



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

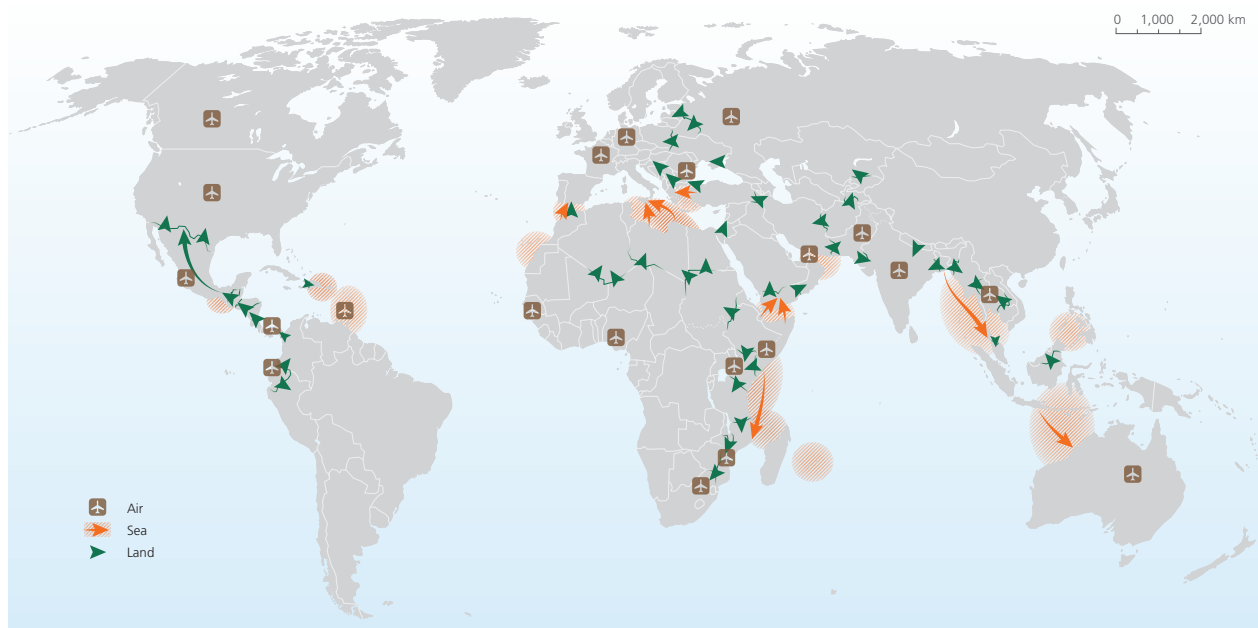
GLOBAL STUDY ON
**SMUGGLING
OF MIGRANTS**
2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

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

Migrants are smuggled in all regions of the world

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

Smuggling of migrants is a big business with high profits

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

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

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

Supply and demand

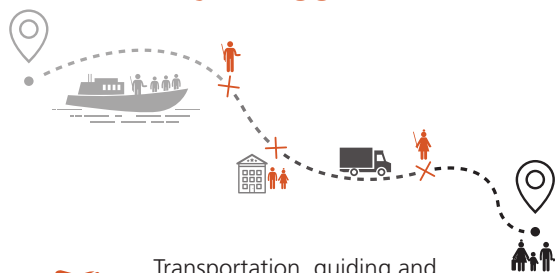
Smuggling of migrants follows the same dynamics of other transnational organized crime markets. It is driven by a demand and a supply of smuggling services to circumvent

Factors determining the demand for smuggling



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

Services supplied by smugglers



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

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

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

Routes change

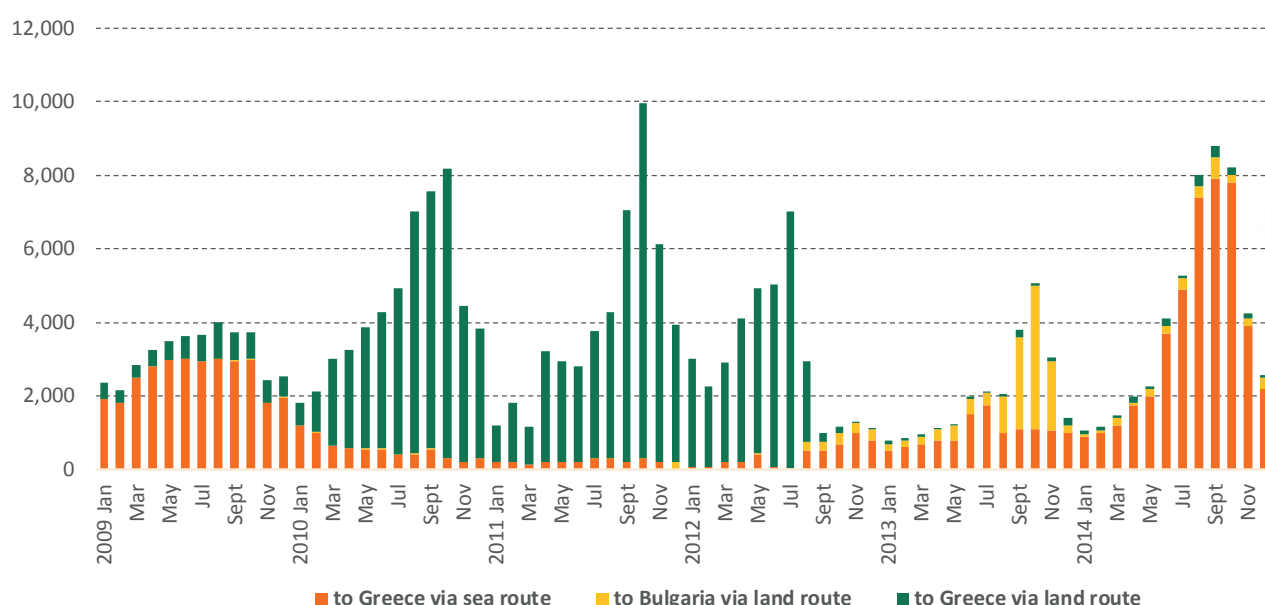
Geography, border control, migration policy in destination countries, smugglers' connections across countries and

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

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

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

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



Source: Frontex.

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

Hubs are stable

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

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

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

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

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

The organization of migrant smuggling

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

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

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

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

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

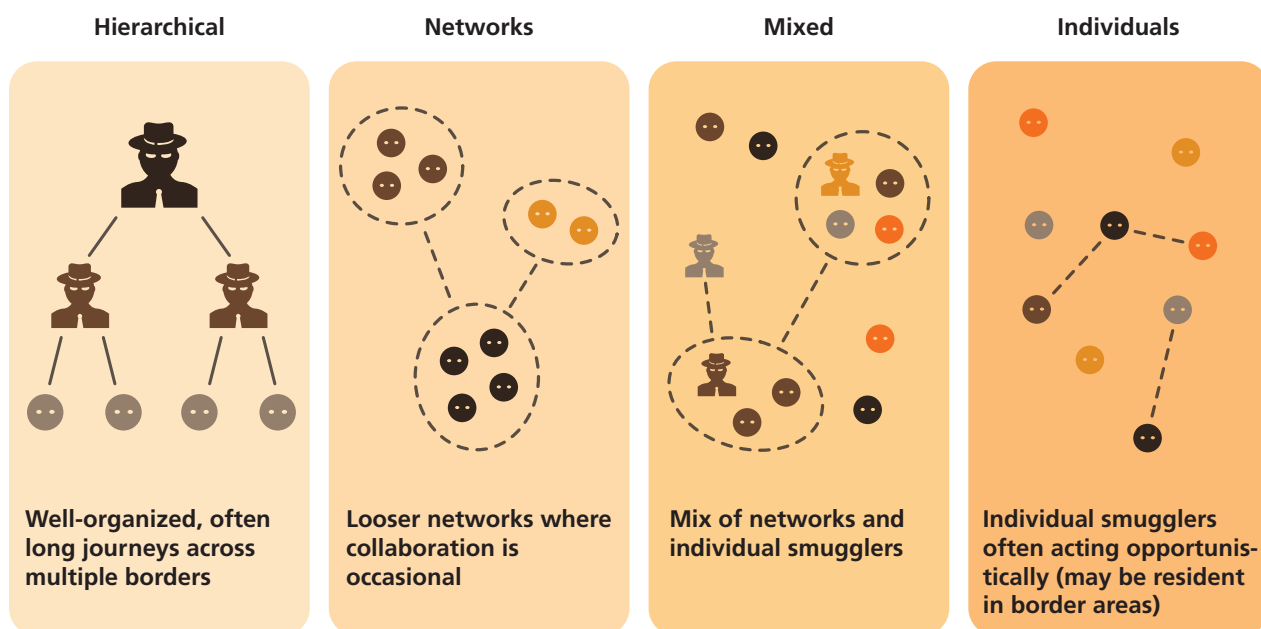
Smugglers, other criminal organizations and corruption

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

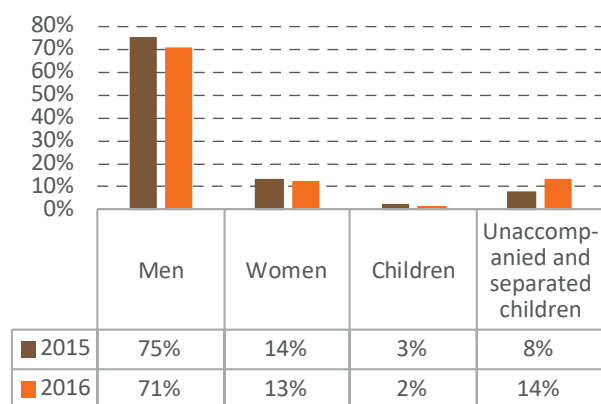
Many smuggling networks engage in systematic corruption at most levels; from petty corruption at individual border control points to grand corruption at higher levels of government. Corrupt practices linked to migrant smuggling have been reported along nearly all the identified routes.

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

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



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



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

less commonly reported among other groups of smuggled migrants.

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

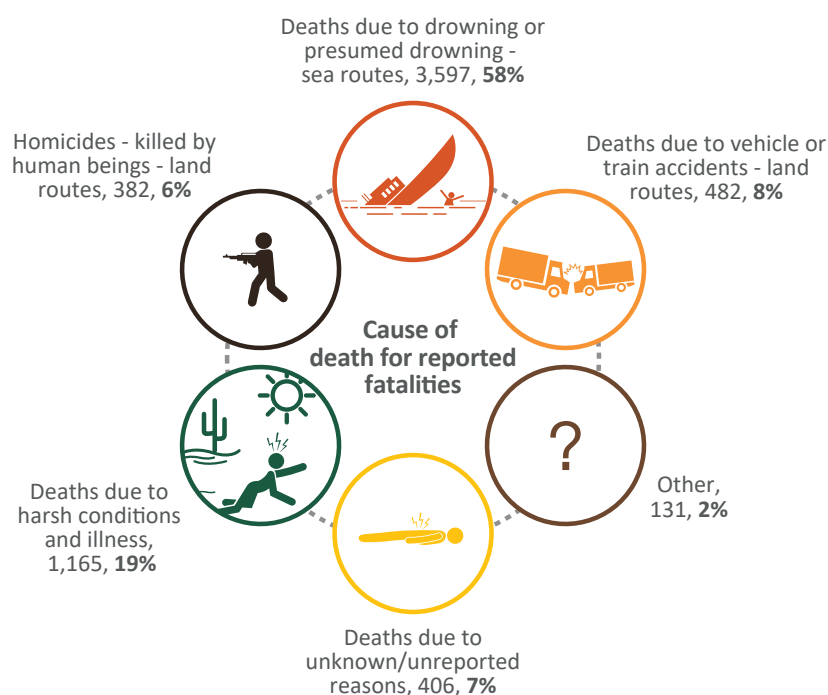
Europe and the land routes towards North America, though it may also be a significant concern elsewhere.

Migrant smuggling can be deadly

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

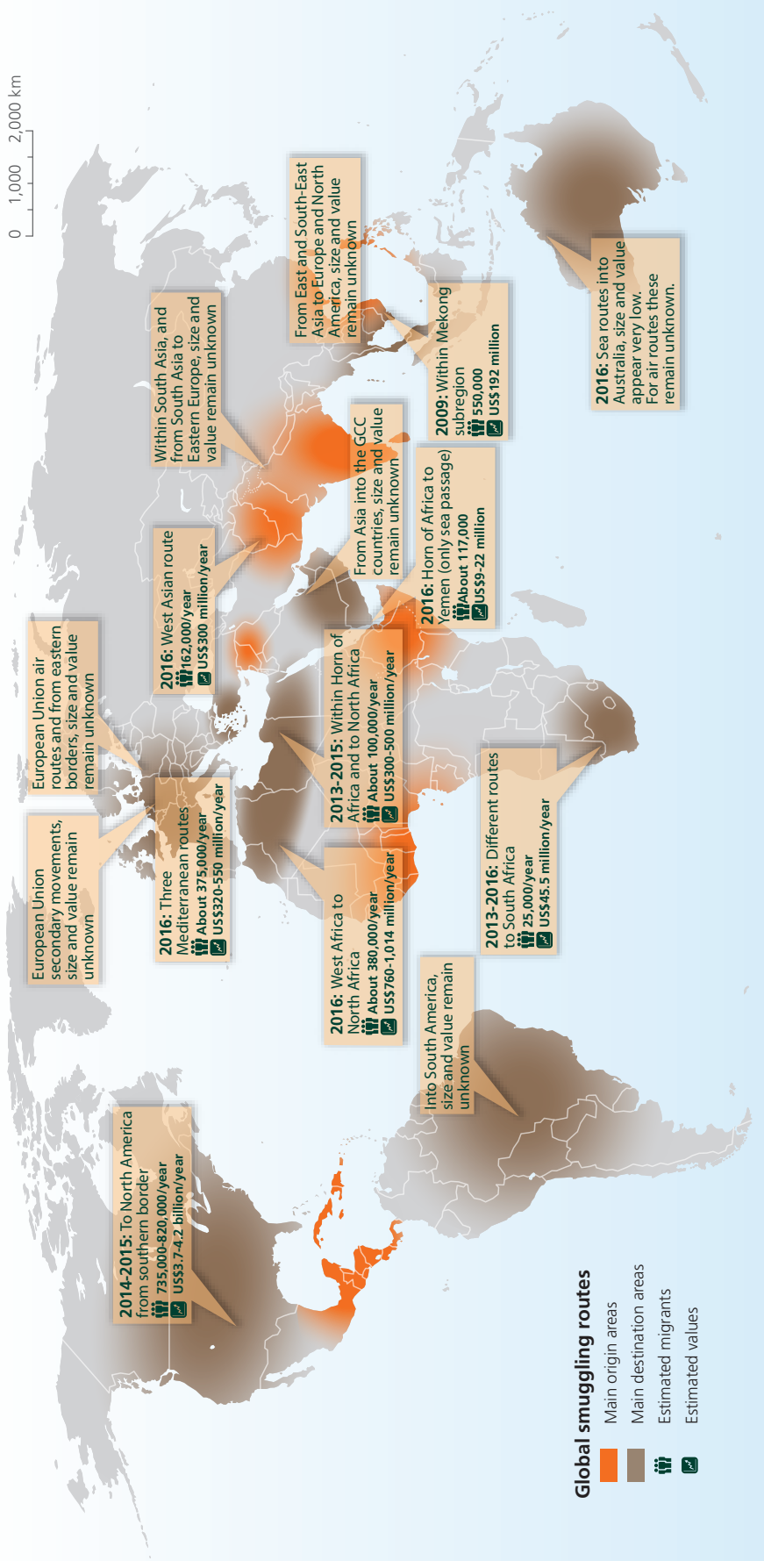
In addition to fatalities, smuggled migrants are also vulnerable to a range of other forms of crime. Some of the frequently reported types faced by smuggled migrants include violence, rape, theft, kidnapping, extortion and trafficking in persons. Such violations have been reported along all the smuggling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

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



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

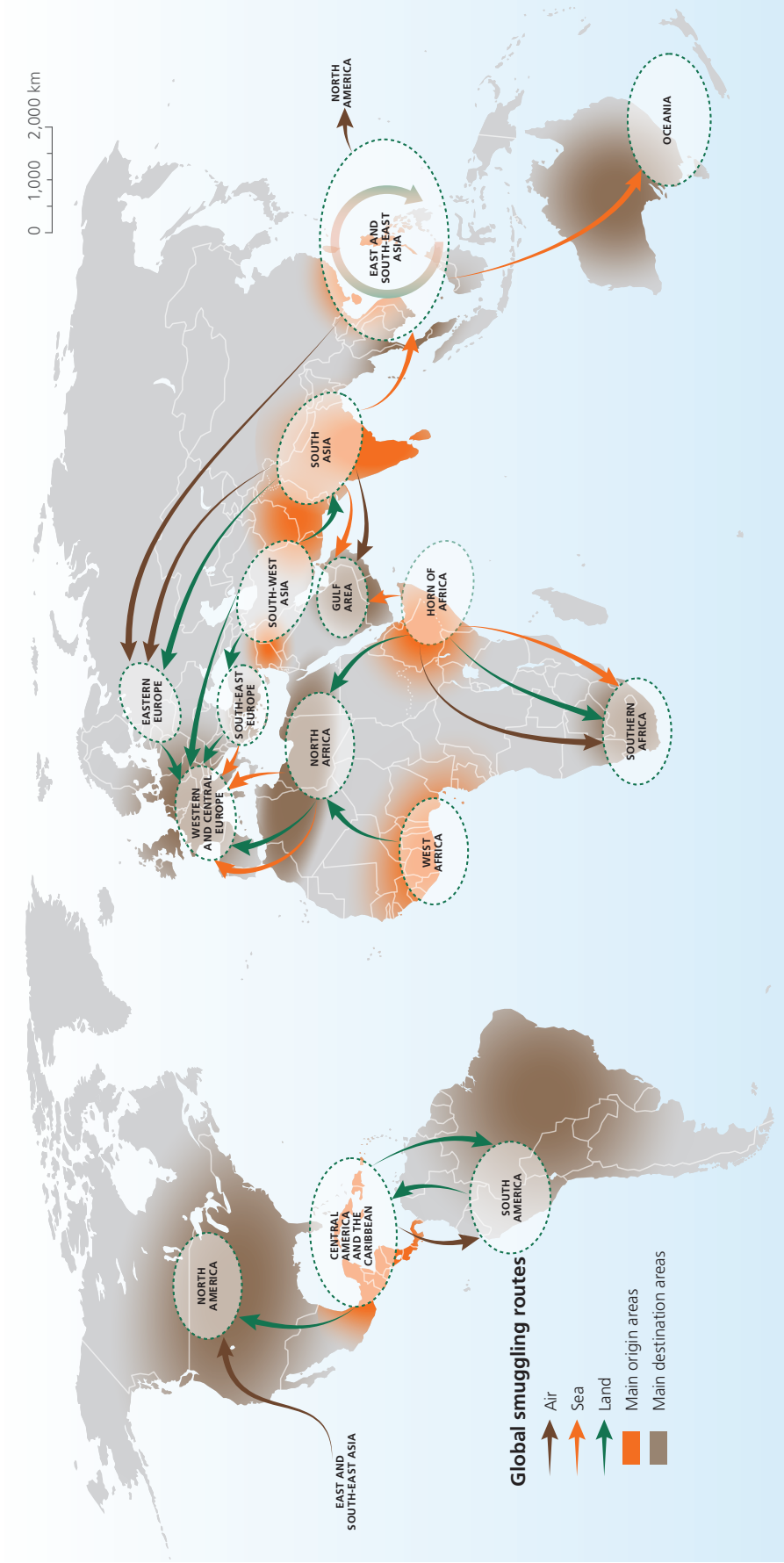
Estimated magnitude and value of the major smuggling routes discussed in this study



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by the parties. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Source: UNODC

Major smuggling routes discussed in this study



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.

Source: UNODC

Policy implications

- This first UNODC *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants* presents a wealth of information on the different manifestations of this crime and its harm to migrants and states. While many information gaps remain, the knowledge compiled in this Study has important implications for policies and programmes.
 - The study shows that smuggling of migrants is a transnational crime which generates significant economic returns. Among its consequences are thousands of migrants who are killed, tortured and exploited every year. The United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, is the only internationally agreed legal instrument designed to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants. The Protocol also reiterates the importance of protecting migrants' rights. Ratifying or acceding to the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol, and ensuring full implementation, including the defining element of 'financial and other material benefit,'^a are vital first steps to effectively address the crime and protect migrants.
 - The increasing numbers of unaccompanied and separated children among smuggled migrants on some routes pose great challenges to children's rights and wellbeing. Institutions providing assistance to migrants as well as law enforcement and migration authorities need to be equipped and trained to address the particular vulnerabilities among children who are smuggled and to guarantee the best interest of the child.
 - Increased border enforcement efforts in geographically limited areas often result in displacement of smuggling routes to different borders, smuggling methods or to other routes. If applied in isolation these measures do not reduce the number of smuggled migrants or the size of the smuggling problem. Only policies that integrate different types of interventions and broaden the geographical spectrum to include countries of origin, transit, and destination can be successful in the long term. Targeting programmes to prevent migrant smuggling in smuggling hubs can be particularly effective since these hubs are more stable than routes.
 - A holistic approach to counter smuggling of migrants needs to take into account not only the geography of the crime, but also its different contributing factors. Smuggling of migrants is determined by a mix of demand and supply elements and requires a comprehensive strategy which recognizes the complexity of these factors and is guided by a knowledge-based approach.
 - Limiting the demand for migrant smuggling can be achieved by broadening the possibilities for regular migration and increasing the accessibility of regular travel documents and procedures. Making regular migration opportunities more accessible in origin countries and refugee camps, including the expansion of migration and asylum bureaux in origin areas, would reduce opportunities for smugglers.
 - Some smugglers actively recruit migrants in their communities by misinforming about the risks and the prospects in destination countries. Raising awareness in communities of origin, and particularly in refugee camps, about the dangers involved in smuggling may also help reduce the demand for smuggling services.
 - Addressing the supply of migrant smuggling services requires different approaches for different profiles of smugglers. The provision of alternative livelihood programmes to communities that rely on income from migrant smuggling activity can reduce the economic drivers that attract small-scale smugglers to engage in the smuggling business.
 - Tackling smuggling networks in their entirety requires improved regional and international cooperation and national criminal justice responses. These policies and interventions can be more potent with financial sanctions such as effective mechanisms to confiscate the proceeds of the crime. Like other organized crime activities, smuggling of migrants is motivated by a hunt for profits, so cutting the financial benefits may serve the purpose of reducing the crime.
 - Migrants and refugees are extremely interconnected in origin countries, at destinations and sometimes also en route. Engagements with prominent actors in the private sector, such as telecommunications and social media corporations, could support migrants to have access to adequate information on first aid, risks along the routes, ruthless smugglers and other potentially lifesaving information.
 - Corruption at borders and within consular and migration authorities is one of the enablers of smuggling of migrants. Combatting smuggling of migrants can only be successful if anti-corruption mechanisms are enforced in these institutions.
 - This study has only scratched the surface of the many ways in which migrant smugglers rely on corrupt practices to commit their crime. Further research of broad geographical scope is needed to establish a sound evidence base for future interventions to tackle these multifaceted linkages.
 - Data collection, analysis and research on smuggling of migrants remain at their infancy. In order to build a solid international body of knowledge to support policy making in the area of smuggling of migrants, there is a need to improve data collection systems at the national, regional and international levels. In particular, it is important to maintain adequate administrative records, conduct appropriate surveys, apply statistical methodologies and qualitative studies to monitor migrant smuggling patterns and routes, as well as the profiles of smugglers and their modus operandi.
- ^a A clarification on 'financial and other material benefit' is provided in a text box on pages 18-19.

