilla are the major cities geographically close by.⁸⁹ There, migrants and refugees can find smugglers and arrange for their journey to Europe. In Oujda, migrants live in settlements in the forest, away from the city, without proper housing and services.⁹⁰

The magnitude of migrant smuggling along the Western Mediterranean

Over the years, the total flow along this route, as well as along the land and sea sub-routes, have fluctuated considerably. In 2017, the sea crossing departing from Tangier,

FIG. 84: Trends in the number of arrivals of irregular migrants in Spain, both in continental territory and the Canary Islands, 2012-2016



Source: Spain, Ministry of Interior.

Morocco and arriving in Spain, only 14 to 30 km long, was the most widely used sub-route among migrants and refugees travelling in the Western Mediterranean.

Between the two overland flows, that into Melilla is larger than the one into Ceuta. In 2016, 3,901 irregular migrants entered Melilla, whereas 2,542 entered Ceuta.⁹¹ Moroccan passport holders who live near the two Spanish cities can enter them for limited periods without a visa. There is a trend of using Moroccan passports to cross the borders by car, or by hiding in the cars of Moroccans for the crossing. However, this is an expensive method, which puts it out of reach of most people from sub-Saharan Africa. Previously, this method was mostly used by North Africans; in recent years, by Syrians.⁹²

The share of smuggled migrants among those travelling along the Western Mediterranean route is not easy to determine. Some migrants, who cross the land border to Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, do so with the help of smugglers, who provide them with fraudulent documents or transportation. On the other hand, many of those opting for the sea passage from Tangier to Tarifa, Spain are in a stronger financial position, allowing them to buy a small boat and attempt the sea crossing on their own.⁹³

The route from Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco to the Spanish Canary Islands - located off the southern coast of Morocco - was once the busiest irregular entry point to Europe, peaking at almost 32,000 arrivals in 2006. Following the strengthening of border control and enforcement measures and the conclusion of bilateral agreements (including on repatriation) between Spain and the countries of origin and transit, arrivals along this route had significantly decreased as of 2008⁹⁴, and have remained relatively low since then. Cooperation between the Span-

ish and Moroccan authorities, for instance, has led to the dismantling of smuggling rings operating along this route.

The profile of the smuggled migrants

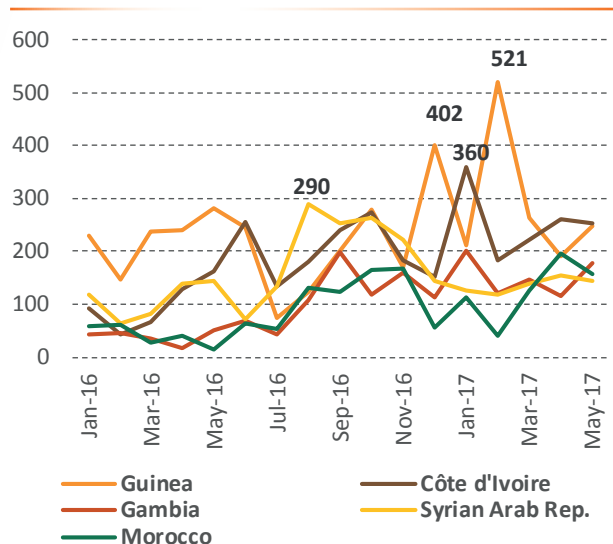
The Western Mediterranean used to be the most popular route among Algerians and Moroccans trying to reach Spain, either with the intention of staying or in order to move on to another European country. Since the late 1990s, increasing numbers of people from sub-Saharan Africa have also made use of this route. Many migrants travelling along this route are from West Africa. Passport holders from a number of West African countries can enter Morocco without a visa for a period of 90 days.⁹⁵

As of 2010-2011, people from the Horn of Africa and from the Syrian Arab Republic also started to use this route to reach Spain. According to the Spanish authorities, in 2014, Syrians accounted for more than 3,300 irregular entries, mainly in the city of Melilla. In 2015, the number of Syrians increased to nearly 7,200, accounting for more than 78 per cent of irregular migrants arriving in Melilla. The number of arrivals of non-Syrians rose just over 5 per cent from 2014 to 2015.⁹⁶

Between January 2016 and May 2017, the most common citizenship among arrivals to Spain was Guinean. Citizens of Guinea made up some 19 per cent of all arrivals, followed by nationals of Côte d'Ivoire with 15 per cent, and Syrians at some 12 per cent of arrivals. Syrian arrivals declined towards the end of 2015 and into 2016, but increased again as of late summer 2016. Arrivals of Gambians and Moroccans have also increased since early 2016.

The vast majority (81 per cent) of migrants and refugees travelling along the Western Mediterranean route - as on other routes - are young men. Most of the land arrivals originating in Sub-Saharan African countries were young

FIG. 85: Monthly trend of the five most common citizenships among sea and land arrivals in Spain, 2016 – May 2017



Source: UNHCR (Spain: Arrivals dashboard, May 2017).

men who had jumped over the border fences, whereas the few women and children travelling by land often hide inside vehicles to cross the border.⁹⁷

There are no available statistics regarding the arrival of unaccompanied minors in Spain. Flows of unaccompanied minors into Morocco, however, tend to be boys aged between 14 and 18 from countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Mali, Guinea, Cameroon and Ghana. Sometimes they travel to join family members already in Europe, and other times they are sent ahead as 'pioneers' of the family.⁹⁸

The smugglers' profile and organization

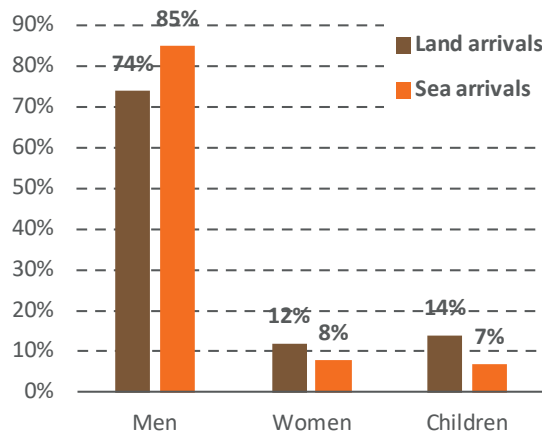
With regard to the sea crossing from Morocco to Spain, migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa rely on local smugglers for the crossing. They are often recruited by fellow citizens who work for the smugglers. Personal connections and recommendations from friends or family seem to be more prominent sources of information than internet and social media.⁹⁹

The Moroccan authorities reported having dismantled 120 smuggling networks active along this route in 2017. Since 2002, more than 3,200 such networks have been broken up.¹⁰⁰

The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Migrants have been trying to reach Europe via the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla since the early 1990s.¹⁰¹ Since then, the borders have become increasingly fortified. Both

FIG. 86: Shares of arrivals in Spain, by land or sea arrival, by sex and age, 2016 – May 2017



Source: UNHCR.

Spanish and Moroccan authorities heavily patrol the borders. As a result, apprehensions on the sea route into Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, rose in 2016. Attempts at scaling the border fences saw a decline.¹⁰²

Despite the opening of asylum border posts in Ceuta and Melilla in September 2014, difficulties to access these two cities have been reported, including summary returns and 'rejections at the border'.¹⁰³ Syrian citizens then started to pay smugglers to obtain fake Moroccan passports of residents of Tetuan and Nador in order to enter Ceuta and Melilla by posing as traders. Once inside, they would immediately apply for asylum. The number of Syrians using this approach declined sharply at the end of 2015 and into 2016.¹⁰⁴

According to the Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community, the use of fraudulent documents to enter European Union countries is frequently reported along this route. Almost 950 alleged Moroccans were detected with fraudulent documents in 2015; a 15 per cent increase from the more than 800 who were detected in 2014. In the first half of 2016, the numbers seem to have remained stable. Most of the detected alleged Moroccans used the genuine travel documents of someone else in an attempt to enter Ceuta or Melilla, Spain.¹⁰⁵

With the increased popularity of this route in 2016, the average price paid by migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa doubled, from €500 in 2015 to 1,000 in 2016. Some of those who cannot or do not want to pay smugglers may set off in small inflatable dinghies usually used in children's play. Some 12-15 migrants may cram into these toys.¹⁰⁶ Moroccan migrants, who tend to have more financial resources, often choose safer and faster transportation.

They may travel to the Spanish coasts on board inflatable boats with powerful engines, or even on jet skis. Crossing the Straits of Gibraltar on a jet ski can take around 30 minutes at a cost of some €3,000.¹⁰⁷

The human cost

The numbers of deaths seem to be increasing in line with the growing use of this route. According to data from the IOM Missing Migrants Project, between 1 January and 11 August 2017, 121 migrants had lost their lives along the Western Mediterranean route. In 2016, the figure for the entire year was 83.¹⁰⁸ Most casualties occur at sea, but some also take place along the land route to Ceuta and Melilla, Spain, especially in connection with attempted crossings of the fence. However, it is difficult to assess whether there is a connection between these risks and the smuggling activity along this route.

The risk of trafficking in persons also appears to be high among much of the migrant population along this route. According to IOM, many of the Nigerian and Cameroonian women making use of this route have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.¹⁰⁹

OTHER SMUGGLING ROUTES IN EUROPE

The three Mediterranean routes are not the only smuggling routes in Europe. Several other routes – with varying extents of smuggling activity – criss-cross the continent. As for most of the routes discussed in this report, the magnitude of these other European routes, the departure, arrival and transit point, the modes of travel and the involvement of smugglers are all volatile and subject to sudden, drastic changes.

The Eastern Borders route

There is some migrant smuggling activity along the European Union's 6,000 km-long eastern border. This includes parts of the eastern borders of Norway,^f Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

Broadly speaking, the Eastern borders route can be split into two sub-routes. The Baltic sub-route comprises the crossing into one of the Baltic countries and the onward movement to the destination country via Poland. The second sub-route departs from Ukraine and enters any of its neighbouring EU countries (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary or Romania).

^f Norway is not a European Union Member State, but is part of the Schengen area of free movement.

The flow at the European Union eastern border is much smaller than other flows into the EU. The number of illegal border crossings detected in 2015 at the EU's eastern border – less than 2,000 people – represented only 0.1 per cent of the total number of illegal border crossings into the EU that year. In 2016, this flow was even smaller, at some 1,350 detections.¹¹⁰ Frontex noted in 2017 that detections of illegal border crossings might have been low along this route because irregular migrants tend to make use of visa fraud and counterfeit border-crossing stamps rather than attempting to cross the border irregularly.¹¹¹

There is no data regarding the prevalence of migrant smuggling along this route, but there are some indications that its use is decreasing. Frontex reports that the number of detected smugglers ('facilitators') along the Eastern borders route significantly decreased in early 2016, from 205 in the first quarter to 45 in the second quarter of that year. The apprehended smugglers were from Eastern Europe and the European Union.¹¹² The decreasing trend continued into early 2017.¹¹³ People from different countries seem to be smuggled across different sections of the EU eastern border.

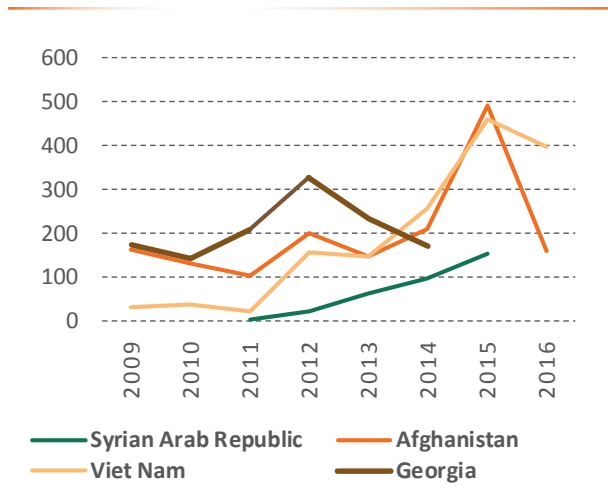
The Polish-Ukrainian border appears to be particularly attractive for irregular migrants using fraudulent documents. According to Frontex, most of the detected document fraud at the EU borders occurs at this border, which is largely attributable to Ukrainian citizens misusing fraudulently obtained Polish visas.¹¹⁴

Not all the irregular border crossings at the EU's eastern border are associated with the purpose of irregular migration. According to Frontex, in 2015, only half of the detected border crossings between border crossing points were associated with irregular migration. A big share of irregular border crossings were undertaken in order to smuggle goods or conduct illegal hunting or fishing.¹¹⁵ Moreover, irregular migrants may cross the border without the assistance of smugglers.

The profile of migrants travelling along the EU Eastern borders route has drastically changed over the last few years. Until 2012, the route was mainly used by regional migrants. As of 2011, the number of Vietnamese, Afghan and Syrian citizens started to increase, and in 2016, Vietnamese and Afghans were the two most frequently detected citizenships, with Ukrainians comprising the third. Some of the detected Asians might have been smuggled by air prior to attempting to cross the EU eastern border illegally.

Along the Baltic sub-route, the Latvian authorities report having detected some 50 smugglers in 2016. In the same

FIG. 87: Trends in the number of illegal border crossings detected at the EU eastern borders among selected citizen-ships, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

year, about 500 irregular migrants were detained at Latvia's borders with the Russian Federation and Belarus; some 300 from Viet Nam, 44 from the Russian Federation, 30 from Afghanistan and 25 from India. In 2015, 463 irregular migrants were detained, including 309 citizens of Viet Nam.¹¹⁶

Migrant smuggling is also reported from Ukraine to different EU countries. Frontex reported the detection of about 1,200 Ukrainians attempting to cross the border with Poland with fraudulent documents in 2015; a number that remained broadly stable in 2016.¹¹⁷ The widespread use of fraudulent documents suggests that there is significant smuggling along this border crossing.

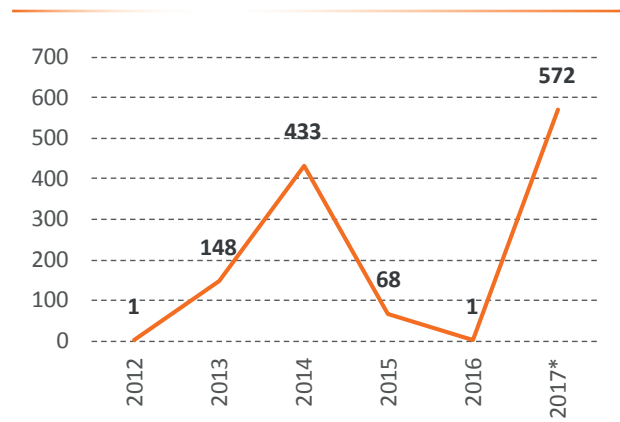
The Black Sea route

A few migrants are smuggled from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania and Bulgaria. Although the numbers are small, the interception of six boats carrying nearly 600 smuggled migrants between January and mid-September 2017 could be an indication that smugglers are trying to revive this route. Most of the smuggled migrants aboard the boats that were detected in 2017 were Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans and Pakistanis.¹¹⁸

Migrant smuggling flows to European airports

According to Europol, migrant smuggling by air is currently less frequent, but is likely to become more attractive in the future due to increased controls along land and sea routes. Smuggling by air is generally perceived as a safer

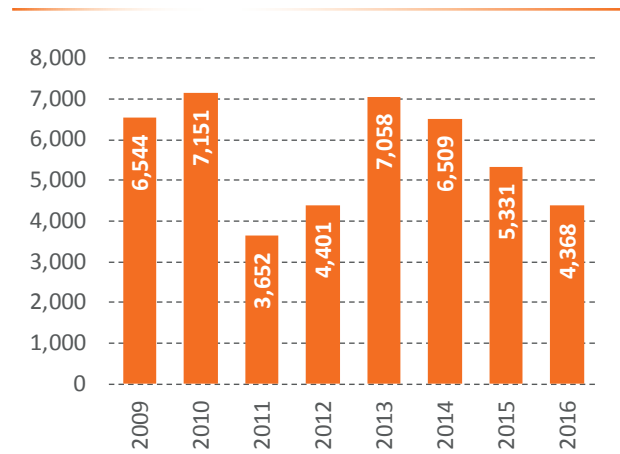
FIG. 88: Number of detected illegal border crossings on the Black Sea route, 2012-2017



* 2017 data covers January – mid-September only.

Source: Frontex.

FIG. 89: Trend in the number of persons detected using false travel documents to enter the EU by air, 2009-2016



Source: Frontex.

mode of travel, offering high chances of success and low risk of detection. However, it tends to be more expensive than other smuggling methods.¹¹⁹

Over the last few years, official detections of migrants smuggled by air into the European Union using false travel documents have ranged between 3,500 and 7,000 per year, with a declining trend since 2013. Passports are the most frequently detected type of fraudulent document (air, land and sea routes combined), followed by visas, identity cards and residence permits. The type of document seems to vary according to country of issuance, and appears to fluctuate between years. In 2016, fraudulent French passports, Spanish and Italian identity cards and residence permits, and Polish visas were frequently detected.¹²⁰

In the EU, most detections of fraudulent documents take place on air routes. Large international transit airports are particularly at risk, but smaller airports with fewer officials, often not adequately trained in document control, may also be targeted.

Changes to regularly scheduled flight routes may directly impact detections of smuggling activities. Just as the opening of a new air route can bring about smuggling, cancellations can have the opposite effect. For example, the cancellation of direct services between Lagos and Rome in March 2015 brought detections on this route to a halt.¹²¹

Smuggling of migrants within Europe

Smuggling of migrants has also been widely documented within Europe. Migrants and refugees not only resort to the services of smugglers to cross into the European Union, but also to move within the EU or to countries which do not belong to the Schengen area of free movement. The Western Balkans route is the main one, but there are also several others, which will be discussed together in the section 'secondary movements'.

THE WESTERN BALKANS ROUTE

Departing from Greece and Bulgaria, the Western Balkans route leaves European Union territory and then enters it again in Hungary, Croatia or Romania. Depending largely on the changing border control measures adopted by the countries along the way, the route passes northward through the countries of the Western Balkans.

For migrants arriving in Greece and Bulgaria along the Eastern Mediterranean route, the Western Balkans route is the natural continuation towards northern Europe, the intended destination for most refugees and migrants. While the vast majority resort to smugglers to move from Turkey to Greece - at least for the sea crossing - it is difficult to determine how many are smuggled along the Western Balkans route. Moreover, regional migrants on their way to central and northern Europe also use this route, and in fact undertook the majority of detected irregular border crossings there until the first quarter of 2015.

Although there is no data on the share of migrants who cover the Western Balkans route or part of it with the help of smugglers, the services of smugglers are perceived to be less needed there than along the Mediterranean routes, and many migrants cross the borders on their own. This seems to be particularly true for the passage between

Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.¹²²

The exact travel routes vary and are subject to sudden and dramatic fluctuations according to changes in legislation and border controls in the countries concerned. According to Frontex, in 2016, the main migratory movement across the Western Balkans flowed from Greece to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, into Serbia and towards the Serbian-Hungarian border. Many irregular entry detections also took place at the Romanian and Bulgarian land borders with Serbia; mostly involving migrants who had illegally entered Bulgaria from Turkey and were trying to reach other EU countries.¹²³

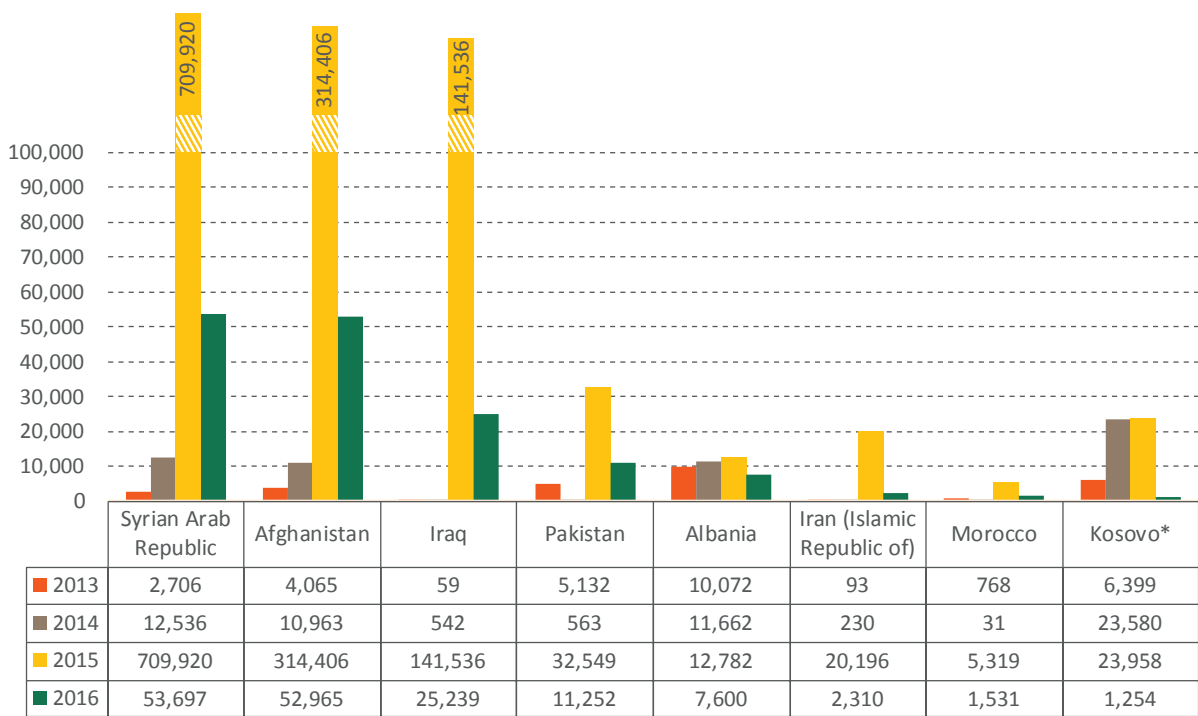
In Greece, the main exit point prior to the significant reduction in the flow along this route in 2016 was Idomeni, on the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.¹²⁴ Migrants would then reach the small town of Gevgelija in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and make their way through the country to the border with Serbia. Once in Serbia, many migrants headed north, to the border with Hungary. The Serbian-Hungarian border has been a key gateway from the Western Balkans into the European Union for several years. In spite of enhanced border controls, enforcement measures and legislative changes put into place by Hungary since 2014, Frontex reported in 2017 that the high pressure at this border still persisted.¹²⁵

Irregular border crossings undertaken by Albanians trying to irregularly enter Greece comprise a very different, minor flow. This crossing is often carried out with fraudulent travel documents; a method that implies the use of some smuggling services.¹²⁶ Detections along this route declined from nearly 9,000 in 2015 to just over 5,000 in 2016.¹²⁷

In terms of magnitude, the use of the Western Balkans route skyrocketed in 2015, reflecting the dramatic increases in arrivals along the Eastern Mediterranean route. The number of detections of irregular border crossings at the EU borders with Western Balkans countries reached more than 764,000. This number - unprecedented and beyond comparison with any previous period - was mainly determined by the influx of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi migrants and refugees travelling along the Eastern Mediterranean route.¹²⁸ By 2016, these detections had decreased to just over 130,000; far lower than the year before, but high compared to the years prior to 2015.¹²⁹

The citizenship composition among migrants travelling along the Western Balkans route has considerably changed over the past few years. Arrivals from the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Iraq dominated in 2015 and

FIG. 90: Number of people detected for illegal border crossings between border crossing points, by main origins, reported by Western Balkan and neighbouring EU Member States, 2013-2016*



* The reference to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

Source: Frontex, Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis, 2017.

2016. In 2014, however, there were more irregular border crossings by people originating within the region, such as Kosovars and Albanians.¹³⁰ Many Pakistanis also use the Western Balkans route.

Women and children appear to comprise a significant share of the migratory flows passing through the Balkans. A situation assessment undertaken by UN Women in 2015^g found that in November 2015, women comprised some 18 per cent and children 24 per cent of migrants, with some minor variations depending on their national origins. The same assessment also found that the shares of women increased in the course of 2015.¹³¹

There is also a considerable number of unaccompanied or separated children within the Western Balkans flow. Statistics from Bulgaria reveal that 2,768 unaccompanied or separated children applied for asylum in that country in 2016; most of them from Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.¹³² In Serbia, the number of unaccompanied minors registered between January and July

g The assessment included a literature review, in-depth interviews with officials of relevant governments, international organizations and NGOs, as well as semi-structured interviews with nearly 30 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan in reception and transit centers in Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

2015 exceeded 4,000 people; also there, the vast majority were from the same three origin countries.¹³³

According to a survey conducted by IOM between October 2015 and March 2016 in Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia and Hungary, the average Syrian respondent was 29 years old, the majority of respondents were male (76 per cent) and travelled with a group (86 per cent; more than three quarters with family). The average Afghan respondent was younger (average: 24 years) and even more likely to be male, whereas Iraqis were of similar average age to Syrians and also highly likely to be male.¹³⁴

The Western Balkans countries do report detections of fraudulent travel document use, though the prevalence is relatively low. In 2016, there were 855 such cases, most of them carried out by persons from the region.¹³⁵ Europol has reported the use of counterfeit documents to travel along the Western Balkan route, and the dismantlement of a document counterfeiting activity in Albania. The main suspect, who was running the print shop, received orders from migrant smuggling networks to produce false documents. The documents were delivered via small parcels and couriers, and provided to irregular migrants in Greece.¹³⁶

Smugglers facilitating the passage from Greece to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and onward to Serbia often share a citizenship with their clients. Afghans, Pakistanis and nationals of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa reportedly operate along those routes. There are reports of well-structured smuggling groups operating along this route. In 2016, the Hungarian Police dismantled a large, multinational criminal group that smuggled migrants from Serbia through Hungary and finally to Austria. The group smuggled between 30 and 100 migrants per journey, using several minivans and a large number of drivers who worked in shifts. The smugglers sent vehicles in advance on the highways, before the actual transportation process, to identify police presence and to alert the actual drivers. A financial investigation into the crime group's illegal activities revealed that large amounts of generated profits had been transferred to Afghanistan, where it was invested into real estate businesses.¹³⁷

While deaths along the Western Balkans route are relatively rare, they do occur. According to IOM data, 27 migrants died along the Western Balkans route in 2015 and 2016.¹³⁸ Moreover, in August 2015, the bodies of 71 migrants from the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Afghanistan were found in an abandoned truck alongside an Austrian motorway.¹³⁹ Although it is not clear whether the migrants had moved along the Western Balkans route, the case still illustrates the risks migrants face and the smugglers' unscrupulous behaviour in their hunt for profits.

Women and children, traveling without male family members, depending on smugglers, may be at increased risk of sexual exploitation or trafficking. The same applies to unaccompanied minors. Women and girls may also suffer sex and gender-based violence en route, as well as physical harm from robbery or police brutality.¹⁴⁰ Migrants and refugees travelling across the Western Balkans, including those assisted by smugglers, may also be victims of human rights violations by some national authorities of the different countries along the route.^h

Secondary movements across the European Union

In the context of the European Union migration discourse, the term 'secondary movements' encompasses travel within the EU undertaken either by people who entered the EU territory irregularly with no intention of

^h The European Court of Human Rights has found different countries along this route to be in breach of the ECHR in connection with the detention of asylum seekers. See, for instance, application no. 10816/10, judgment of 20 September 2011, application no. 13058/11, and application no. 13457/11, judgments of 23 October 2012.

applying for asylum, or by asylum seekers who choose to ignore the obligation under Dublin regulations to stay in the first country of arrival - often just a transit - and move further to lodge an asylum application in their country of choice. The arrival country, where an asylum seeker first entered the EU, is normally responsible for assessing that person's application for international protection. Asylum seekers should remain in their arrival country until the refugee status determination procedure has been completed.ⁱ

The 'Dublin system' operates on the assumption that, as the asylum laws and practices of the EU States are based on the same common standards, asylum seekers enjoy similar levels of protection in all EU Member States. But in reality, asylum legislation and practice vary greatly from country to country. This, together with other factors determining the migrant's choice to move to another destination country - such as the presence of family members or diaspora communities - push many asylum seekers to abscond during the asylum procedures and to continue their journey, often only a few days after having submitted their application.

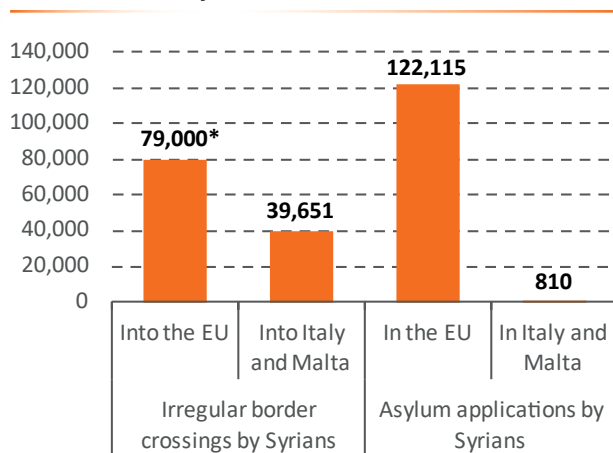
Some asylum seekers resort to the services of smugglers to move irregularly across Europe. When smugglers are involved, their role tends to differ from what is observed along the smuggling routes leading into Europe. When it comes to secondary movements, it appears that the role of smugglers often includes the provision of fraudulent documents rather than transportation.¹⁴¹

Secondary movements reached an unprecedented volume in 2015, in the wake of the massive increases in arrivals in Greece, as well as sustained high levels of arrivals in Italy.¹⁴² In 2016, the level of secondary movements remained high. Border control and enforcement measures seem to have reduced the visibility of some flows. There may also have been some displacement of flows.¹⁴³

It is not possible to determine how many migrants and refugees had their journeys facilitated by smugglers. However, a comparison between data on irregular arrivals and asylum application statistics can indicate where secondary movements take place within the EU. The total number

ⁱ This regime was introduced in 2003 by the Dublin Convention; later replaced by the Dublin II Regulation and amended in 2013 with the adoption of Dublin III Regulation. The aim was to establish criteria to determine which State is responsible for examining an asylum application. The criteria for establishing responsibility run, in order of priority, from family considerations, to recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly. For more details, see European Commission, DG Migration and Home Affairs, *Country responsible for asylum application (Dublin)*, online briefing.

FIG. 91: Comparison of the number of irregular border crossings and asylum applications by Syrians in the EU and in Italy/Malta, 2014



* Approximately.

Source: European Commission.

and distribution of asylum seekers in the EU-28 suggest that many do not apply for asylum in their first country of entry, but in another. Some others do apply for asylum upon arrival, but soon afterwards move on to another European country. The data on Syrian arrivals in Italy and Malta is illustrative (see figure).

Another indicator of intra-EU secondary movements by asylum seekers is the data about ‘Dublin requests.’^j In cases where a member state has indications that an asylum seeker has transited through another country, the member state can submit such a request in order to assess which country should adjudicate the asylum application. An analysis of recent Dublin requests shows that secondary movements usually occur between countries of asylum located at Schengen external borders and northern European countries.

The joint police operation ‘Mos Maiorum’ was carried out in October 2014, with the goal of identifying the link between irregular EU external border crossings and secondary movements of irregular migrants within the EU and the Schengen area. 26 Member States and one Schengen Associate Country, Switzerland, participated. Almost half of the 19,234 irregular migrants detected during the operation were apprehended either at EU internal borders between Member States or inland. Syrian citizenship was by far the most frequently detected (2,459), followed by Eritrean (951) and Afghan (758).

j Although a Dublin request does not necessarily mean that the asylum seeker had really submitted an application for international protection in another country, in most of the cases the request corresponds to a previous application.

Most detections at internal borders occurred at the borders of Germany (977), Austria (480), the United Kingdom (182), France (176) and Hungary (145).¹⁴⁴

There is evidence that some migrants and asylum seekers are smuggled across Europe. Smugglers can be found at railway stations, markets, squares and even reception centres for asylum seekers in large European cities serving as smuggling hubs for secondary movements within Europe.¹⁴⁵

Migrants are also smuggled between Malta and Italy. RMMS reports that a boat trip from Malta to Italy cost around US\$1,100 in 2013. Sometimes migrants use a fake passport or someone’s passport, which they then post back once they reached mainland Europe.¹⁴⁶

The passage from France to the United Kingdom is undertaken either by boat, on inflatable dinghies or by lorry. In April 2016, UNICEF reported that smugglers charged between £4,000 and £5,500 per person to cross the English Channel – a higher price than ever before.¹⁴⁷

Dangerous travel conditions are reported along many intra-European smuggling routes. Migrants may hide in lorries transporting goods, in very little space and with insufficient ventilation. Moreover, according to Interpol and Europol, irregular migrants are vulnerable to exploitation by criminals and criminal networks both prior to and after their arrival in the EU. They may be at a higher risk of experiencing labour or sexual exploitation, or they may be forced to serve as drug mules or to recruit and/or smuggle other migrants, especially if they contracted debt to pay for their travels.¹⁴⁸ There have also been reports of violence and exploitation in improvised ‘camps’ where migrants reside temporarily while waiting for onward transportation.¹⁴⁹

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