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GLOBAL STUDY ON  
**SMUGGLING  
OF MIGRANTS**

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ASIA

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Research

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Migrant smuggling is widely documented in South and South-West Asia, a vast and diverse region stretching from Syria and Afghanistan to Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. Several irregular migration and migrant smuggling routes depart from and cross the region. The routes departing from South Asia and from South-West Asia often converge and ultimately head to Europe, to the Gulf countries, Australia and North America.

This chapter starts by presenting the West Asian route, leading migrants and refugees from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan to Turkey. A

large number of these migrants try to join the Eastern Mediterranean route to Greece and the European Union. A second section describes the different routes used for the smuggling of South Asians into Europe or to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. A third section analyses the routes from South and South-West Asia towards North America. These routes are relatively well documented, but the flows are smaller in magnitude than those towards Europe. A final section considers smuggling to Australia. While these routes were sizable a few years ago, they have since diminished. As for most routes described in this study, the individual routes should be considered as indicative, as most migrants' actual journeys vary considerably according to a myriad of factors, such as resources, time available, travel group, visa regimes, border security, terrain, weather, and so on.

### THE WEST ASIAN ROUTE TO EUROPE



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Smuggling from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan to Europe is well documented.<sup>1</sup> In recent years, Europe appears to have become an increasingly attractive destination for many South-West Asians. According to recent field research in Pakistan, a popular route runs from Afghanistan to Pakistan via the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey, joining the Eastern Mediterranean route to Europe.<sup>2</sup>

#### Profile of migrants:

Mainly Afghan migrants and refugees smuggled both as individuals and as families. Pakistani and Iranian migrants, mainly young males, are also smuggled along this route. In recent years, Syrians, including many families.

#### Human cost:

Some fatalities, mainly due to the harshness of the weather

and terrain. Risks of exploitation and violence in origin, transit and destination countries.

#### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Smugglers in organizing roles often share citizenship with the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

#### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers who facilitate short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

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

Migrants and refugees are smuggled along land routes from South-West Asia towards Europe. For many Afghans,

their first transit country is the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas others travel first via Pakistan. They enter Pakistan almost exclusively by land, either on foot or by bus.<sup>3</sup> In Pakistan, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta are transit cities for people heading towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. Once in Iran, most Afghan and Pakistani migrants head for Tehran.<sup>4</sup>

From the Islamic Republic of Iran, migrants and refugees are smuggled into Turkey from far north-western Iran by crossing the mountainous border area. Once in Turkey, they are taken towards Turkey's western cities, in particular Istanbul and Izmir, aboard buses and minivans. Often, smugglers provide forged travel documents to the migrants in order to avoid problems in case of routine police controls.<sup>5</sup>

As of 2011-2012, many Syrians have also joined the flow of other South-West Asians into Turkey. Most Syrians cross the border into south-central Turkey, from Syria's Idlib governorate, west of the city of Aleppo. They then head towards the Turkish west coast to join the Eastern Mediterranean route, or to Istanbul and onwards to Turkey's land borders with Bulgaria and Greece.

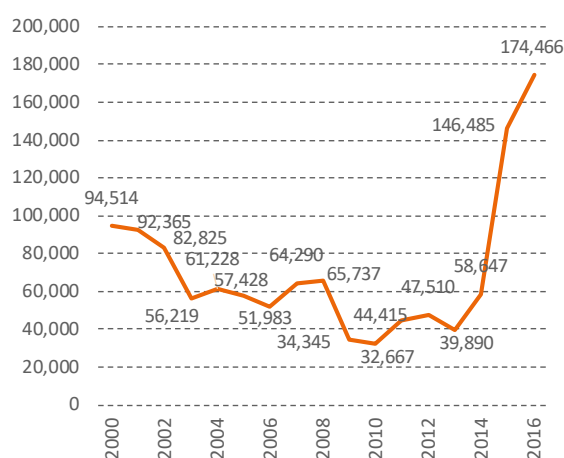
Some citizens South-West Asian countries are smuggled by air to Europe. Pakistani, Iranian and Iraqi migrants and refugees are smuggled by air to European destinations either directly from their country of origin or transiting through major airports in Europe, Africa, the Middle East or other parts of Asia.<sup>6</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South-West Asia to Europe

Turkey is usually the last transit country for migrants and refugees travelling by land routes from South-West Asia before reaching the European Union. It is also a destination country for some Iranians and Iraqis.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of specific data on migrant smuggling, Turkish data on irregular entries and exits will be considered. However, caution should be exercised in estimating the magnitude of migrant smuggling based on such data, since it is often unclear to what extent irregular migration is facilitated by smugglers.

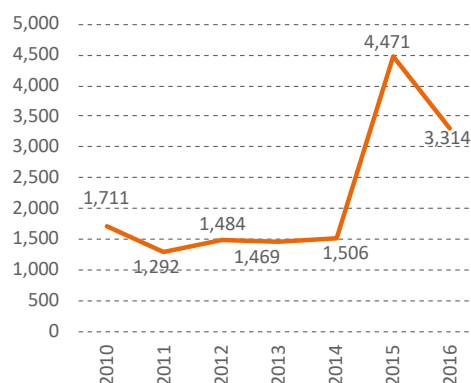
The Turkish Directorate General of Migration Management, within the Ministry of Interior, collects data about irregular migrants detected in the country. Their data show that there was a rapid and steep increase in apprehensions of irregular migrants in 2015 and 2016. Compared to 2016, a slight increase was recorded in 2017, when the number of apprehensions of irregular migrants was 175,752.<sup>8</sup> Research on irregular migration to Turkey

FIG. 53: Number of irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey per year, 2000-2016



Source: Turkish Ministry of Interior.

FIG. 54: Trend in the number of migrant smugglers detected in Turkey, 2010-2016



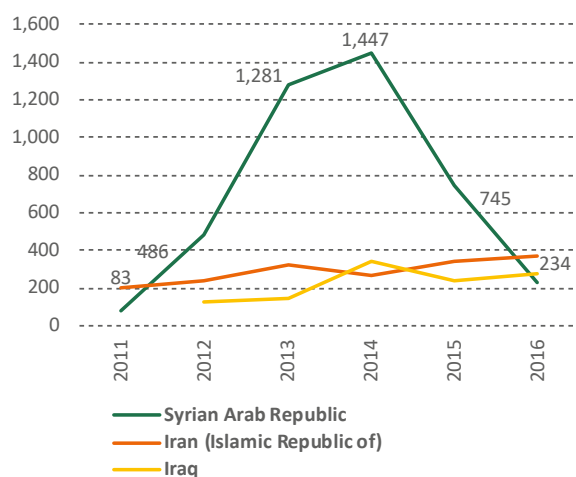
Source: Turkish Ministry of Interior.

carried out for the International Organization for Migration in 2012 suggested that about half of the apprehended irregular migrants travelled to Turkey with the assistance of migrant smugglers.<sup>9</sup>

Very few irregular border crossings are detected at Turkey's eastern border with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is partly due to stricter monitoring along Turkey's western borders.<sup>10</sup> The number of detected smugglers in Turkey increased sharply in 2015 (see figure).

Migrant smugglers are usually involved in supplying fraudulent documents for the purpose of entering the European Union or Schengen area countries. In 2016, more than 7,000 persons were denied entry at EU land and sea borders; some 4,400 at air borders. People claiming to come from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic were among the most commonly

FIG. 55: Trends in detections of document fraudsters claiming to originate from selected South-West Asian countries at external EU borders,\* 2011-2016



\* 2011 data for Iraq is not available as Iraq was not among the top ten citizenships detected that year.

Source: Frontex.

detected citizenships. The number of detected Syrian document fraudsters spiked in 2013 and 2014, for then to decline rapidly. Detections of Iranian and Iraqi document fraudsters have remained broadly stable over the last few years.<sup>a</sup>

South-West Asians may be smuggled to Western Europe not only by land but also by air, directly from the country of origin or from countries along this route. Data about smuggled migrants could only be found for the United Kingdom for a limited period. Between 2010 and 2013, the number of South-West Asian migrants smuggled to the United Kingdom ranged around 1,400 per year.<sup>11</sup>

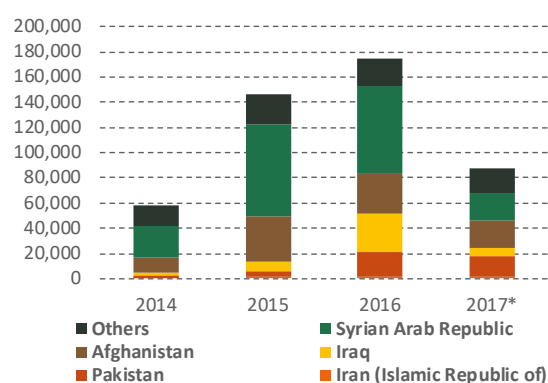
### The profile of smuggled migrants

The citizenship profiles of Middle Eastern and South-West Asian irregular arrivals in Turkey have changed considerably in recent years. Not only has the number and share of citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic among irregular migrants fluctuated greatly, but so has the number of Afghans, Iraqis and Pakistanis.

For Afghan nationals, their final destination largely depends on the wealth of the migrants and their families. Migrants with limited social and economic resources tend to be smuggled to neighbouring countries, whereas those from wealthier families are smuggled to destinations fur-

<sup>a</sup> The data only shows the number of people claiming to have a particular citizenship who have been detected using fraudulent documents upon entry into the EU or Schengen area. Some may have presented counterfeit passports or identity documents, whereas other may have tried to use fraudulently obtained visas or residence permits.

FIG. 56: Trend in the number of South-West Asian citizens among irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey, 2014-2017\*



\* 2017 data only covers the period 1 January-15 August.

Source: Turkey Ministry of Interior.

ther away.<sup>12</sup> Afghan migrants and refugees are smuggled both as individuals and as families. Those smuggled individually are mainly young men who intend to settle in the destination country. Recent research has indicated that an increasing number of Afghan families are on the move.<sup>13</sup>

The number of unaccompanied minors smuggled from Afghanistan to Europe – most of whom are boys – is significant and growing.<sup>14</sup> According to a 2014 study on Afghan unaccompanied minors travelling to Europe, children who engage in unaccompanied travel are usually between 13 and 17 years old, and most of them are neither the only male nor the eldest child in the family.<sup>15</sup> Interviews with Afghan migrants already in Europe have also indicated that there may be a relation between the age of the migrant and the fact that decision to migrate is not a personal choice, but rather a family decision. The younger the migrants, the more likely that the decision to migrate was taken as a household coping strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Iranians who are smuggled to Europe – or Australia or North America – are mainly male, as are most Iraqi migrants. A relatively large number of unaccompanied minors, most of them male teenagers, have also been detected among Iraqi smuggled migrants arriving in Europe via Turkey.<sup>17</sup> Pakistani smuggled migrants are also predominantly men, mostly aged between 18 and 30.<sup>18</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Smuggling networks operating from and in South-West Asia are usually loosely connected, informal and not strictly hierarchical. Different individuals and groups form flexible chains, where members can be easily replaced with little or no disruption to the network's activities.<sup>19</sup>

Individuals involved in migrant smuggling in South-West Asia generally do so casually, temporarily or on an ad hoc basis. They supplement other sources of income through migrant smuggling or get involved in it when opportunities arise.<sup>20</sup>

Smugglers operating along this route have strong linguistic, ethnic and cultural ties with the local communities and primarily originate from the border regions.<sup>21</sup> The vast majority of migrant smugglers operating along the routes departing from South-West Asia are adult males. According to a 2016 report by the Pakistani Investigative Agency, for example, 90 out of the 92 most wanted Pakistani migrant smugglers (or human traffickers) are males. More than half are between 30 and 49 years old.<sup>22</sup>

Most Afghan migrants appear to organize their journey step-by-step, relying on personal networks in each of the countries they cross.<sup>23</sup> They first rely on a local smuggler, who will arrange the first leg of the journey, namely the passage from Afghanistan to the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan. Local smugglers are often from the same village, neighbourhood or district of their clients, and are recommended to them by friends or relatives.<sup>24</sup> Local smugglers are often part of transnational networks, whereby the main smugglers manage the business from outside Afghanistan and local smugglers ('agents') recruit the clients and organise their journey in Afghanistan and in transit countries.<sup>25</sup>

In transit and destination areas, local smugglers and smuggler 'agents' are often nationals of the country where they operate. For instance, Pakistani migrants and refugees usually rely on Turkish or Greek smugglers to move from Turkey into Greece.<sup>26</sup> Local individuals and groups are also involved in the production and provision of fraudulent identity and travel documents to migrants and refugees.<sup>27</sup>

Sometimes, smugglers are migrants who were smuggled along the same route on which they operate. For instance, on the routes from western Turkey onwards to Greece and Bulgaria most smugglers are Afghans who were previously smuggled and are familiar with the region.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes, smuggled migrants become smugglers in their country of destination. In other cases, they remain in or return to transit countries, where they get involved in smuggling activities. Migrants stranded in transit countries may also participate in the smuggling of others to collect money to continue their journey to their intended destination.<sup>29</sup>

There is very limited information about the profile and organization of smugglers operating in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The available sources indicate that the smug-

gling of migrants in Iran is largely managed by local and loosely connected networks. A typical smuggling network consists of 3-4 smuggler 'organizers' and approximately 10 other smugglers involved in transporting smuggled migrants, producing fraudulent documents and laundering the profits.<sup>30</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Afghans enter Pakistan along two main routes. The first one departs from Kabul, passes through Jalalabad, crosses the border at the Torkham border crossing point and arrives in Peshawar, Pakistan. The second leaves from Kandahar - Afghanistan's second largest city - crosses the border at Chaman and leads into Pakistan's Balochistan region, in particular, its capital, Quetta.<sup>31</sup> Migrants and refugees crossing the border at Torkham do not necessarily engage smugglers as that portion of border is mountainous and difficult to patrol. Those travelling along the second route, instead, generally have their journey facilitated by smugglers.<sup>32</sup>

From Pakistan, migrants are smuggled through border crossing points along the land border with the Islamic Republic of Iran,<sup>33</sup> with many crossing the border near the Iranian city of Zahedan. From there, they continue north to the region near Mashhad, and onwards to Tehran.<sup>34</sup> An alternative route takes migrants and refugees to the south-western coast of Pakistan, from where they cross the border to Iranian coastal cities, before continuing to Shiraz and Tehran.<sup>35</sup>

Many Afghans are smuggled directly into the Islamic Republic of Iran from Afghanistan; often from the area around Herat. A survey of nearly 2,000 Afghans in European countries found that 58 per cent<sup>b</sup> had transited through only Iran and Turkey before reaching the European Union.<sup>36</sup> Smugglers in western Afghanistan move migrants in batches between 10 and 80 people either on foot or by car (or bus or truck) across the border into Iran.<sup>37</sup> These migrants then head directly to Tehran where migrants and refugees may find new smugglers and also work for some time to finance the next leg of their journey. The majority of Afghan nationals transiting through Iran travel without any documents.<sup>38</sup>

From Tehran, migrants and refugees travel to the mountainous areas near the cities of Urmia and Salmas, close to the Turkish border, usually by taxi in groups of two to five. Migrants and refugees smuggled along these routes

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b In addition, 6 per cent reported having departed from the Islamic Republic of Iran, indicating that they had lived there for some time prior to departure for Europe.

regroup there, before crossing into Turkey.<sup>39</sup> The border crossing is usually undertaken on foot in large groups of up to 1,000 people.<sup>40</sup> Two or more smugglers usually assist with the crossing, which takes 12-15 hours. More rarely, migrants and refugees are smuggled across the border in taxis, private cars or trucks. There are also reports of migrants and refugees using forged documents at the official border crossing points.<sup>41</sup>

Most movements from Iraq to Turkey are facilitated by smugglers.<sup>42</sup> Iraqis – particularly from Baghdad and north-western Iraq – are often smuggled across the border near the city of Zakho.<sup>43</sup> According to an IOM survey of Iraqi migrants and refugees who left Iraq in 2015 and are currently residing in Europe, most of them transited legally through Turkey and continued their journey irregularly to Europe.<sup>44</sup>

Once in Turkey, Van, Ağrı and Dogubeyazit are major transit points used to organize the rest of the trip through that country.<sup>45</sup> Migrants and refugees primarily use public transportation to reach the outskirts of Istanbul where they stay while waiting for the smugglers to organize their onward journey to Western Europe.<sup>46</sup>

People from the Syrian Arab Republic have undertaken the bulk of irregular entries into Turkey since 2013. They generally cross the border away from official border crossings, often in the area around the border village of Khirbet al-Joz, in Idlib governorate. It is not clear to what extent migrant smugglers are involved in those movements. A few others are smuggled by boat from the Syrian coastal cities of Latakia and Tartus to Turkey.<sup>47</sup>

Until a few years ago, Syrians could freely cross into Jordan and Lebanon. But between 2012 and 2015, Lebanon and Jordan partially or totally closed their border with the Syrian Arab Republic. As a result, a growing number of Syrians (and Palestinian refugees who have been living in Syria for years) have sought the assistance of migrant smugglers to reach the neighbouring countries.<sup>48</sup> Lebanon and Jordan have become increasingly significant transit countries for Syrian refugees. From there, some Syrians are smuggled by land or sea to Egypt and Turkey, whereas others fly to Cairo or Istanbul.<sup>49</sup>

With regard to prices, there are several different sources and estimates, and prices also seem to vary considerably. UNODC reported in 2015 that Afghan migrants seemed to pay, on average, US\$10,000 to be smuggled to western European countries, based on information from 2008-2014 from a range of different sources.<sup>50</sup> Other, more recent sources report lower fees for the journey to an unspecified destination in Europe, ranging between

\$4,000 and 6,000.<sup>51</sup> According to a 2016 survey conducted by IOM in the Balkans, the vast majority of Afghans travelling along the Western Balkans route paid \$1,000 to 5,000. Few reported having paid more than US\$5,000.<sup>52</sup> Smuggling by air from Afghanistan is more expensive, with the cost for a passport, visa and air tickets reportedly ranging between \$20,000 and 25,000.<sup>53</sup> Pakistani migrants and refugees reportedly pay a bit less than Afghans. Estimates suggest that smuggling fees for Pakistanis range between US\$3,000 and 8,000 for smuggling by land, whereas smuggling by air to Europe costs between \$12,000 and 18,000.<sup>54</sup> Recent field research involving migrants from Pakistan has shown that the average price for being smuggled to Germany is \$11,000, while smuggling to Sweden costs \$6,800. The same study found that the journey to Greece would cost \$4,000.<sup>55</sup>

Most of the time, these fees are not paid in one lump sum. Rather, they are the sum of fees charged and paid at each leg of the journey, so that particular land or sea crossings can cost between several hundred or a few thousand dollars each.<sup>56</sup> Every border has a specific price, and the payment is only effected upon successful crossing of the border.<sup>57</sup> South-West Asians often rely on the *hawala* money transfer system to pay the smuggling fees. Before departure, most Afghans leave an upfront deposit with a third-party guarantor, who will pay the smuggling fees either entirely or in instalments upon milestones en route. Smugglers with occasional and limited tasks seem to be paid cash by the migrants and refugees.<sup>58</sup> Sometimes, smuggling services include several attempts to enter a country. Sham marriages are also reportedly used to smuggle South-West Asian migrants to European countries.<sup>59</sup>

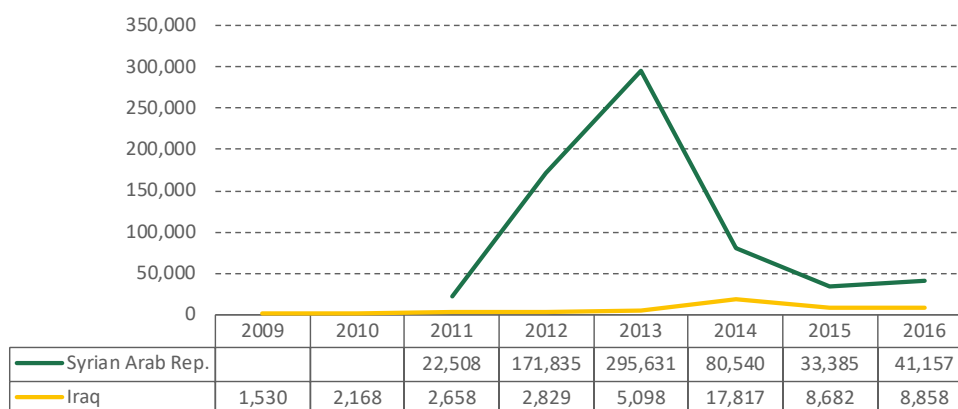
### The human cost

The land journey from South-West Asia to Turkey and Eastern Europe involves several other risks and difficulties for smuggled migrants. The Afghans travelling through Pakistan have to cross the dangerous Hindu Kush mountains and the insecure Nangarhar province.<sup>60</sup> The border between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey is also mountainous and difficult to cross in some areas. Many migrants and refugees are ill equipped to make this journey and some have died trying to cross the border in freezing temperatures.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, migrant surveys have revealed that those who cannot keep up with the walking pace of the smugglers may be beaten up or abandoned along the way.<sup>62</sup>

Migrants and refugees are also at risk of exploitation, violence and abuse by smugglers. In Afghanistan, delays in payment could lead to migrants and refugees being forced

## Syrians and Iraqis escaping conflict smuggled to neighbouring countries

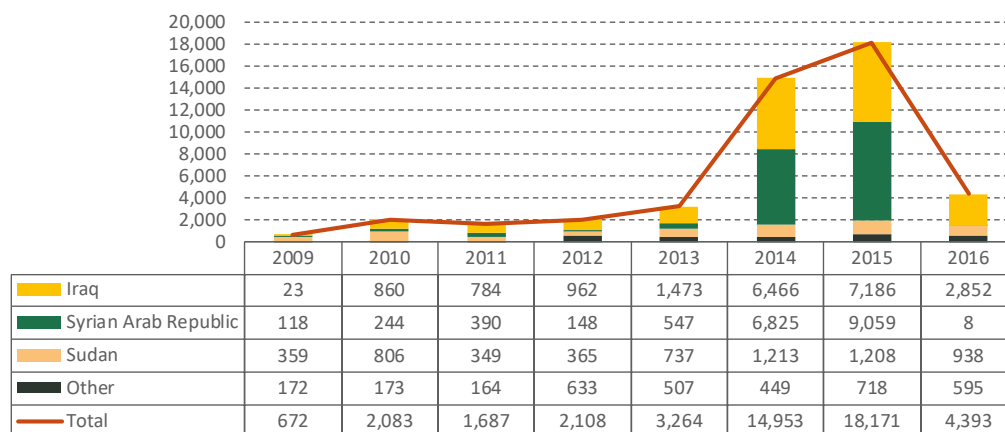
Trend in the numbers of arrivals of citizens of the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq in Jordan,\* 2009-2016



\* Not necessarily registered with UNHCR.

Source: UNHCR

## Asylum applications submitted in Lebanon per year, 2009-2016



Source: UNHCR.

UNHCR provides data on arrivals in Jordan from the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq. Until 2012, the Syria-Jordan border was open without restrictions. It can thus be assumed that Syrian citizens did not need migrant smugglers to cross into Jordan. However, since the eruption of conflict in Syria, previously open border crossings have been closed, and migrant smuggling is documented at the Syria-Jordan border, although the extent remains unclear.<sup>a</sup> The number of arrivals from the Syrian Arab Republic in Jordan peaked in 2013 at nearly 300,000, according to information from UNHCR.

As for the Iraq-Jordan border, Iraq has closed it several times since the beginning of the civil war in 2014. In 2015, Jordan closed the border, following a suicide attack on its forces. Migrant smuggling at this border is documented, but again its magnitude is difficult to assess.<sup>b</sup>

a European Commission, Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries, Case Study 1: Syria/Lebanon – Egypt - Italy*, 2015.

b Ibid.

Data about clandestine entry attempts into Lebanon could only be found for a few months in 2012 and 2013. Detections were extremely limited, ranging between 0 and 3 per month. Statistics about newly registered Syrian and Iraqi asylum-seekers as well as field research indicate that large numbers of Syrians and Iraqis migrate to Lebanon, and that many of them rely on migrant smugglers to enter the country.<sup>c</sup> The number of Syrian and Iraqi asylum applications in Lebanon grew sharply in 2014 and 2015, while the number of Syrian applications in particular decreased from more than 9,000 in 2015 to only eight in 2016.

<sup>c</sup> Ibid.; Achilli, L., *Tariq al-Euroba: Displacement Trends of Syrian Asylum Seekers to the EU*, MPC Research Report 2016/01, Migration Policy Centre, European University Institute, 2016.

to carry drugs, or they may end up in a situation of human trafficking.<sup>63</sup> In Pakistan, migrant interviews have revealed that many smugglers working as ‘agents’ run away with the money once a deposit has been paid.<sup>64</sup> Smuggled migrants also risk being captured and held hostage by criminal organizations operating along this route.<sup>65</sup>

According to a survey conducted by IOM in 2016 among Afghans in Calais, France, the majority of respondents reported incidents of detention and violence. A smaller group reported having food, money, phones, clothes and other personal belongings stolen. The perpetrators are often the smugglers or their affiliates, border control or police officers. Furthermore, several respondents recounted having been abducted for ransom by smugglers operating along this route.<sup>66</sup>

### Other migrant smuggling routes from South-West Asia

A minor smuggling route connects South-West Asia to the European Union via Azerbaijan and Georgia. From the Islamic Republic of Iran, migrants are smuggled to Azerbaijan, continue to Georgia and on to the Russian Federation. From there, they are smuggled either to the Baltic countries and/or Belarus and Ukraine, and smuggled into the European Union along the Eastern borders route. Those smuggled along this route reportedly use fraudulent identity or travel documents to cross borders, rather than clandestine movements.<sup>67</sup> More than 1,000 Iraqi citizens were refused entry at Georgian borders in the first half of 2014, making Iraq the most frequently refused citizenship in Georgia. During the same period, 853 citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran were also refused entry.<sup>68</sup> It is not clear how many of the entry refusals involved facilitation by smugglers.

There is also a minor route connecting South Asia to Europe via Central Asia and the Russian Federation. This route is discussed in more detail in the section on South Asia to Europe.

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN CENTRAL ASIA

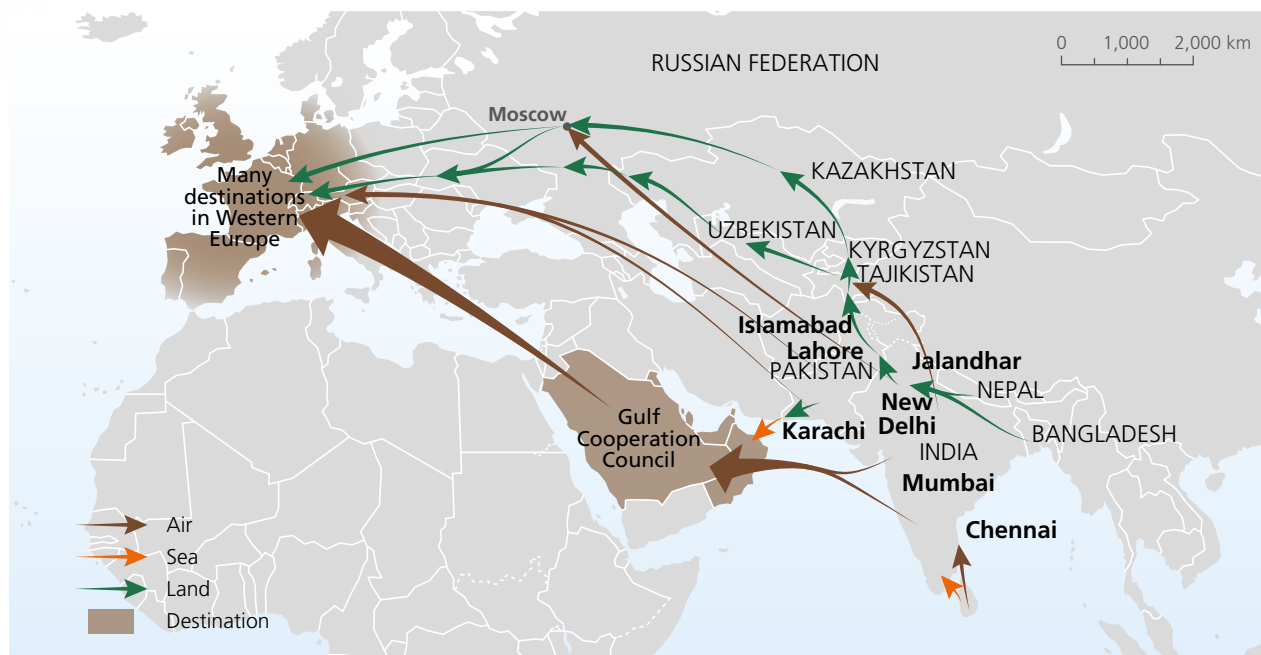
Central Asia, encompassing the five former Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, is a transit area for irregular migration and migrant smuggling from South, South-West and East Asia to Europe. After transiting through Central Asia and the Russian Federation, South West and East Asian migrants continue to Ukraine and Belarus, from where they enter the European Union in Poland, Slovakia or Hungary. Alternatively, a few irregular migrants also pass through the Russian Federation, the Baltic countries and then enter one of the Nordic countries.<sup>69</sup>

Within Central Asia, irregular migration is relatively rare, since the citizens of most Central Asian countries can freely move within the region, without a visa. Irregular migration status mainly results from overstaying, the failure to register as a temporary resident or unauthorized employment, rather than from irregular movement across national borders.<sup>70</sup> Still, some Central Asians also migrate irregularly within the region and to the Russian Federation, sometimes with the assistance of migrant smugglers. These are mainly people who do not possess valid travel documents, or citizens of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who need a visa to travel to most of the countries within the region. Kazakhstan and in particular the Russian Federation are the main destinations for these migrants.<sup>71</sup>

Although Central Asia remains mainly a transit point for irregular migration and migrant smuggling, the continued rise in living standards in some Central Asian countries has made them increasingly desirable as destinations.<sup>72</sup> Kazakhstan, in particular, has recently become attractive for irregular migrants from neighbouring countries due to its relatively high levels of economic development and political stability.<sup>73</sup> Because most Central Asians can travel within the region without visas, irregular migration mainly takes place in order to avoid expensive and time-consuming formalities and evade other entry regulations.<sup>74</sup>



## FROM SOUTH ASIA TO EUROPE AND THE GCC COUNTRIES



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### Profile of migrants:

Mostly young males from South Asia.

### Human cost:

Risks of exploitation and various forms of victimization reported in origin, transit and destination countries; particularly along land passages.

### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed; some smugglers share citizenships with the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

Within South Asia, much irregular migration appears to be facilitated by smugglers.<sup>75</sup> Some migrants are smuggled within the region – from Sri Lanka, Nepal or Bangladesh to India, for instance – and may also be smuggled onwards the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council<sup>76</sup> or to Europe.<sup>77</sup> The Gulf countries are also used as transit countries; particularly when migrants are smuggled by air.

It appears that most migrant smuggling to Europe is

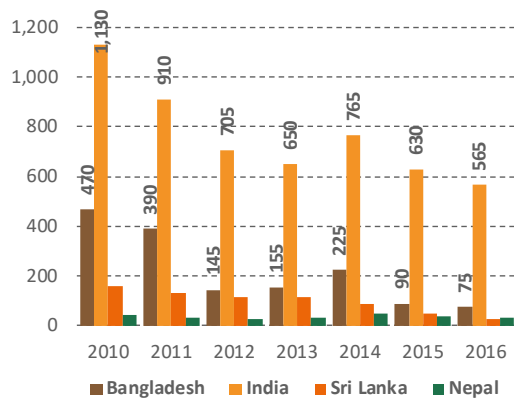
carried out by air or in a combination of air and land smuggling.<sup>78</sup> Many South Asians also follow different land routes. Some follow land routes across South-West Asia to Turkey, and enter Europe via the Eastern Mediterranean. Some are also smuggled along land routes across Central Asia.<sup>79</sup>

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

Along the different routes, some South Asian migrants travel regularly – with required documents, taking advantage of bilateral free-movement agreements – others irregularly, sometimes with the assistance of migrant smugglers.<sup>80</sup> Bangladeshi migrants are mainly smuggled to India by land, although a few also enter irregularly by sea.<sup>81</sup> Sri Lankan nationals enter India by air or sea. Many travel regularly, others use forged documents. Once in India, they join Indian migrants on the land and air routes heading to Europe. Chennai, New Delhi, Mumbai and Jalandhar are important transit cities in India.<sup>82</sup>

Some migrants are smuggled by air via Pakistan or the Gulf countries, mainly to Belgium, France and Germany, from where many try to enter the United Kingdom.<sup>83</sup> Other air routes involve flights to a West or North African city and onward smuggling by sea along the Western or Central Mediterranean routes.<sup>84</sup>

**FIG. 57:** Trend in the number of South Asian nationals refused entry at the United Kingdom's air border, 2010-2016



Source: Eurostat.

South Asians heading to Europe may be smuggled by air from New Delhi to the capital cities of Central Asian countries, using fraudulent documents. From there, they continue by land to Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>85</sup> Some migrants are smuggled from New Delhi directly to Moscow via air and then enter Europe through Ukraine. The journey to Moscow is usually undertaken by air with a legitimate visa, whereas the travel by land to the European Union is often facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>86</sup>

Most South Asian migrants heading to the Gulf States via land and sea routes travel to Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran (together with migrants and refugees heading to Europe). Entry into Pakistan and Iran usually occurs across land borders, either on foot or by motor vehicle. From Iran migrants are smuggled to Oman by sea. From Oman, some migrants continue to other GCC

countries. The smuggling of Bangladeshi migrants also appears to take place across the Gulf of Oman in the opposite direction, from Oman to Iran.<sup>87</sup>

Some South Asians are also smuggled via Central Asia to the Russian Federation and ultimately to various countries in the European Union. These routes often combine air and overland travel. South Asians may enter Central Asia in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan, from where they make their way through Kazakhstan, sometimes via Uzbekistan, and on to the Russian Federation. Migrant smuggling is documented from Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to the Russian Federation, and from there onwards to Ukraine and the European Union.<sup>88</sup>

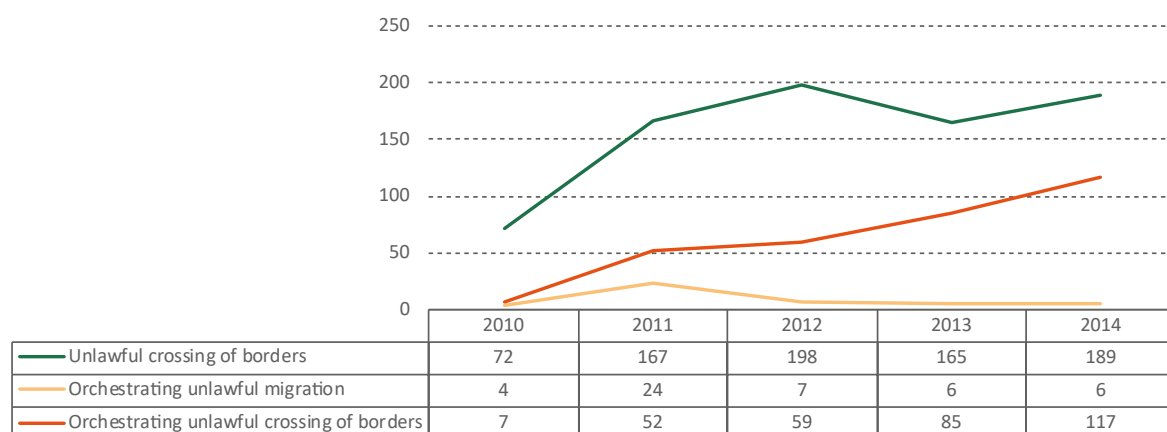
### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South Asia to Europe

Data from the United Kingdom shows that some South Asian migrants and refugees choose the United Kingdom as their destination. This is a traditional migration route with a long history.<sup>89</sup> In 2010, 170 smuggled migrants from India were detected, whereas the numbers for 2011 and 2012 were lower, 80 and 50 respectively. Additionally, the United Kingdom reported the detection of 10 Sri Lankan smuggled migrants for each of the years from 2010 to 2012. The data does not specify whether the migrants were smuggled by land, sea or air.<sup>90</sup>

Considering entry refusals of South Asians at European air borders, the United Kingdom has the highest totals, although the trend is declining. In 2016, the United Kingdom refused 565 Indian citizens, and less than 100 other South Asian citizens entry at airports.<sup>91</sup>

Other European countries also reported refusals of South Asians at their air borders, though in far smaller numbers.

**FIG. 58:** Trend in the numbers of criminal cases launched in Kyrgyzstan for irregular migration and border crossing, 2010-2014



Source: IOM, 2016 (quoting data from the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs).

In 2016, Italy refused about 250 South Asian citizens entry, and France about 200. Refusals at German air borders are lower, apart from the 115 Indians who were refused entry there in 2016.<sup>92</sup>

As for smuggling along land routes through Central Asia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan recorded an increasing trend in the number of irregular migration-related criminal cases launched from 2010 to 2014. It is, however, unclear how many of these cases involve migrant smuggling.

With regard to Tajikistan, in 2013, 736 violations of migration legislation were detected; many of which may be unrelated to migrant smuggling. Regarding the flow from Afghanistan, Tajikistan appears to be a destination and transit country for Afghan nationals, although the flows to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are much smaller than those heading to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>93</sup>

While in general relatively few South Asians are smuggled via the land route through Turkey into Europe, in 2016, Bangladeshi citizens were frequently detected. According to official data, in 2016, Bangladesh was the sixth most frequently detected citizenship among irregular migrants apprehended that year, with nearly 2,400 apprehensions.<sup>94</sup>

Data from Saudi Arabia show that the total number of detections of attempted irregular entry in that country is declining steeply, whereas the number of arrested smugglers is increasing. This might indicate that more migrants are seeking assistance from smugglers.

While regular migration flows may bear little resemblance

to smuggling flows, it is nonetheless noteworthy that South Asians comprise a vast part of the GCC countries' considerable migrant workforces. Out of the total migrant stock in the GCC countries, some 25.4 million people, South and South-West Asians comprise some 15.4 million, or 61 per cent. Indian citizens make up the largest group, with nearly 8.2 million, followed by Bangladeshis and Pakistanis (nearly 3 million each).<sup>95</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

There is very little information available regarding the profiles of smuggled migrants from South Asia directed to Europe. According to two 2009 UNODC studies, most Indian migrants who are smuggled to Europe are young men of middle class background. They generally come from rural areas, have low levels of education and leave in search of work opportunities.<sup>96</sup>

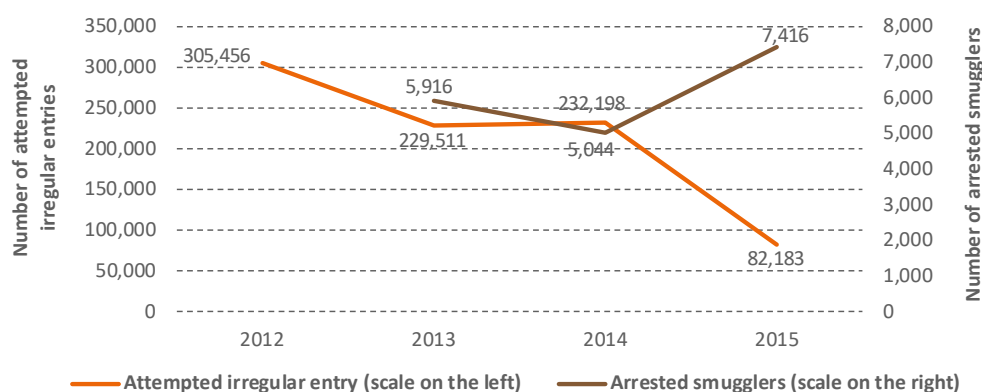
Most South Asians who are smuggled by land routes to Europe are young men from families of modest income. They are generally smuggled alone, often to join relatives who previously emigrated, to earn money to support their families who remained in their home countries.<sup>97</sup> Many have connections with relatives living in the destination countries.<sup>98</sup>

South Asians who seek to be smuggled to Gulf countries are often young men seeking unskilled, low-skilled or temporary work.<sup>99</sup> Unskilled Indian migrants from poor backgrounds typically come from southern Indian states.<sup>100</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Smuggling into India from neighbouring countries is largely carried out by local smugglers. Bangladeshis are usually smuggled out of their country by fellow citizens.

FIG. 59: Trends in the number of detected attempts of irregular entry and arrests of migrant smugglers, Saudi Arabia, 2012-2015\*



\* Months and years are approximated from the Islamic calendar.

Source: Saudi Arabia, Border Guards.

In transit countries, South Asians smuggle other South Asians on the basis of their ethnic background, together with locals.<sup>101</sup>

In origin countries, smugglers usually belong to the migrants' local community. They may be friends, relatives, community members or returnees. According to a 2013 study on labour migration from South Asia, more than 60 per cent of the surveyed stated that they had met their smuggler through friends.<sup>102</sup>

The recruitment of migrants is usually undertaken by local smugglers, or 'agents', especially in rural areas.<sup>103</sup> They work for a few main smugglers based either in large cities or close to international borders. Many smugglers run travel agencies as a cover for their smuggling business.<sup>104</sup> A 2012 study noted that more and more migrants were using smugglers in major cities, rather than their local smuggler 'agents'.<sup>105</sup>

The same 2012 study found that most smugglers operating in some parts of India were male, although a few females were also involved; sometimes working with their husbands. Most of the smugglers were reported to be in their 30s.<sup>106</sup> Another study of the profiles of more than 11,000 individuals involved or suspected of being involved in irregular migration in Punjab found that nearly all the smugglers were locals. Some 94 per cent of the intermediaries came from Punjab, while the remaining were from elsewhere in India. Very few were based abroad.<sup>107</sup>

The available sources suggest that Indian smuggling organizations continue to be involved throughout the smuggling process to Europe and engage local groups and individuals in transit countries. Smugglers of Indian origin or with Indian citizenship also operate in a range of European transit and destination countries.<sup>108</sup> With regard to the smuggling of Bangladeshis, diaspora communities living in destination countries may provide some support.<sup>109</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Bangladeshi and Nepalese migrants are mainly smuggled to India by land to New Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore and other major Indian cities.<sup>110</sup> After crossing into India, Nepalese typically settle in India, while those who can afford to fly to the GCC countries contact other smugglers who can provide them with the necessary documents and plane tickets.<sup>111</sup> Most Bangladeshis head across the country towards Pakistan. A few are smuggled to Europe by air.<sup>112</sup> For many Bangladeshi smuggled migrants, Pakistan is a transit country.<sup>113</sup>

Document fraud is commonly used by migrant smugglers operating on routes departing from India or Pakistan.<sup>114</sup> From here, they board international flights to Europe, the Gulf countries or South-East Asia.<sup>115</sup> In 2013, the Pakistani Federal Investigation Agency reported about an Africa-based cartel that sold stolen or expired passports to smuggling networks in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Egypt. Visas were lifted from the passports and pasted on the migrants' authentic passports.<sup>116</sup>

Migrants generally pay between US\$35 and US\$50 to be smuggled from Bangladesh to India, although lower fees have also been reported.<sup>117</sup> The fee for being smuggled from India to Western Europe is considered to range between US\$15,000 and 30,000.<sup>118</sup> Smuggling fees from India to Eastern Europe may be considerably lower. According to a 2011 report, Indian migrants pay between €1,500 and 4,500 to be smuggled to Eastern Europe, and US\$1,500-2,000 to continue onwards to the European Union.<sup>119</sup> Migrant smugglers in India are estimated to earn between US\$250 and \$750 per migrant.<sup>120</sup> In 2011, the cost of the entire journey from Bangladesh to Europe was estimated at €12,000-18,000.<sup>121</sup>

According to a recent survey of Pakistani migrants, the smuggling journey from Pakistan to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, costs approximately US\$1,000, but that excludes the cost of travel documents.<sup>122</sup> Somewhat older research cited fees for destination countries in the Middle East varying between €1,400 and 4,300. Higher fees are charged when the smugglers accompany the migrants to their destination.<sup>123</sup>

### The human cost

Harassment, assault and occasional killings of smuggled migrants have been reported along the different routes here considered.<sup>124</sup> Women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking and sexual violence by criminal gangs or border officials.<sup>125</sup>

Several sources report that migrants are often deceived by smugglers or charged exorbitant fees for their services.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, there are reports of South Asian smuggled migrants ending up in situations of debt bondage or forced labour to pay back money owed to the smuggler or to friends and relatives.<sup>127</sup>

## FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA TO NORTH AMERICA

Some migrants are smuggled by air from South and South-West Asia to North America, but information on routes and methods is sporadic and limited.<sup>128</sup> Some of the routes

involved are complex; involving transits through countries on other continents. Due to the costs involved and the limited number of flights (compared to smuggling overland and by sea) the magnitude of this smuggling is relatively small.

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

There is scattered evidence of migrant smuggling from most South and South-West Asian countries to North America, primarily to the United States of America, but also to Canada. South and Central American countries are sometimes used as transit locations. South Asian and South-West Asian migrants are smuggled to North America by air directly or via third countries in the Americas.<sup>129</sup>

Canada and the United States are both destination countries for South Asian smuggled migrants. The United States is sometimes used as a transit point en route to Canada.<sup>130</sup> According to the British authorities, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Kingdom are used as transit points to smuggle migrants from South-West Asian countries to North America.<sup>131</sup>

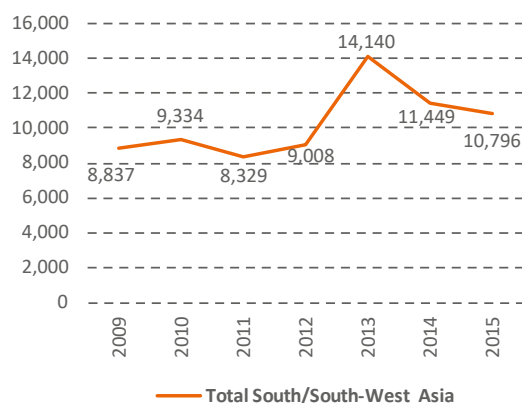
Several Latin American countries have reported cases in which smuggled migrants from South-West Asia were detected, usually on their way to the United States. Smuggling of these migrants to the United States and Canada often involves fraudulent documents.<sup>132</sup> Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic are also reportedly used as transit countries by migrants and refugees from South-West Asia heading to the United States by air.<sup>133</sup>

Between 2009 and 2010 a few cases of migrant smuggling by sea to Canada involving Sri Lankan nationals were also recorded. In 2009 and 2010, a few hundred Sri Lankan nationals were smuggled to British Columbia, in Canada, on vessels originating from South-East Asia. According to the Canadian authorities, different countries in South-East Asia may have served as transit countries for some of those migrants. Another attempt to smuggle Sri Lankan nationals by sea to North America was foiled in 2011. Since then no further arrivals of this kind have been recorded.<sup>134</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South and South-West Asia to North America

Statistics about migrants smuggled to the United States could not be found. In the absence of specific data on migrant smuggling, other immigration-related data collected by the US Department of Homeland Security provide an indication of the potential magnitude of the

FIG. 60: Trend in the number of South and South-West Asian citizens determined inadmissible at ports of entry into the United States, 2009-2015\*



\* Fiscal years (FY 2015 ran from 1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015).

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

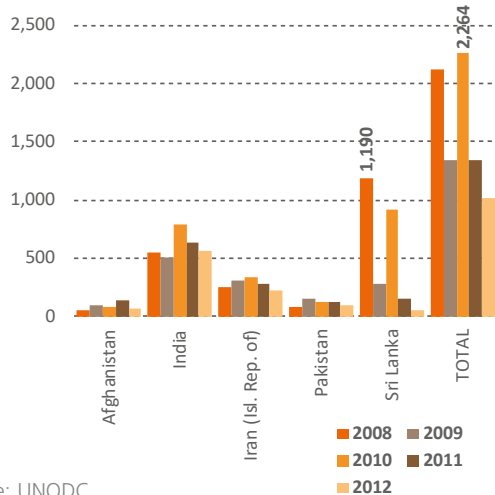
phenomenon. For instance, the US immigration authorities deem a large number of people inadmissible each year, with increasing numbers during recent years. Inadmissibility grounds include those related to an inability to satisfy documentary requirements, previous immigration violations, as well as crime and national security-related reasons. These instances may not involve migrant smuggling.

Out of the more than 250,000 determinations of inadmissibility in fiscal year 2015, nearly 10,800 were for citizens of countries in South and South-West Asia, representing more than 4 per cent of the total. Citizens of India comprised the largest share. Smaller shares of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Iranian citizens were also deemed inadmissible to the United States.

The number of apprehensions for suspected immigration violations by the US Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement has declined in recent years. There was, however, a modest increase for fiscal year 2016 (1 October 2015 – 30 September 2016), when some 530,000 apprehensions were reported. Many of these apprehensions are unlikely to be due to migrant smuggling. South and South-West Asians accounted for some 4,700 of the more than 460,000 apprehensions in fiscal year 2015, slightly more than 1 per cent.

While the United States is the main destination country in North America, some migrants are also smuggled into Canada. The number of immigration apprehensions in

**FIG. 61: Number of smuggled South and South-West Asian migrants apprehended in Canada, by citizenship, 2008-2012**



Source: UNODC.

Canada has steadily declined since 2012. As for the United States, immigrants may be apprehended for a number of reasons; many of which may not be linked to migrant smuggling.

The Canadian authorities provided UNODC with data about smuggled migrants from South and South-West Asia apprehended between 2008 and 2012. While the data are slightly out of date, they nonetheless indicate the size and composition of the migrant smuggling flow into Canada. In 2008 and 2010, Sri Lankans were the most commonly detected, whereas in the other years, Indians outnumbered the other citizenships.

Migrant smugglers often facilitate irregular movements by air from India.<sup>135</sup> The scale of migrant smuggling by air from India is corroborated by data about people apprehended while trying to irregularly leave India from the major international airports in the country. Between 2008 and August 2012, 1,173 cases of irregular migration were recorded at Indira Gandhi International airport in New Delhi. Most of those departing were Indians, but citizens of many other countries - Afghans, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans in large numbers - were also detected. The United States or Canada was the destination in nearly 20 per cent of the cases.<sup>136</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

The Canadian authorities have reported that around two thirds of the Indian and Iranian migrants who were smuggled into Canada between 2008 and 2012 were male.<sup>137</sup> Most Sri Lankan smuggled migrants are reported to be males between 30 and 40 years old.<sup>138</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

According to Canadian officials, smugglers facilitating the journey from South Asia - and in particular from Sri Lanka - to Canada operate in loosely organized networks.<sup>139</sup> Members of the Sri Lankan community in Canada are sometimes involved in the smuggling of other Sri Lankans. They may serve in different smuggling roles - as organizers, agents or facilitators - but may also help provide genuine Canadian passports for use by other Sri Lankan migrants.<sup>140</sup>

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

Various countries in South and Central America are used as transit countries for migrant smuggling between South and South-West Asia and North America. Sometimes this is due to visa arrangements. Between 2009 and 2011, for example, Indians used a visa waiver scheme for Indian nationals in Guatemala to gain easier access to the United States via Mexico. After the termination of this scheme, Ecuador, which had a similar program, emerged as a transit point for the smuggling of migrants from India.<sup>141</sup> Other South Asian citizens use fraudulent Indian passports to be smuggled on the same route.<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is sometimes used as transit country by Iranians. Taking advantage of the visa-free policy adopted by Venezuela in the mid-2000s, Iranian migrants would fly there and continue to the United States and Canada with the assistance of smugglers.<sup>143</sup> According to the Canadian authorities, approximately 80 per cent of the Iranian nationals who arrived in Canada irregularly by air between 2008 and 2012 had their journey facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>144</sup> There have also been reports of Iraqi citizens who have been smuggled into the United States by air, relying on fraudulent travel or identity documents.<sup>145</sup>

Sri Lankan nationals are also smuggled to Canada and the United States by air. This often involves fraudulent travel or identity documents. According to the Canadian authorities, an estimated 55 per cent of the Sri Lankan nationals who were apprehended attempting irregular entry by air between 2008 and 2012 had used the services of smugglers. The smuggled migrants who arrived in Canada by air over the same period often used fraudulent documents. This included the use of genuine Canadian passports that some Canadians had 'rented' to smugglers or the use of forged foreign passports.<sup>146</sup>

Smuggling routes from South Asia to North America can be complex. To illustrate, one route involved Sri Lankans who were smuggled first from India to Kenya and the

United Republic of Tanzania. From there they continued along a route via Istanbul and Helsinki to Paris, where they obtained fraudulent British passports. They were then brought to Belgium, from where they boarded a flight bound for Canada.<sup>147</sup>

### The human cost

There is no specific information regarding the various human rights risks that smuggled migrants along these routes are exposed to. Migrant smuggling by air entails fewer physical risks than sea or land-based smuggling. However, migrants travelling by air pay high prices, and a failed experience might incur severe debts. Moreover, as for other routes, migrants are at the mercy of smugglers who may be more concerned about their profits and risks of apprehension than the safe arrival of their clients.

## FROM SOUTH AND SOUTH-WEST ASIA TO AUSTRALIA

Since the early 2000s, Australia has been a significant destination for irregular migrants and refugees from South-West Asia. Migrant smuggling is widely documented along this route, which usually transits South-East Asia.<sup>148</sup> Australia is also a significant destination for South Asians. Irregular maritime arrivals in Australia nearly came to a halt in 2014 and the sea route is now largely dormant.

### Profile of migrants:

Migrants from South-West Asia and South Asia. Most are young adult males.

### Human cost:

Fatalities have been recorded; mainly along sea passages. Risks of exploitation and gross human right violations in origin, transit and destination countries.

### Profile of smugglers:

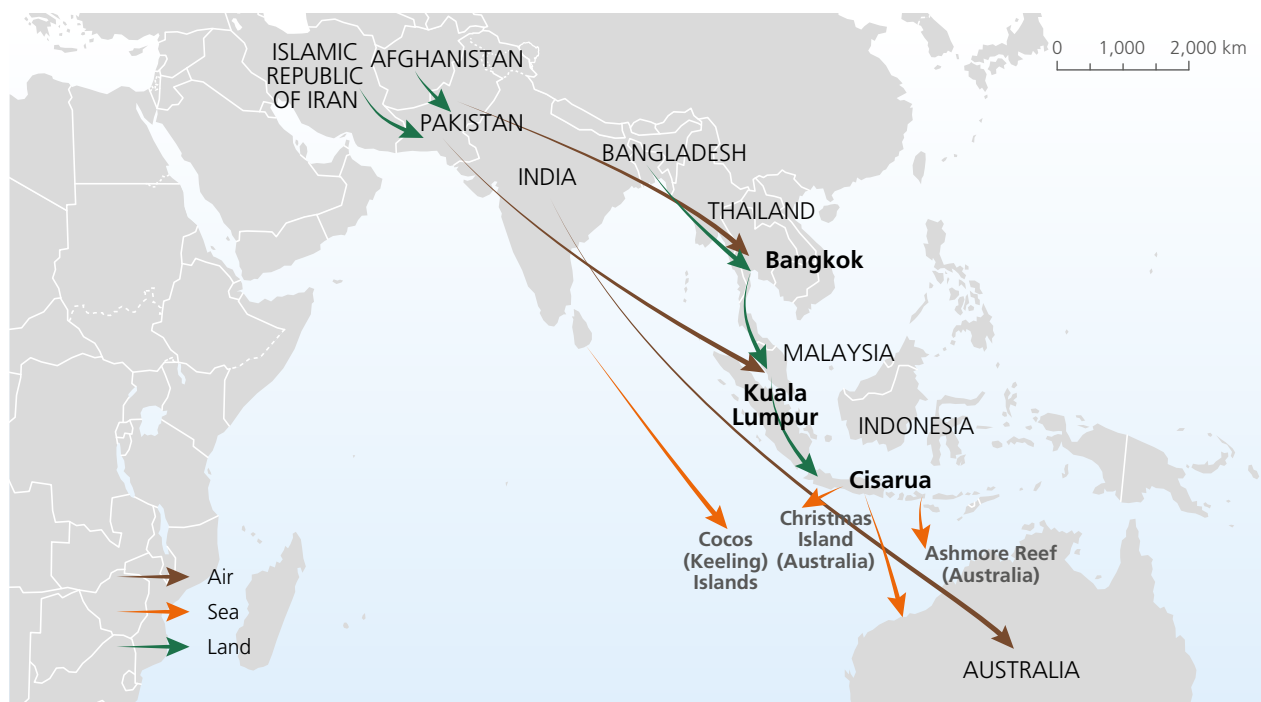
Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Smugglers in organizing roles often have the same citizenship as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smugglers are based in origin countries.

### Organization:

A mix of local smugglers facilitating short legs of the journeys and larger transnational networks.

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

Almost all irregular migrants and refugees from the South-West Asian countries rely on smugglers for at least part of their journey towards Australia.<sup>149</sup> They are often smuggled together along the same routes. The journey usually involves smuggling by air from South-West Asia to South-East Asia, and smuggling by land and sea to southern



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

Indonesia, where migrants and refugees board vessels bound for Australia or its offshore territories.<sup>150</sup>

Pakistan is a departure as well as transit point for migrants and refugees from South-West Asia heading to Australia. As there are few flights from Afghanistan to South-East Asia, Afghans often head to Pakistan first. They usually make their way to Karachi or Islamabad, and board flights to major international airports in South-East Asia.<sup>151</sup> Some South-West Asians also fly to South-East Asia via Gulf countries.<sup>152</sup> From South-East Asia, they continue towards Indonesia, by land, air or sea. Other South Asians are also smuggled along this route.<sup>153</sup>

For maritime departures, in Indonesia, migrants and refugees from South and South-West Asia embarked on board boats to Australia from the main island of Java. The town of Cisarua was reportedly a transit point. From Cisarua, migrants would travel by land to Java's southern coast, where they would board boats to Australia's Christmas Island.<sup>154</sup> Pelabuhan Ratu was a known embarkation point for Christmas Island.<sup>155</sup> Departures for Ashmore Reef – located south of the western part of Timor island – would usually take place further east in Indonesia.<sup>156</sup> Some Sri Lankans also tried to reach the Australian Cocos (Keeling) islands, about half way between Sri Lanka and Australia.

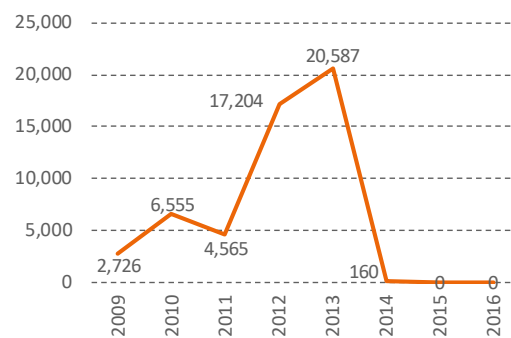
### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from South and South-West Asia to Australia

As for most maritime routes, most migrants and refugees reaching Australia by sea would have had their journey facilitated by smugglers. A 2013 survey of irregular maritime arrivals in Australia found that 55 per cent of the respondents admitted to having used the services of someone who helps people travel (for example, migrant smuggler).<sup>157</sup> Many respondents (41 per cent) also reported having travelled on a false passport at some stage during the journey,<sup>158</sup> which indicates the involvement of smugglers. The Australian data about maritime irregular arrivals can thus be considered broadly representative of the migrant smuggling flow to Australia by sea. The number of irregular maritime arrivals increased rapidly from 2009, peaking at more than 20,000 in 2012-13. Irregular maritime arrivals to Australia started to decrease in late 2013, following the implementation of Operation Sovereign Borders.<sup>c</sup>

The Australian authorities provided some statistics regard-

c A military-led border security operation aimed at combating maritime migrant smuggling and protecting Australia's borders, established in September 2013. (Operation Sovereign Borders; [www.osb.border.gov.au](http://www.osb.border.gov.au)).

FIG. 62: Irregular maritime arrivals in Australia, 2009-2016\*



\* Financial years (July 1-June 30).

Source: Parliament of Australia, Australia Parliamentary Library.

ing the number of smuggled migrants detected in 2012 and the first half of 2013 to UNODC. About 23,000 originated from countries in South and South-West Asia, including both smuggling by air and sea, during that period.

Migrant smuggling by air is also documented along this route, sometimes with the help of sophisticated fraudulent documents. There are reports of small numbers of South Asians having been smuggled by air to Australia.<sup>159</sup> A few smuggled migrants from South-West Asia head to New Zealand; usually involving either fraudulent documents or the swapping of a boarding pass in the airport transit lounge.<sup>160</sup>

### The profile of smuggled migrants

Almost all migrants and refugees that have entered Australia by sea come from South and South-West Asia. Since November 2011, the Australian government has granted a particular type of visa, 'Bridging Visa E (BVE)' to some irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs). This type of visa is only granted to IMAs; many of whom may have arrived prior to 2011. The purpose is to release holders from immigration detention and allow them to remain lawfully in Australia while their immigration status is being resolved.<sup>161</sup> As of the end of March 2017, a total of more than 36,000 such visas have been granted. Statistics by citizenship of the more than 24,000 current BVE holders<sup>d</sup> show that Iranians, Sri Lankans, Afghani and Stateless migrants are among the largest groups granted this visa.

Although the implementation of Operation Sovereign

d Of the more than 36,000 BVEs granted since November 2011, some 12,000 holders had either been granted substantive visas, departed Australia, returned to immigration detention or died, as of 31 March 2017.



Borders has nearly halted irregular maritime arrivals in Australia, there are still a few irregular sea crossings. Between early 2014 and April 2017, nearly 800 people who were intercepted at sea were returned to their origin countries by the Australian authorities, according to an April 2017 speech by the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection.<sup>162</sup>

Statistics regarding the Australian offshore asylum processing facilities in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, which started operations in late 2012, show that South West Asian citizens comprise the largest group by far, followed by South Asians. In October 2016, there were more than 1,200 asylum seekers in the two centres; about half of the total registered at the peak in April 2014. These included 50 women and 45 children.<sup>163</sup> Asylum seekers may or may not have sought the assistance of migrant smugglers en route towards Australia.

Sri Lankan migrants travelling directly to Australia usually do so in small groups, often with relatives or people from their village. According to data collected by the Sri Lankan Criminal Investigation Department, all attempts of irregular departure by sea in 2013 involved children, compared with less than half (22) of the 56 attempts in 2012.<sup>164</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

Most migrant smugglers are male. Nevertheless, some sources note that women are sometimes involved in the smuggling of migrants from South-West Asia to Australia (as well as to Canada) by air, probably because they are less likely to draw the authorities' attention.<sup>165</sup>

The smuggling of South and South-West Asians to Australia seems to be organized mainly by people from the same countries as the migrants, many of whom were once smuggled migrants themselves. For the boat journey from Indonesia to Australia, smugglers in the role of 'organizer' hire young, local Indonesians, who may receive a small salary for captaining or crewing the vessels used for the smuggling.<sup>166</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

South-East Asian countries seem to have gained popularity as transit for the smuggling of Afghan migrants and refugees in recent years.<sup>167</sup> Smuggling by air typically involves the use of fraudulent documents. According to information from the Pakistani authorities, smuggled Afghan migrants are frequently apprehended at airports in Pakistan with fraudulent travel or identity documents when attempting to board a flight to major international airports in South-East Asia. Iranian, Iraqi and Pakistani

nationals also travel along this route.<sup>168</sup>

Sri Lankan nationals are smuggled to Australia along two main routes. The first is the route used by most South-West Asians, described above. The second is a sea route from Sri Lanka to the Australian mainland or one of its offshore territories, especially the Cocos (Keeling) Islands approximately midway between Australia and Sri Lanka. The sea journey from Sri Lanka to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands typically takes between 10 and 20 days. Vessels bound for Australia depart from various ports along the Sri Lankan coast.<sup>169</sup>

Most Bangladeshi migrants smuggled along this route first travel to Thailand. Bangkok and Songkhla are important transit points, where migrants usually have to wait a long time until the smugglers can arrange for their onward journey. Once they have reached the border region, migrants often use remote paths through the jungle to enter Malaysia.<sup>170</sup> They then continue to southern Indonesia, where they board boats heading to Australia's offshore islands or north-western coastline.<sup>171</sup>

Many smuggled Afghan migrants in Australia left Afghanistan long ago and lived in Pakistan or the Islamic Republic of Iran for some time before they were smuggled to Australia.<sup>172</sup> According to a 2013 survey of migrants and refugees who had arrived irregularly in Australia by sea, the majority of Afghans (57 per cent) indicated that they had lived in another country for at least 12 months prior to travelling to Australia, whereas few Iranians did so. The main host countries identified by respondents were Pakistan (60 per cent) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (24 per cent).<sup>173</sup>

Indian citizens also seem to be smuggled to Australia, but very limited information is available about this route. Some are smuggled by air directly to Australia, others travel through South-East Asia.<sup>174</sup>

Smuggling routes to Australia can be very complex. Some migrants and refugees from South-West Asia transit through one of the Gulf countries before flying to Indonesia or Malaysia.<sup>175</sup> Moreover, some Iraqis are smuggled to other Middle Eastern countries, from where they continue to South-East Asia and Australia.<sup>176</sup> The use of fraudulent documents appears to be common along those routes.<sup>177</sup>

Many smugglers in Pakistan offer deals to reach Indonesia only, according to a recent small-scale survey among migrants and smugglers in Pakistan.<sup>178</sup> This implies that the sea voyage from Indonesia to Australia is usually arranged by local smugglers. The cost of a smuggling

## Migrant smuggling in the Pacific

The scattered nature of the states and territories in the vast Pacific limits most smuggling activity to the international airline industry and to a lesser extent, the shipping industry. Migrant smuggling by air usually involves people travelling individually or in small groups of 2-5, as opposed to sea vessels which can carry hundreds of migrants at a time.

### Main departure and arrival points

The Pacific island economies are heavily dependent on tourism and in order to support the growth of this industry, a number of countries have announced new direct flights into Asia and are considering other destinations. The exact list is subject to change, but, for example, it was reported in 2014 that Fiji had direct flights to Hong Kong, China and the Republic of Korea. Papua New Guinea had flights to the Philippines and Singapore, and Palau to several Chinese destinations, the Republic of Korea, Japan and the Philippines.<sup>a</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling in the Pacific

The Pacific is viewed mainly as a transit point for smuggled migrants of Asian origin attempting to enter Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Members of the Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference (PIDC)\* reported varying levels of detected smuggled migrants between 2003 and 2011, ranging from 30-220. However, in 2012, because of a large jump in the Australian data, there were 18,000 detections. Since 2012, the number has dropped to the higher end of the range of pre-2012 numbers, around 200.

The Pacific region has experienced an upward trend in border refusals since 2009. In that year, the number of border refusals was approximately 3,000, whereas by 2013, it had increased to 3,930.<sup>b</sup> Immigration-related fraud has also increased in the region, from 32 cases in 2009 to 905 cases in 2013. The types of immigration fraud reported included false or altered immigration documents, genuine immigration documents obtained fraudulently, false or altered supporting documents and imposters. False passports appears to be the most common type of immigration-related fraud.<sup>c</sup> Most of the migrants attempting to cross borders by fraudulent means are Asians (48 per cent), followed by Pacific Islanders (19 per cent) and Europeans (16 per cent).<sup>d</sup>

There have been occasional large cases of migrant smuggling in the Pacific, involving large numbers of people travelling via boat. For example, in November 2014, the Federated States of Micronesia detected a vessel near the island of Yap carrying 53 individuals, primarily from India and Nepal, who had paid smugglers for transit to the United States.<sup>e</sup> The gender breakdown of the smuggled migrants reported in 2013 by PIDC members was 70 per cent adult male, 13 per cent adult female, 11 per cent boys and 6 per cent girls.<sup>f</sup>

\* Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

- a Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference, *People smuggling, human trafficking and illegal migration in the Pacific*, 2014.
- b Ibid.
- c Ibid., p. 12.
- d Ibid., p. 13.
- e United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Transnational organized crime in the Pacific: a threat assessment*, Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, September 2016, p. 40.
- f Pacific Immigration Directors' Conference, *People smuggling, human trafficking and illegal migration in the Pacific*, 2014.

package from Pakistan to Australia is estimated at US\$10,000-12,000, with \$7,000 for the leg from Pakistan to Indonesia, and some \$4,000 from Jakarta to Australia.<sup>179</sup> A 2013 survey reported an average price of US\$12,600 for smuggling to Australia, with some variations according to citizenship (Sri Lankans reportedly paid \$9,200, while Afghans paid \$13,500).<sup>180</sup>

### The human cost

South and South-West Asians smuggled to Australia face several risks, in particular during sea crossings. South Asians risk their lives in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>181</sup> Moreover, the vessels used to smuggle migrants and refugees from Indonesia to Australia are often in poor condition and overcrowded, and carry insufficient water, food and life-

saving equipment.<sup>182</sup> Many smuggled migrants, in particular Afghans, cannot swim, which greatly increases their risk of drowning during a sea crossing.<sup>183</sup>

Migrants and refugees are also exposed to many other risks, as described for other routes. These risks include theft by smugglers, kidnapping for ransom, arrest, and violence. Moreover, detention upon arrival and the possibility of being returned to one's origin country are other challenges faced in some destination countries.<sup>184</sup>

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING FROM AND TO EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

In East and South-East Asia, smuggling flows and patterns are diverse and varied, with local, regional and trans-regional flows. Countries in this area are countries of origin, transit and destination for smuggled migrants.

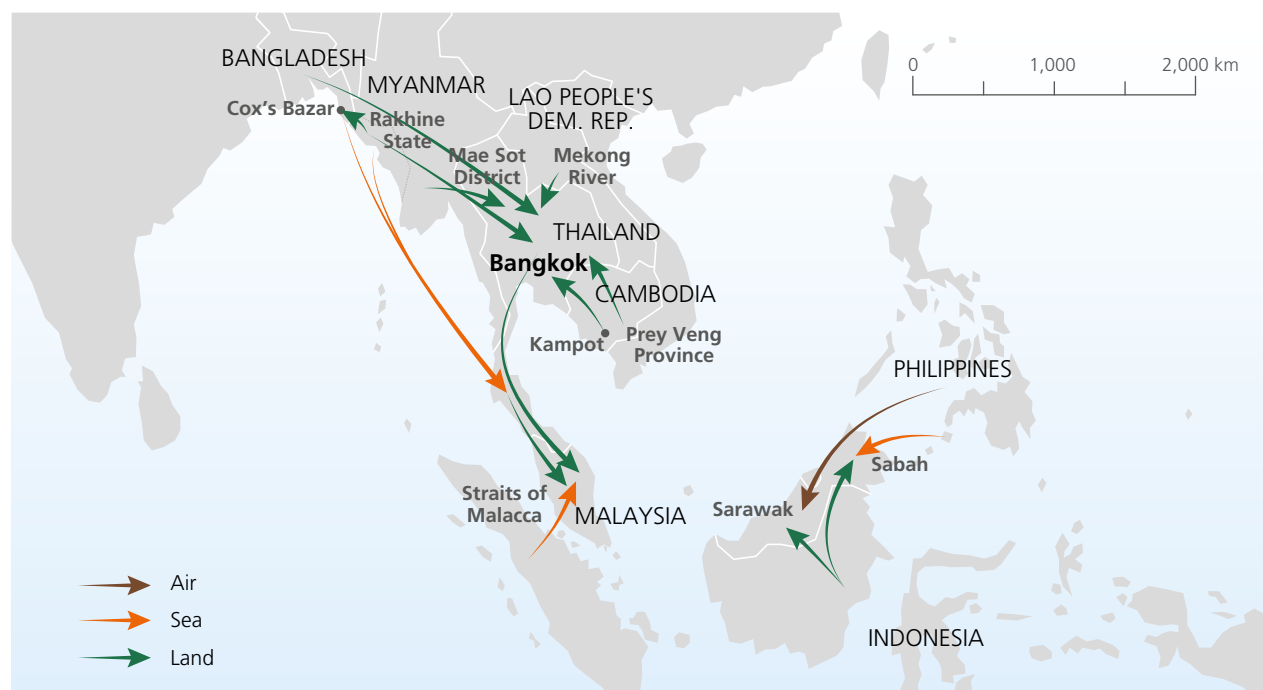
The smuggling flows in the Mekong subregion, which includes Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand, often involve border communities and have Thailand as the main country of destination. Malaysia is also a destination country for migrants from within the region, from Indonesia, the Philippines and Bangladesh.<sup>185</sup>

In terms of smuggling routes out of East and South-East Asia, one significant route runs towards European destinations and North America. This route is characterized by high levels of organization of the smuggling networks.

### Smuggling of migrants within South-East Asia

There is migrant smuggling between many of the countries in South-East Asia. Thailand is the main destination for smuggled migrants from countries in the Mekong sub-region. Thailand shares extensive and unevenly monitored land borders with Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar, which makes smuggling a low risk venture.<sup>186</sup> People from the countries of the Mekong subregion wishing to go abroad often seem to seek the services of smugglers for different reasons. While formal migration channels often do exist, making use of them is expensive and time-consuming. In this area, smugglers may offer both facilitated irregular entry and job placement services.<sup>187</sup>

The other main destination country for migrant smuggling within South-East Asia is Malaysia. Due to Malaysia's relative economic prosperity and labour shortages, it sees significant labour-related irregular migration, particularly for citizens of Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as Bangladesh and Myanmar. These movements appear



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.

to be facilitated by smugglers to a significant extent.<sup>188</sup> The route between Malaysia and Indonesia, in particular, is reportedly ‘busy and lucrative’ for smugglers,<sup>189</sup> and Indonesian and Filipino migrants are believed to comprise the bulk of flows into Malaysia.<sup>190</sup> Moreover, migrant smuggling from other regions into South-East Asia is only significant with regard to the smuggling of Bangladeshi migrants to Malaysia.<sup>191</sup>

#### Profile of migrants:

Migrants are smuggled from most countries within the subregion; mainly migrant workers but also people fleeing persecution.

#### Human cost:

Many fatalities along both sea and land routes. Mass killings of migrants have been reported. Exploitation, extortion and physical injuries are not uncommon.

#### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed. Some smugglers (‘organizers’) have the same citizenships as the smuggled migrants. Some high-level smuggler organizers are based in origin countries.

#### Organization:

A mix of well-organized operations on some routes, and looser organization along others. Local smugglers often facilitate short legs of the journeys.

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

With regard to smuggling into Thailand, the routes that smugglers use from Cambodia are well established. One main route leads from Prey Veng Province, in the east of the country almost on the border with Viet Nam. This route follows the main railway line to Battambang and the border town of Poipet, and then across the border into Thailand. Another main route involves the coastal passage from Kampot to Koh Kong and into Thailand. In addition to the established routes, irregular crossings are possible at many points along the border, through forests, rivers and unstaffed checkpoints. These crossings are generally attempted on foot, at night and in small groups to avoid patrols.<sup>192</sup>

The smuggling of migrants from the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to Thailand occurs primarily over the Mekong River, which makes up a long stretch of the border between the two countries. Although irregular crossings at official border checkpoints likely occur, the methods used and the frequency with which it occurs are

unclear.<sup>193</sup> Migrant smuggling from Myanmar to Thailand takes place over the heavily forested land border. The district of Mae Sot has been singled out as a frequent entry point into Thailand, although crossings also occur elsewhere.<sup>194</sup>

It is also likely that, in the attempt to flee from the violence, the Rohingya<sup>e</sup> ethnic group is generating significant smuggling activity destined into Thailand and Malaysia, as well as into the Cox’s Bazar district on the south-eastern coast of Bangladesh. Deprived of citizenship, they have no access to legal migration channels. In mid-2015, UNODC reported - on the basis of information from UNHCR and IOM - that the most common route involved travelling by sea to the province of Ranong, Thailand, across the border from the southernmost tip of Myanmar, followed by a one-day land journey across the Malaysian border.<sup>195</sup> After reaching Malaysia - either by sea or land, usually transiting Thailand either way - they often search for work within established Rohingya communities in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.<sup>196</sup>

Indonesian nationals are smuggled into Malaysia by sea or overland. The sea route departs from the island of Sumatra, crosses the Strait of Malacca and lands along the coast of the Malay peninsula. The land route starts from Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, and crosses the land border into the Malaysian states of Sabah or Sarawak.

From the Philippines, migrants are smuggled to Malaysia by sea or air. The sea routes often start from the islands of Sulu and Balawan in south-western Philippines and head to Sabah state in the far north of Malaysian Borneo.<sup>197</sup> Migrants from the Philippines are also smuggled to Malaysia by air; although information is scarce, this might be the more prevalent method.<sup>198</sup>

Most smuggled migrants from Bangladesh have transited Thailand on their way to Malaysia. They may have reached Thailand by land, sea or air, and generally pass through Bangkok. Another common transit point is Songkhla in the south of Thailand where migrants may have to wait for some time for smugglers to organize the onward journey.<sup>199</sup> Then, they cross the land border into Malaysia by driving through the thick jungle and forest.<sup>200</sup>

#### The magnitude of migrant smuggling within South-East Asia

There is little migrant smuggling-specific data available for this region. In 2013, UNODC estimated that more than 660,000 irregular migrants enter Thailand each year

<sup>e</sup> The Government of Myanmar disputes the term ‘Rohingya’ and prefers the term ‘Bengalis’.

from neighbouring countries and, based on field research, that more than 80 per cent of them use the assistance of smugglers. This would indicate that about 550,000 migrants are smuggled from these countries into Thailand each year.<sup>201</sup>

Data from the Thai authorities shows that the number of irregular entries that are detected in Thailand amounted to more than 200,000 on average per year during the years covered. The authorities only identify small numbers of smuggled migrants, however; ranging between some 200 to nearly 700 for the 2010 – 2013 period.<sup>202</sup> It is not clear why the Thai data suggests that only a fraction of irregular entries are facilitated by a smuggler.

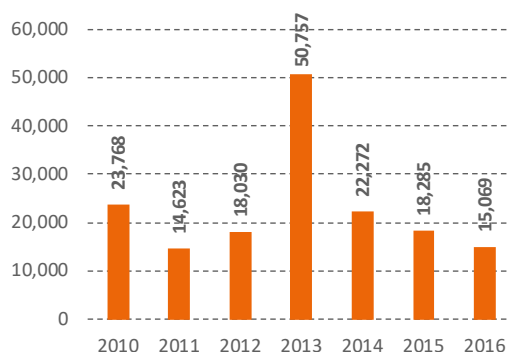
Regarding maritime departures, UNHCR estimates that between 2012 and 2015, some 170,000 refugees and migrants left from Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat. These movements are believed to be greatly facilitated by migrant smugglers.<sup>203</sup> While the sizable flows from Myanmar's Rakhine state across the border into Bangladesh have lasted for decades,<sup>204</sup> the situation escalated dramatically in late August 2017, when nearly 500,000 people left in the span of one month.<sup>205</sup> These new developments are likely to have increased the demand for migrant smuggling as well.

With regard to migrant smuggling into Malaysia, information is even scarcer. Several estimates of the stock of irregular or undocumented migrants and workers have been published in recent years, and although the estimates are inconsistent (and of course do not entail only smuggled migrants) they give a rough indication of the scale of irregular movements. In 2011, OECD estimated that there are 2.5 million undocumented workers in Malaysia,<sup>206</sup> and in 2016, it was reported that Malaysia hosts more than 2 million irregular migrant workers, with well over half being Indonesians.<sup>207</sup>

Data from government-initiated efforts to regularize the immigration status of undocumented workers can also give an indication of the magnitude of flows, even though, of course, many undocumented workers may not have been smuggled. For example, in 2011, the Malaysian authorities carried out a regularization drive,<sup>f</sup> and registered about 1.3 million undocumented workers. Most were Indonesians, but there were also 270,000 Bangladeshis (registration numbers for citizens of the Philippines and Myanmar were not reported).<sup>208</sup> It is likely that migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar are smuggled

<sup>f</sup> Malaysia has used regularizations several times. In the 2011 wave, all foreign workers, including those holding a legal status, had to register with their biometric information.

FIG. 63: Trend in the number of asylum applications lodged in Malaysia by citizens of Myanmar, 2010-2016



Source: UNHCR.

for at least some part of their journey to Malaysia.

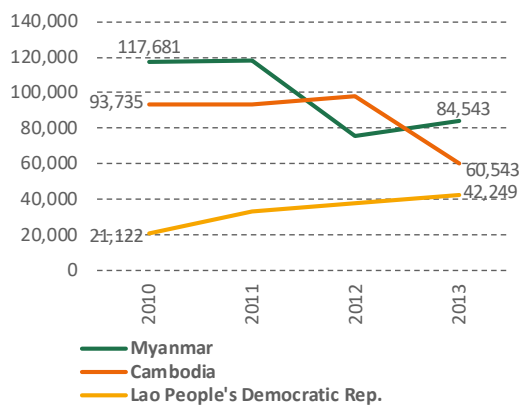
Some migrant smuggling to Malaysia may also involve refugees in search of international protection. Between 2010 and 2016, on average, some 20,000 citizens of Myanmar applied for asylum in Malaysia per year. In the peak year of 2013, more than 50,000 such applications were lodged. A few Indonesians also seek asylum in Malaysia, although the numbers are low, reaching almost 200 in the peak year of 2016.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

Data from large-scale governmental efforts to register irregular migrant workers in Thailand shows that 82 per cent were from Myanmar, 10 per cent from Cambodia, and 8 per cent from the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Assuming this distribution for the 2013 UNODC estimate of 550,000 migrants smuggled from these countries into Thailand each year would imply annual inflows into Thailand of about 450,000 migrants and refugees from Myanmar, 55,000 from Cambodia, and 44,000 from the Lao People's Democratic Republic.<sup>209</sup>

Official Thai statistics show that citizens of Myanmar are the most frequently detected group irregularly entering the country, but not by as large a margin as the figures above would imply. In 2013 – the most recent year for which data is available – the Thai authorities detected more than 84,500 citizens of Myanmar who were entering Thailand irregularly. The corresponding figure for Cambodians was some 60,500, while for citizens of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, it was just over 42,000. The number of detected smuggled migrants was a mere fraction of this. The year with the highest reported numbers of smuggled migrants was 2011. In that year, the authorities recorded 261 smuggled migrants from Myanmar and 16 from Cambodia.<sup>210</sup>

**FIG. 64:** Trend in the numbers of detected irregular entries into Thailand of citizens of Myanmar, Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2010-2013



Source: UNODC.

The available data for Malaysia only refers to irregular migrants, who may or may not have been smuggled into the country. In 2015, UNODC reported that more than 60 per cent of irregular migrants in Malaysia are Indonesians, with citizens of Bangladesh, the Philippines and Myanmar constituting the second, third and fourth largest groups.<sup>211</sup>

Smuggled South-East Asian migrants tend to be economically disadvantaged and have low levels of education.<sup>212</sup> With regard to smuggling into Thailand, migrants can be divided into two categories, with corresponding differences in the services they commonly request from smugglers. First are those from rural border areas who cross the border to Thailand to take advantage of seasonal agricultural work and may employ the assistance of smugglers for transport and to avoid patrols by Thai border guards. The second category are longer-term migrants, who move all over the country and work in a broad range of sectors. These migrants either seek the services of smugglers for assistance in job placement, or are recruited by someone they know.<sup>213</sup>

Most of the available data and research suggest that the majority of smuggled migrants within the Mekong subregion are young men, although the smuggling of females is also significant. Research from 2011 indicated that the majority of irregular migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic living in Thailand are women, working as domestic workers.<sup>214</sup> The same is true for Indonesian smuggled migrants. Although most are men, there are also significant numbers of women, and these women often seek employment as domestic workers.<sup>215</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

As for many parts of the world, most migrant smuggling organizations in South-East Asia seem to be loose associations of individuals operating on a small scale, rather than structured, hierarchical criminal syndicates. These networks tend to act on a very local level, so that smugglers are known to migrants or somebody close to them.<sup>216</sup> Much of the smuggling within the region also appears to be opportunistic.<sup>217</sup>

However, with regard to smuggling of Indonesians to Malaysia, it has been reported that smugglers operate extensive networks in the two countries, capable of offering very well organized smuggling services. Recruitment is often handled by local smugglers living in the migrants' home communities.<sup>218</sup> It appears that smugglers involved in the facilitation of movements from Indonesia to Malaysia often engage in related forms of crime, in particular document fraud.<sup>219</sup> The networks that smuggle Bangladeshi migrants through Thailand into Malaysia are also reported to be well organized. These networks can often assist migrants in obtaining tourist visas - permitting them to enter or transit through Thailand - and arranging their onward travel to Malaysia. Some of the groups appear to have links to construction firms in Malaysia.<sup>220</sup>

Migrant smugglers in the Mekong subregion are commonly citizens of the origin country of the migrants they smuggle. In the case of Cambodian migrants, Cambodian smugglers transport them across the border into Thailand. With migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thai and Lao smuggling groups work together to smuggle migrants from one country to another.<sup>221</sup> Many smugglers were irregular migrants themselves, and most rely on word-of-mouth to promote their services.<sup>222</sup>

In the Mekong subregion, migrant smugglers also tend to offer a wider range of services than what is common along most other routes. Smugglers not only make it possible for migrants to evade border controls, but they also act as job brokers and often offer accommodation.<sup>223</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Some migrants that cross into Thailand via the land borders are smuggled closer to Bangkok by private car or public transportation. Other smugglers then arrange transportation to a final destination. If law enforcement intercepts the smuggling, migrants are generally arrested, fined, and then deported. The smugglers are often not penalized.<sup>224</sup> It seems that many smugglers along this route rely heavily on other smugglers who live in border communities, especially at particular border crossings.<sup>225</sup>

According to the Thai authorities, migrants from South Asia are smuggled into Thailand through Bangkok and Songkhla Province. Most of them are smuggled by sea, debarking in southern Thailand, including Ranong province.<sup>226</sup>

A UNODC report from 2013 shows that the fees for being smuggled into Thailand vary according to the services required. A safe border crossing and transportation to an employer in Thailand will cost the migrant approximately US\$325. Fees typically cover the cost of crossing the border, food, water, transportation to the Thai employer and en route accommodation. Smugglers who act as recruiters also collect fees from the Thai employers. The amount ranges from some US\$6 to US\$16 (200 and 500 baht) per worker.<sup>227</sup> There may also be differences in the fee structures based on origin. Migrants from Myanmar reportedly pay the highest fees, while migrants from the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia pay considerably less.<sup>228</sup>

Much of the migrant smuggling into Malaysia has a strong labour connotation, and much of the smuggling involves unlicensed recruitment agencies in both the origin country and in Malaysia. These smugglers usually facilitate both irregular entry and job placement.<sup>229</sup> The use of fraudulent documents for the purpose of smuggling into Malaysia is relatively well documented, particularly regarding movements from Indonesia and the Philippines. Migrant smuggling organizations may either forge the documents themselves or outsource the work to other criminal networks.<sup>230</sup> In operations from the Philippines, smuggling groups usually do not forge documents themselves, instead relying on specialized criminal groups to provide this service.<sup>231</sup>

Regarding smuggling operations from Indonesia into Malaysia, some research has found that the role of Indonesian smugglers ends with arrival at destination, where Malaysian smugglers handle job placement.<sup>232</sup> However, there are also reports that Indonesian and Malaysian smugglers operate on both sides of the border and act as brokers, recruiters or agents that are organized into smuggling networks. These smugglers are often well-known local figures who live among their clientele and have a record of successful smuggling operations.<sup>233</sup>

Smuggled migrants from the Philippines who travel by sea are usually transported to Malaysia aboard small boats, often used by local traders. The smugglers who navigate the boats anchor near the shoreline of Malaysia's Sabah state, permitting the migrants to wade ashore.<sup>234</sup>

Corruption often seems to play a role in this subregion,

with a wide range of officials potentially benefitting. Recent research published by the International Organization for Migration argued that '...the corrupt behaviour that facilitates migrant smuggling and human trafficking (is) endemic and (has) proved difficult to manage' in South-East Asia.<sup>235</sup>

### The human cost

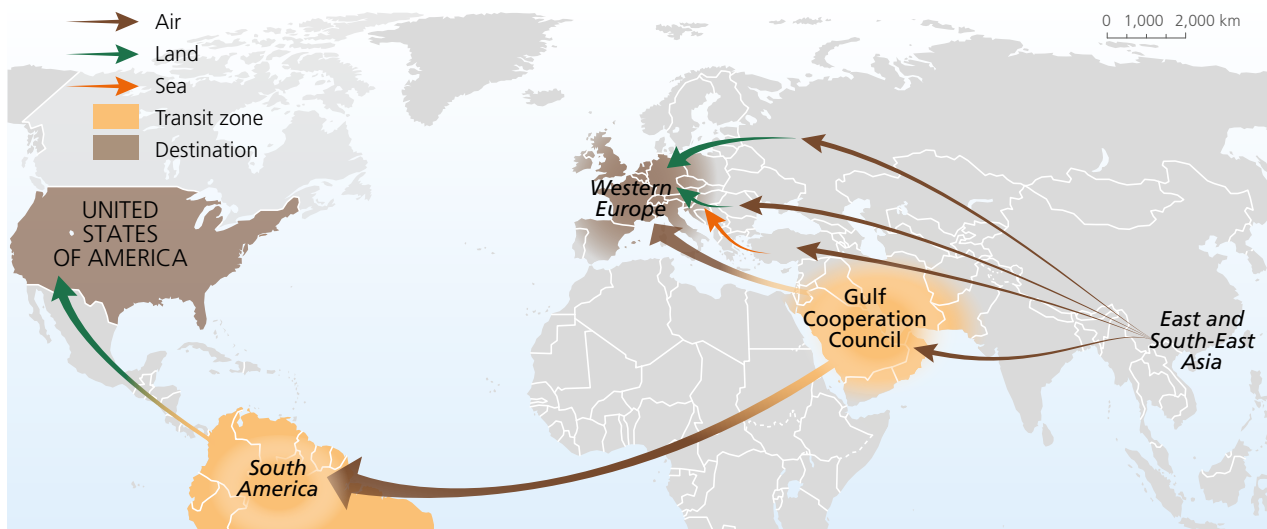
Significant numbers of fatalities have been reported during smuggling in South-East Asia. An estimated 800 people lost their lives in the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea in 2014 and 2015, when large numbers of stateless persons attempted to reach Thailand and Malaysia from Myanmar and Bangladesh by boat.<sup>236</sup> In South-East Asia, as for most routes, the majority of fatalities occur at sea. Between January 2014 and June 2017, 89 per cent of recorded migrant deaths involved maritime travel. This includes deaths caused by gunfire, torture or beatings that occurred on board ships. However, it is likely that migrant deaths on land go unrecorded. In 2015, mass graves containing nearly 200 migrant remains were discovered in the region.<sup>237</sup> This indicates that irregular overland movements in South-East Asia are also fraught with danger.

The smuggling of migrants along this route entails dangers, both environmental and at the hands of smugglers, as well as vulnerability to labour exploitation as a result of the irregular migration process. Smuggled migrants may have no choice but to accept excessively long working hours, unsafe conditions and payment well below the minimum wage.<sup>238</sup> Some smuggled migrants are also exploited and become victims of trafficking in persons.<sup>239</sup> South Asian migrants who are smuggled by sea to the southern provinces of Thailand may fall prey to human trafficking syndicates. Thai authorities reported having assisted victims of trafficking as well as migrants vulnerable to being trafficked among the migrants smuggled along this route.<sup>240</sup>

## FROM EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA TO EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

East and South-East Asia are regions of origin for migrants who are smuggled to Europe and North America. The smuggling of migrants from Cambodia, China, the Philippines and Viet Nam, as well as from other countries in East and South-East Asia is dispersed in several parts of Europe and North America.

East and South-East Asians are smuggled along the Eastern Mediterranean and European Eastern Borders routes, as



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

well as through air routes. Similarly, East and South-East Asians are smuggled to North America via air routes to major international airports in the United States, as well as through that country's southern border.

#### Profile of migrants:

From various East and South-East Asian countries; mainly individual males, but also women.

#### Human cost:

Various forms of victimization have been recorded along certain land passages.

#### Profile of smugglers:

Smugglers are often citizens of the countries along the borders that are crossed, or related to the citizenship of the migrants smuggled.

#### Organization:

Mainly large transnational smuggling networks.

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

Smuggling from East and South-East Asia to Europe involves a range of different routes and methods. Most commonly, migrants fly as close as possible to their desired destination, and are smuggled overland for the remaining stretch. The choice of transit airport is guided by considerations regarding cost and visa requirements for these migrants. In recent years, many migrants have flown to Eastern European major cities with fraudulent travel documents. Smugglers then transport migrants over land,

often via the European Eastern Borders route.<sup>241</sup>

UNODC research from 2015 identified three key migrant smuggling routes from East Asia to the European Union. One involved migrants flying from major international airports in the region to major international airport in Eastern Europe. The air passage to Europe may be regular or undertaken with altered documents or genuine documents belonging to someone else. Migrants then continued overland to one of the Baltic States and/or Eastern European countries into Western Europe.<sup>242</sup> Frontex reports that most detections of irregular border crossing by East and South-East Asian citizens take place at the Eastern EU border with Latvia.<sup>243</sup> Poland is also a transit country for the smuggling of these migrants, and there appear to be links between some smuggling networks and the East Asian communities there.<sup>244</sup>

The second route involved direct flights to some European transit airports, mainly in South-eastern or Central Europe. From there, migrants were transported overland to other destinations in Western Europe.<sup>245</sup>

A third smuggling route involved East and South-East Asians making use of the Eastern Mediterranean route. Typically, they would fly into Turkey with fraudulent documents, and travel onwards from Turkey to Greece by boat. Many would continue to Italy, and then transit through various other European countries to reach either France or the United Kingdom.<sup>246</sup>

With regard to smuggling from East and South-East Asia to North America, it appears that different nationalities



use different smuggling methods. Some arrive with genuine documents and then overstay their visa. This travel method may or may not involve smugglers. There is a possibility, for example, that a genuine visa is obtained with the help of a smuggler. Some East and South-East Asian migrants pay smugglers to arrange a sham marriage with a Canadian or American citizen in order to enter those countries. Others may be smuggled by air directly to the United States or via a neighboring country.<sup>247</sup>

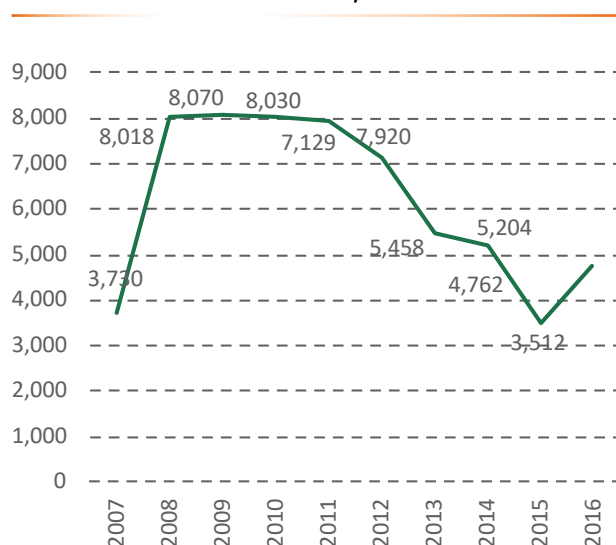
Smugglers may use a number of air routes. Sometimes migrants are smuggled first by air to a Gulf country or to Europe, then onwards to South or Central America. Or they may fly directly to a South American country and then head north towards the United States overland. From Central America, migrants are smuggled to Mexico, continuing overland to the border region.<sup>248</sup>

### The magnitude of migrant smuggling from East and South-East Asia to Europe and North America

There is very little specific migrant smuggling data available, and there is no consensus among academics regarding the magnitude of these flows.<sup>249</sup>

With regard to entry refusals of East and South-East Asian citizens at the European Union external borders, the number has ranged between 1,800 per year in 2012 and 3,000 per year in 2016. The trend is increasing, but still

**FIG. 65:** Trend in the number of East and South-East Asians apprehended in immigration enforcement actions in the United States, 2007-2016\*



\* Fiscal years (FY 2016 ran from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016).

Source: US Department of Homeland Security.

a mere fraction of the more than 388,000 total entry refusals at European borders in 2016.<sup>250</sup>

With regard to smuggling of East and South-East Asian citizens into the United States, data from the US Department of Homeland Security shows that the trend for apprehensions of East and South-East Asian citizens for immigration offences was declining from fiscal year 2009 to 2015.

### The profile of smuggled migrants

The majority of smuggled migrants from East and South-East Asia come from specific provinces in their countries<sup>251</sup>. It is likely that the presence of established diaspora communities in destination countries plays a role in this smuggling.

The sex, age and educational profile of smuggled migrants appear to vary between origin and destinations. For instance, Vietnamese irregular migrants in Europe are mostly aged between 18 and 40 years. Vietnamese persons who are smuggled into Germany are often in their 40s or older, and fairly well educated. Those detected in other parts of Europe were both younger (mostly in their late 20s) and less educated.<sup>252</sup>

### The smugglers' profile and organization

East Asian migrant smugglers typically share the same citizenship with the migrants,<sup>253</sup> although cooperation between groups from different East Asian background has been reported in destination countries.<sup>254</sup> They come from a range of backgrounds, often with good family networks and contacts, and do not seem to conduct other illicit activities. Smugglers are usually men aged between 20 and 50. Smugglers based in the European Union typically have legal residence there and have been living abroad for an extended period of time.<sup>255</sup> Although men dominate, many women are also involved in these networks.<sup>256</sup>

Smuggling from East Asia appears to involve a combination of different groups and networks that cooperate along the main smuggling routes. The groups involved in the smuggling along these routes have extensive contacts outside their origin countries in Europe and North America. The networks have been described as interconnected and horizontal.<sup>257</sup>

Some East Asian smuggling networks seem to work with groups operating in origin countries, outsourcing certain legs of the trip to local groups with contacts and knowledge. They may also engage other criminal groups to handle travel through transit countries as well as entry into the destination country. Such arrangements are handled like business relationships, with frequent communi-

## Smuggling of migrants from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) shares land borders with China and the Republic of Korea. It appears that the Republic of Korea is the preferred destination for most smuggled migrants from the DPRK.<sup>a</sup>

The Republic of Korea's Ministry of Unification publishes statistics on the number of 'defectors' from the Democratic Republic of Korea that enter the Republic of Korea (ROK) each year. While it is not clear whether or to what extent these movements involve migrant smugglers, it is likely that a large share of them do, given the border fortifications between the two Koreas and the convoluted alternative routes into the ROK for DPRK citizens. The data show a declining trend, and average yearly arrival numbers around 1,500.<sup>b</sup>

According to the Ministry of Unification data, the age groups of 20-29 and 30-39 accounted for 57 per cent of the DPRK 'defectors' who arrived in the ROK between 1998 and 2016. Children and young people (age groups 0-9 and 10-19) accounted for some 16 per cent of the arrivals. In 2016, nearly 80 per cent of the 'defectors' were females.

Regarding the specific place of origin of the irregular migrants, research for the United Nations Human Rights Council found that most of the migrants originated from regions bordering China. Approximately 80 per cent of the more than 26,000 former DPRK citizens who left for the Republic of Korea by late 2013 and acquired citizenship there originated from the North Hamgyong and Ryanggang border provinces in the country's north-east.<sup>c</sup>

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a United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Migrant smuggling in Asia. Country Profiles: East Asia*, UNODC Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, August 2015 (restricted distribution), p. 1. Song, J., 'North-East Asia,' in McAuliffe, M. and Laczko, F. (eds.), *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: a global review of the emerging evidence base*, International Organization for Migration, pp. 243-267, 2016, pp. 245-246.

b Republic of Korea, Ministry of Unification, *Policy on North Korean Defectors*, online statistics (available at: [http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng\\_unikorea/relation/statistics/defectors/](http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eng_unikorea/relation/statistics/defectors/)).

c United Nations, Human Rights Council, *Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (A/HRC/25/CRP.1)*, 7 February 2014, p. 111.

cation and close follow-up.<sup>258</sup> For example, European smuggling groups seem to be involved in assisting migrants with information and onward travel arrangements, sometimes also including forged or fraudulently obtained documents. Reports indicate that some migrants are travelling (regularly or irregularly) directly to capitals in Eastern Europe from East Asia, where they continue by truck into Western Europe.<sup>259</sup>

More organized smuggling networks seems to integrate several smugglers who serve as 'stage coordinators,' controlling different parts of the geographical movement and/or certain aspects of the smuggling process. The 'stage coordinators' have some seniority and oversight, and may delegate certain tasks to lower-ranking smugglers. The 'stage coordinators' appear to report to senior smugglers, 'organizers' in origin countries, who maintain responsibility for the financial aspects of the smuggling crime. Document forgery and falsification is also generally carried out in East Asia.<sup>260</sup>

### The smugglers' modus operandi and travel arrangements

Smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to

Europe is usually carried out by a combination of air and overland travel. Eurostat data on entry refusals by border type shows that more than 50 per cent of refusals of these citizens take place at airports in the European Union. About one third of the refusals were reported at land borders and much less at sea borders.

Migrants who make their way to Western Europe via Eastern Europe are often smuggled first by air from their origin countries to an international airport in one of the Eastern European countries. From these transit points, migrants are smuggled westward to the European Union.<sup>261</sup> Smugglers may provide migrants with forged or altered documents or genuine documents under false identities, at origin countries or en route. Sometimes smugglers employ sophisticated techniques. Smuggled migrants may be presented as students seeking to study in Europe and travel with academic transcripts, language proficiency certificates and enrolment documents that may be forged.<sup>262</sup>

Czech and Slovak authorities have reported various methods of document fraud and false representations in applications for visas and travel documents by these migrants, for example, photo substitution in temporary Czech passports. In other cases, visas have been fraudulently obtained

through embassies in origin countries. Forged passports have also been reported.<sup>263</sup> According to Hungarian authorities, some South-East Asian citizens present fraudulent travel or identity documents to obtain Schengen visas.<sup>264</sup> The fraudulent documents are typically manufactured or altered in East Asia and sent to transit points where they are given to the smuggled migrants.<sup>265</sup>

The fees charged for the smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to Europe vary greatly, depending on destination, travel routes and time spent in transit countries. Reported estimates for smuggling into Europe are between US\$7,000 and \$15,000.<sup>266</sup> In general, smuggling into Eastern Europe is less expensive than to Western Europe. Migrants typically pay an upfront fee of \$1,000 to \$2,000 in order to obtain fraudulent travel documents, and then pay the rest at destination.<sup>267</sup>

Methods of payment seem to change according to the smuggling organization or the migrant's nationality. Some smuggling groups handle financial transactions through a hawala-like system. A smuggler ('broker') in the origin country is given the cash and arranges payment to another smuggler in destination country. If the smuggling is unsuccessful, part of the fee is refunded to the migrant's family.<sup>268</sup> Some other smuggling groups seem not to use such informal methods of transferring fees.<sup>269</sup>

### The human cost

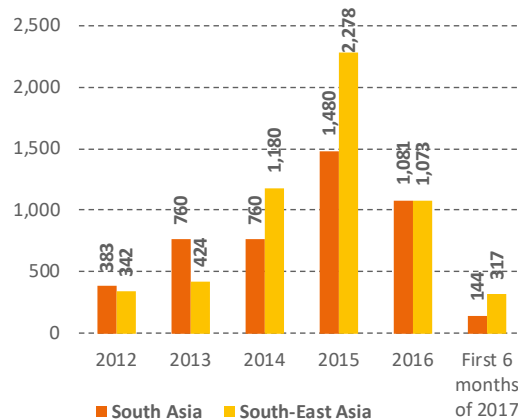
The smuggling of East and South-East Asian migrants to Europe and North America can be extremely dangerous and even life threatening. There have been reports of migrants dying inside shipping containers from lack of air.<sup>270</sup> A case in which migrants were concealed in plastic bin bags from France to the United Kingdom, for example, resulted in the death of one smuggled migrant while several others fell unconscious and had to be resuscitated after they were detected.<sup>271</sup>

The migrants' irregular status in transit and destination countries also makes them vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking. In addition, the high smuggling fees associated with these routes subject migrants to severe repayment tactics that may lead to exploitation. East Asian migrants have been reported to be vulnerable to situations of debt bondage, sometimes entailing years of brutal working conditions.<sup>272</sup>

### Other routes in East Asia

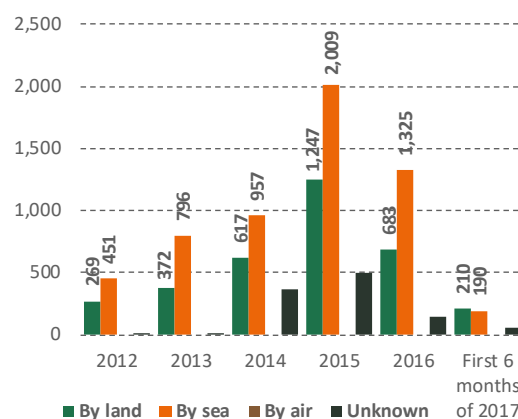
Smuggling of migrants flows seem to affect the two Special Administrative Regions of China; that is, Hong Kong SAR, China and Macao SAR, China. A number of irregular entries have been reported by the Chinese authorities in

FIG. 66: Trend in the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong SAR, China, by region of citizenship, 2012-June 2017



Source: Official information from Hong Kong SAR, China.

FIG. 67: Trend in the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong SAR, China, by method of travel, 2012-June 2017



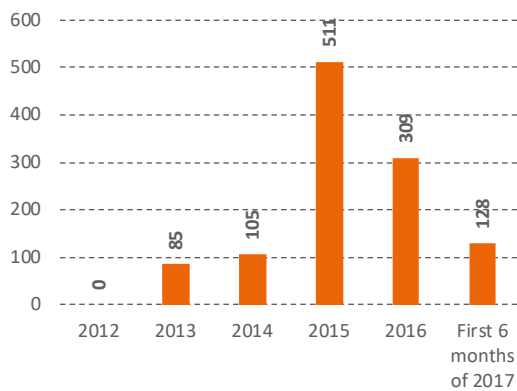
Source: Official information from Hong Kong SAR, China.

reference to these two areas in recent years. Two facts suggest that many of these irregular entries have been facilitated by smugglers. The first is the origin of the detected migrants and the second is the method of transportation.

Many of the migrants who have been detected for irregularly entering in Hong Kong, China are South Asian citizens, 45 per cent of the illegal entries between 2012 and the first six months of 2017. The majority of migrants (55 per cent of the entries) are South-East Asian migrants.

The majority of migrants who are detected when attempting irregular entry into Hong Kong, China travel by sea, which suggests a travel method requiring a minimum level of organization. About 56 per cent of the irregular entries recorded in Hong Kong, China between 2012 and the

**FIG. 68:** Trend in the number of migrants smuggled into Macao SAR, 2012-June 2017



Source: Official information from Macao SAR, China.

first six months of 2017 involved travel by sea; 33 per cent by land, while for 11 per cent of the irregular entries the method of travel was unrecorded. None of the detected irregular entries took place at airports.

For Macao, China, the data refers specifically to smuggled migrants. The number of smuggled migrants recorded in Macao, China is much lower than the number of irregular entries into Hong Kong, China, and almost all refer to South-East Asian citizens. There are no indications that South Asian migrants are smuggled into Macao, China.

Linguistic ties due to the colonial past of these areas could help explain the flows from parts of South Asia to Hong Kong, China, as well as the absence of such flows to Macao, China. Both Special Administrative Regions recorded increasing trends of irregular entries until the peak in 2015. A sharp reduction was recorded in 2016 and the decreasing trend is confirmed by data for the first half of 2017.

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