



European Commission, DG Migration  
& Home Affairs

# A study on smuggling of migrants

Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third  
countries

Executive summary

September 2015

## 1 Executive summary

A consortium comprising Optimity Advisors<sup>1</sup>, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) was commissioned by the European Commission's DG Migration and Home Affairs to undertake a "**Study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries.**" (HOME/2011/EVAL/01).

### 1.1 Objectives and scope

The objectives of this study were to:

- ★ Map and analyse policies, programmes and operational responses implemented by selected EU Member States and third countries<sup>2</sup> aimed to fight against, reduce and prevent migrant smuggling to the EU.
- ★ Draw concrete comparative assessments of practices in various parts of the world where smuggling of migrants occur, based on a factual and comparative picture of the scale, characteristics, trends and patterns of the phenomenon.
- ★ Draw conclusions based on the data collection and case study outcomes.

### 1.2 Key findings

- ★ **There is an active market for migrant smuggling services.** Price, quality and risk vary across routes and suppliers are able to differentiate between customer needs, commanding higher prices from more affluent customers who want a less risky journey. On journeys from Libya, for example, prices start at around USD 1 000 for a sub-Saharan African migrant ready to sit in the most dangerous below deck positions, and rises to USD 2 500 or more for wealthier Syrians who can pay for more security on the crossing.
- ★ **There are strong communication networks.** Social media, pay-as-you-go phones and other forms of communication enable information to be shared quickly between buyers, between sellers and between buyers and sellers. For instance, once migrants have arrived in transit countries, information about the completed leg of their journey is often shared online including pictures of fake or altered travel documents; used boats and other means of transportation; drawings and maps of the routes; information about departure times and starting points for assisted journeys, as well as the phone numbers of smugglers and brokers located in transit countries.
- ★ **The business model for the supply of smuggling services is network based.** Groups or "cells" of actors/facilitators communicate to enable movement of people from one country to another, from source to destination. These networks are complex, shifting, emergent and resilient<sup>3</sup>. Routes are a manifestation of the journey of the migrant through the network and are best seen with hindsight. For instance, an Afghan smuggler explained the sort of cooperation between different networks: "everything and everyone is connected. From Afghanistan they (organisers) will give phone numbers or recommended organisers to call in Iran, and then Turkey, Greece etc. It's like a business. If someone is good they will recommend him, if someone is not good they will not collaborate".<sup>4</sup> Journeys are rarely organised from beginning to end, routes are flexible and can easily change.

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1 Matrix Knowledge (including Matrix Insight) formally joined the global consultancy group Optimity Advisors in September 2014. As its European arm, the newly combined business runs the public policy arm of Optimity Advisors' global operations. For more info go to: [www.optimityadvisors.com](http://www.optimityadvisors.com)

2 Countries outside the EU

3 These networks are complex regarding their organisation and the number of actors involved, networks change easily, they are developing and increasing in number and they are durable/resistant

4 GR/S/AF/03, Case Study 3: Pakistan – Turkey – Greece.

- ★ **Where the intensity of smuggling activities is greatest, smuggling networks cluster to form Hubs.** Within Hubs, the degree of professionalism, vertical hierarchical organisation, and cross-border contacts within any smuggling network increase with size and profits rise. There is also evidence of strong links with other illicit markets and organised crime within the Hubs. For instance, on Turkey's Eastern borders, Van, a major social and economic centre in the Eastern Anatolia region, is a first point of entry from Iran and, just like Ağrı and Doğubeyazıt<sup>5</sup>, is a main Hub city from where irregular migrants' onward movement within Turkey is organised. Istanbul, Izmir, Edirne, Balıkesir, Canakkale, Aydın and Muğla function as Hubs for preparing onward movements from Turkey towards Europe.
  
- ★ **Operational activities to tackle supply are likely to be more effective if they are comprehensive and, based on the business model analysis, if targeted at the Hubs.** Policies have the potential to be more effective if they are targeted at a migrant smuggling Hub, and if they combine law enforcement, prosecution of smugglers, direct action on the means of smuggling (document fraud and transportation), and business disruption activities particularly in relation to financial flows. Although there are no examples of such comprehensive policies and activities targeted at Hubs, examples of targeted "effective" operation activities do exist. These include the construction of fences (e.g. Greece and Bulgaria) and the deployment of additional border guards to specific areas where many irregular migrants arrive (e.g. Operation Shield in Greece); the implementation of new border surveillance systems (e.g. Bulgaria); bilateral police cooperation (e.g. between Egypt and Italy) and focused efforts of prosecutors in dismantling smuggling networks (e.g. Italy). Policies that are unilateral and not comprehensive simply serve to alter the route. For example, tightening of visa regulations for Syrian citizens in Egypt – alongside a more general deterioration of the situation for Syrians<sup>6</sup> – has discouraged Syrians from using Egypt as a country of transit. Syrians have changed their route and, from the beginning of 2015, tend to travel to Turkey and, if they are planning to proceed to a European country, continue their journey from there.<sup>7</sup> Lebanese restrictions on entry of Syrians have comparable effects.<sup>8</sup>
  
- ★ **Coordination of activities across agencies and borders is essential.** Cooperation can increase the effectiveness of policies if agreements can be reached quickly and can be collectively targeted at the Hub. Bilateral operations are currently used because they can be activated quickly but may have the disadvantage of simply displacing smuggling activities. EU level operations should be more comprehensive but are more complex to arrange and slower to implement. Examples of particularly effective bilateral cooperation (albeit not particularly targeted at Hubs) between EU and third countries include police cooperation between Turkey and Greece, joint patrols between Hungary and Serbia and joint investigation teams between Spain and Mauritania. Examples of good bilateral cooperation between EU Member States include France and Spain (posting of police officers), tri-lateral joint operations (Germany-Austria-Italy/Germany-Austria-Hungary) in which extra checks on trains are being carried out, and cooperation between the UK and France and Belgium through the introduction of juxtaposed controls in these countries.
  
- ★ **Policies and related activities that only tackle the supply of migrant smuggling could drive up prices or increase risks faced by migrants.** The unrelenting volume of migrants embarking on life-threatening crossings of the Mediterranean provides indicative evidence that demand is relatively unresponsive to the price paid by migrants for the crossing (either in financial or risk terms). This is particularly likely when migration is driven by crises and there is an absence of legal channels for migrants. Supply appears to expand relatively easily. Experts from Libya reported that very loose networks are made by anybody willing to exploit migrants, and it is very easy to enter these networks "*whilst there are some specific people who control the transfer process, but many others can benefit and make profit on the passage of migrants*". If demand is relatively unresponsive to price and supply is very flexible, policies that focus only on

5 Due to the existence of many other smuggling incidents (e.g. cigarettes) and the on-going conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK, migrant smuggling is considered a minor affair in the eastern and south eastern borders of Turkey (TR/A/24, Case Study 3 Pakistan – Turkey – Greece)

6 Bauer, W. (2015). Über das Meer. Mit den Syrern auf der Flucht nach Europa. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp

7 LB/OS/3, Case Study 2: Syria – Lebanon – Egypt – Italy.

8 [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/legal\\_status\\_of\\_individuals\\_fleeing\\_syria.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/legal_status_of_individuals_fleeing_syria.pdf)

supply, without also addressing demand, could simply increase market price or risk rather than actually reducing the use of smuggling services.

- ★ **Migrants become particularly vulnerable to exploitation and human rights violations when migrants run out of money.** For example, in this research, migrants who were smuggled through the Sinai and Libyan deserts by a network of Sudanese, Egyptian and Libyan smugglers described how their smuggling journey turned into a trafficking experience. They reported that at a certain point during the journey, usually when they reached an isolated desert area, the smugglers kidnapped and abused them to extort a ransom from their relatives in exchange for their release and onward travel.
- ★ **Family and diaspora play an important role.** Those considering embarking, or continuing on a journey, tend to trust communications from family and diaspora far more than those issued by governments or news agencies. In Nigeria, for example, a potential migrant will often ask for information through family and friends, particularly those migrants who have been successful in their smuggling journey and arrived at a European destination. One migrant interviewed in Ethiopia noted that he received information on which smuggler to contact in Metema from friends he made in Addis Ababa who migrated before him.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Somalis draw on established diasporic networks – from Ethiopia to Malta – in facilitating their onward migration.<sup>10</sup> There appear to be few activities targeted on social networks, and this research could not identify any specific policies in this context. Given their important role in the dynamics of smuggling there is potential to work much more closely with diaspora to co-design information campaigns, to raise awareness about legal routes and the risks of using smugglers.

### 1.3 Main findings from the research

In this section the main findings of the research are presented. Further detail can be found in the research report.

Migrant smuggling is a significant problem for the European Union. More than 280 000 people were detected when **illegally crossing** the border in 2014. In the first eight months of 2015, more than 500 000 migrants were detected.<sup>11</sup> Although the exact proportion is unknown, it is believed that the majority used smuggling services to gain entry. Those migrants who use the services of smugglers take considerable risks; migrant deaths are increasing, particularly where they are travelling by boat across the Southern Mediterranean.

The smuggling of migrants is a constantly evolving phenomenon. Routes are not static but are likely to change and are in themselves not fixed, with people using different legs if, and when, necessary. In the first eight months of 2015, the main route of entry was the Eastern Mediterranean route (January-September 2015: 359 171 detected migrants<sup>12</sup>). At the time of this research, the main **sea route** into the EU was the Central Mediterranean route, with 170 664 migrants detected at the sea border in 2014. This route involves countries such as Egypt/Libya, as well as Malta and Italy. The main **land route** was the Western Balkan route with 43 357 detected migrants at the European land borders in 2014. This route mainly involves the Greek-Turkish border and continues towards other EU Member States, through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia. Data on detection of migrants using fraudulent documents at **air borders** in 2014 shows that Istanbul Ataturk Airport in Turkey is the most reported last embarkation airport from third countries.

Within the EU, if they have a preferred destination country, most migrants seem to take the shortest route to their preferred country of destination, which means the geographic position of the country plays an important role. However, routes do change as a result of national policies (such as stricter enforcement) in European transit

9 ET/M/ET/5, Case Study 2: Ethiopia – Libya – Malta/Italy

10 Rousseau, C., Said, T. M., Gagné, M. J., & Bibeau, G. (1998), 'Between myth and madness: the premigration dream of leaving among young Somali refugees', *Culture, medicine and psychiatry*, 22(4), 385-411.

11 <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/more-than-500-000-migrants-detected-at-eu-external-borders-so-far-this-year-fGa82v> Please note that the cut off date for the research report was the end of June 2015. The exact numbers in 2015 were not known.

12 <http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-and-routes/migratory-routes-map>

countries. Germany, Sweden, France, United Kingdom, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark are regarded as preferred destination countries.

Various agencies operating at international and EU level have a role in assisting countries to implement their national legislation and policies addressing the smuggling of migrants. Within the researched EU Member States, several institutions and bodies are involved, such as ministries and governmental departments, law enforcement and border control agencies, authorities responsible for criminal investigations and the judiciary. Cooperation on the issue of migrant smuggling between the different institutions within the researched Member States is organised in different ways and to different extents, but usually on a very general level dealing with irregular migration as such. The main institutions include Ministries of Interior, Justice and Foreign Affairs, dealing with immigration policy and securing the border, prosecution of migrant smuggling cases and cooperation with third countries respectively. National law enforcement agencies are responsible for undertaking surveillance and border controls. The activities and policy responses in place are collectively focused on reducing the size of the market for migrant smuggling and/or reducing the harms associated with migrant smuggling. These activities and policies will be discussed in relation to each of the conceptual perspectives below.

In order to frame conclusions about the dynamics of smuggling and the mapping of policies and programmes, a **conceptual model** used in previous research was adapted for this study. The model explores smuggling from three inter-related perspectives, namely:

1. **The market perspective**, an interplay of supply, demand, risk and benefit.
2. **The business perspective**, focusing on investing and organising to make profits.
3. **The social perspective**, focusing on the relationships between human operators and their effect on the above.

Analysing research on smuggling through each of these lenses was seen to provide additional insight into which policies and/or portfolio of policies and activities addressing migrant smuggling are likely to be the most effective. These three perspectives overlap and intersect.

### 1.3.1 The market for migrant smuggling

Relevant features of an efficient market include buyers and sellers who have access to good information about the market, are free to join or leave the market and in this context can access resources relatively easily with relatively low investment and disinvestment consequences. This research suggests that all of these characteristics exist in the context of migrant smuggling, albeit with some distortions.

One of the most important characteristics of the market is the availability of information. An important source of information for migrants (buyers) travelling to the EU or within the EU (secondary movement) is formed by family, diaspora and social media. The research evidence suggests that there are circumstances where asymmetry of information<sup>13</sup> between the migrant and the smuggling network results in migrant exploitation.

Conflicts, civil unrest and security issues in countries such as Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Kosovo have resulted in a huge growth in the numbers of irregular migrants and corresponding demand for smuggling services. The large increase in the volume of irregular migrants using smugglers does not seem to have increased prices, which suggests that market supply is relatively "elastic"; in other words, the volume of supply is able to expand as demand increases. Market demand, however, is relatively "inelastic"; in other words demand is relatively unresponsive to changes in price. The volume of migrants using migrant services in any given sub-market, therefore, seems to remain relatively stable, regardless of changes in price.

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<sup>13</sup> Asymmetry of information means that one party might have more information or more accurate information than the other party. In this context, the migrant has less or inaccurate information about the journey

Changes in the economic circumstances of specific countries of destination and transit, such as Greece and Spain (for example in relation to employment prospects), also demonstrates the ability of migrants and smugglers to substitute one service for another relatively easily, allowing migrants to change their choice of destination and transit country and instead travel to new places of settlement as circumstances dictate.

Differential pricing for different routes and different levels of quality of service within suggest a degree of market sophistication, with suppliers being able to differentiate between customer needs and commanding higher prices from more affluent customers who want a less risky journey. Where the migrants are especially poor and/or vulnerable they can move from being a client for a smuggling service to being vulnerable to human trafficking. Some migrants report on abuse, rape, torture and deprivation during their journey to Europe. There are also reports of migrants being abducted by smugglers for ransom to be paid by their families, or migrants who are persecuted for religious reasons. Those that try to earn money for their journey in a transit country are often exploited by their “employers”.

Freedom to communicate is one of the most important characteristics of the market. The research has shown that the growth of social media, pay-as-you-go phones and other forms of communication ensure strong communication networks between buyers, between sellers, and between buyers and sellers. Family and diaspora are also an important source of market information for migrants. Migrants often use their social network to share information and comment on the products or services available from which seller. While social networks help to expedite irregular migration, migrants appear to lack accurate and unbiased information on the realities of using smuggling services, both on the various options for attempting it and expectations/realities awaiting them in destination countries. Those considering embarking, or continuing on a journey, appear to be disproportionately influenced by the success of others who report having succeeded in migrating and, as referenced above, tend to trust these communications more than those issued by governments or news agencies.

### *Policy responses*

The existence of a market suggests that policies to tackle migrant smuggling need to target both demand and supply. Put simply, if policies only focus on reducing supply, even if they are effective in increasing the costs of supply, the result will probably be that either prices rise or exploitation risks increase (for those who can't afford to pay) and the problems associated with migrant smuggling will increase.

Activities focused on reducing supply are generally those which increase the costs and risks of supplying the services for any given volume and service. The primary activities in this regard are **border management and migration control**. These are widely used by national authorities as one of the tools to reduce irregular migration, including the smuggling of migrants. These can be described generically as “target hardening” activities, rather than policies to mitigate migrant smuggling. However, these activities make it more difficult for smugglers to smuggle migrants into the countries while increasing the efforts needed by the smuggler to provide their services. Perversely, **it is the existence of these policies that, in part, also creates the demand** for smuggling services by irregular migrants. These activities, therefore, while reducing irregular migration overall, could increase the smuggling of migrants, as the more restrictive the border controls, the greater the challenges faced by irregular migrants to enter a country, and the greater their need to engage with smuggling networks. If such measures are pursued only in the national context, they also merely shift irregular flows and smuggling activities to another country or route (displacement), creating new hot spots or Hubs in global irregular movements and the international smuggling industry.

**Law enforcement activities (detect, apprehend, investigate and prosecute)**, when implemented effectively, will increase the cost and risk of doing business in these countries. This will reduce profit margins and either displace smuggling activities to the next best alternative or could even cause some actors to shift to other, more lucrative, criminal activities.

Combining “target hardening” activities with strong law enforcement activities targeted at actors engaged in smuggling activities should result in increased risks and costs for smugglers and should have the effect of reducing the level of supply. However, it can also have the effect of displacing the supply of smuggling activities to other, less secure, borders.

A third potential and effective measure to the supply side of the smuggling of migrants is to tackle **border guard corruption and document fraud**. Smugglers use these tools in particular, alongside transporting migrants across borders in a hidden way. Other law enforcement activities aimed at decreasing supply include **targeting the means of transportation used by smugglers** (i.e. policies targeted at carriers, to prevent them from participating in the smuggling). In addition, working with providers of social media to disrupt communication channels is potentially a very important policy instrument. However, there are currently no examples of successful initiatives in this area that have impacted on the volume of migrant smuggling.

The availability of legal channels for migrants and refugees to reach Europe is of particular relevance where crises exist, as it would have a direct impact on irregular migration and the demand for migrant smuggling services. Initiatives to support genuine refugees and asylum seekers to access legal channels to Europe would potentially have an immediate and direct impact on the demand for smuggling services. Demand can also potentially be influenced by successful **awareness raising activities**. There is some doubt related to its effectiveness in all circumstances and research suggests that migrants usually do know where they are going and what risks are involved. **Effective return policies** are also noted by some stakeholders as another mechanism for discouraging irregular migration and as a means to deter migrants from paying a high price to smugglers, if this would mean they would be returned to their country within a short period of time anyway. There is, however, less evidence to support this as a policy that directly tackles migrant smuggling.

### 1.3.2 The business of smuggling is network based

Evidence from this research suggests that the business of smuggling is best described as a **network model**, with a network of communication links between smaller groups or “cells” of actors/facilitators to enable movement of people from one country to another, from source to destination. There may be multiple networks within a country and networks can span borders and, or, have links with other networks across borders. Networks cluster to form Hubs where the intensity of smuggling activities is greatest. These Hubs can be found in third countries as well as in transit countries within the EU, such as Greece and Italy.

The research has shown a diverse range of actors within a network performing a **variety of roles** in the migrant smuggling business including: Smuggler/top men, Recruiters, Guides, Drivers or Skippers, Spotters/Messengers, Money collectors, Forgers (passports/formal documents), Suppliers (boat makers, boat owners, car/bus owners), Corrupt policy officials (immigration officials) and Corrupt service providers (train conductors etc.), and Enforcers. Their role and function varies according to the type and scale of the smuggling network in which they are involved in as to the range of services provided to migrants. These actors have been found in third countries as well as in European Member States to facilitate secondary movements.

This network model provides for flexibility across the smuggling market as actors adapt their links in response to changes in national and international initiatives designed to mitigate their activities. The research has shown that these networks are **plentiful and cross borders**. Evidence suggests that, within the EU, facilitators are likely to be of the same nationality as the transit or destination country to which the migrants are smuggled (not necessarily ethnic background). These facilitators benefit from knowing the language and culture of that country and how to navigate barriers. The research has also shown that providers of smuggling services can be found in the main smuggling network Hubs and frequently operate in or around asylum and reception centres where they directly contact potential clients.

There are many different routes into the EU with border crossings taking place at sea, land and air. The research findings suggest, however, that rather than operating along a pre-defined route, the business of smuggling is best described as a network of communication links between smaller groups or “cells” of actors/facilitators to enable movement of people from one country to another from source to destination. Networks cluster to form Hubs where the intensity of smuggling activities is greatest. While routes are visible in terms of geographical flows of people, they are most clearly seen with hindsight; they result from a complex pattern of ever-changing migration patterns resulting from displacement of supply in response to policy initiatives along the legs of the journey.

The Hubs appear as the main constant. They form because of their geographical position on an irregular migration route, i.e. their location between countries of origin and aspired final destinations and the necessity to cross them. These are at critical points along migratory routes where particularly difficult stages have to be overcome or where “favourable” conditions facilitate the activities of migrant smugglers.

Within these Hubs, the degree of professionalism, vertical hierarchical organisation, and cross-border contacts within any smuggling network increases with size. Here, even though the “business of smuggling” operates as a network, the relationships change. The “top man” controls the migrant smuggling operation but contracts with actors all of whom are relatively influential within their respective spheres of influence.

### *Policy responses*

The policies need to be highly adaptive, with continuous innovation, utilising risk predictions to anticipate how the networks are likely to respond. Most of all, they require cooperation across Member States and between the EU and third countries. As shown by this research, there is a range of policies that are focused on disrupting the business of smuggling.

Selected EU Member States have set up **specific bodies that deal or assist with the investigation of cases of the smuggling of migrants** (e.g. the Expertise centre for trafficking and smuggling in human beings (EMM) in the Netherlands). These investigations are likely to be crucial **complementary activities** to the “target hardening” activities if they are to ultimately impact on smuggling as a business. **Technical assistance** is provided, at national as well as international and EU levels, to enhance capabilities to identify facilitators of smuggling of migrants and apprehend smugglers. Policies and legislation developed specifically to address migrant smuggling are instrumental in the effort to combat the phenomenon. For many **third countries gaps still remain** in terms of specific legislation, prosecutorial and operational activities addressing migrant smuggling. International organisations have played a key role in developing such legislation, and in providing support, for example in the form of training programmes for, or in facilitating dialogue between, key actors involved in addressing the phenomenon (e.g. judges, prosecutors, border police, Ministries, etc.).

Cross-border crime requires **cross-border cooperation**. The international organisations and the EU have a supporting and coordinating role. This research has found three types of cooperation: between EU Member States and third countries, between EU Member States and between third countries. There are two main levels/ways in which countries cooperate: sharing of intelligence (e.g. through border management systems and deploying liaison officers) and police cooperation (including joint border patrols or bilateral joint operations).

Cooperation between EU Member States and third countries supported by the EU can take different shapes. Specific frameworks include EU Association Agreements; EU and EU Member State Readmission Agreements with third countries; Mobility Partnerships; Common Agenda on Migration and Mobility and EU IPA Cross-Border Cooperation Programmes. Outside the above-mentioned EU frameworks, many EU Member States cooperate (bilaterally) with third countries in several ways including operational (border) police cooperation (e.g. border control and joint investigations) and readmission. Cooperation between third countries takes place, for instance, through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and African Union Police Cooperation Mechanism (AFRIPOL).

While there is no international organisation with specific responsibility to coordinate **joint operations** between countries aimed at detecting and dismantling migrant smuggling networks, cooperation does happen. Police cooperation and joint operations are important in the actions targeted against smuggling as a business. These are often bilateral operations focused on local circumstances and immediate needs. Europol is responsible for coordinating **Joint Police Operations** and for facilitating the (real time) exchange of intelligence; undertaking immediate cross-checks of all data gathered; hosting/organising operational meetings; interlinking the investigations; deploying a mobile office for on the spot intelligence analysis and setting up of coordination centres. Several specific joint operations have been effective at disrupting relatively well-organised networks.

There is also an EU Action Plan proposal to build on the success of **Hot spots policing**, a US practice where law enforcement agencies focus limited resources in areas where crime is highly concentrated and develop a “Hot spots”

approach to smuggling detection. This would involve joint mobile teams consisting of Europol, Eurojust, EASO and Frontex members deployed to frontline states facing particular pressure. There would be debriefing and screening teams to interview migrants upon arrival, provide operational and information support and assistance with investigations.

Although bilateral operations (between Member States, between third countries, and between a third country and a Member State) are perceived as effective by those countries that are involved, they have the disadvantage of potentially displacing smuggling activities to another location rather than reducing supply. On the other hand, there is a risk that international or EU level operations can be more difficult and slower to co-ordinate; local bilateral arrangements are able to respond with more agility and more intensity to detect and dismantle criminal networks involved in the smuggling of migrants.<sup>14</sup> As discussed in more detail above, the business of smuggling is agile and resilient and requires innovative, adaptive policy responses, which need to be implemented locally at the right time and in the right place.

**Prosecution** is also a key objective at national level for addressing migrant smuggling and disrupting the smuggling business. In some countries, such as Belgium or the Netherlands, specific courts have been set up to deal with cases of migrant smuggling in particular, or specific judges or prosecutors are appointed to try smuggling cases. Organisations at EU and international level can, and do, assist the Member States in bringing smugglers to justice, by providing training and guidance to prosecutors, or by organising meetings or signing agreements with the aim of enhancing information exchange and cooperation. The EU Action Plan against smuggling rightly calls for a multi-agency approach and stronger coordination between law enforcement and judiciary structures in the EU. It has called on Eurojust to set up a thematic group on migrant smuggling to specifically reinforce cooperation between national prosecutors and enhance mutual legal assistance. However, in certain circumstances it can be easier and simpler to share information and cooperate on a bilateral basis to solve the same case. For example, Spain has Joint Investigation Teams, without the coordination of Eurojust, with Morocco and Mauritania and plans to establish more in Niger and Algeria. These teams are considered by stakeholders as effective, as irregular migration from those countries has decreased in recent years.

One relatively under-developed area is the coordination of activities targeted on disrupting financial flows of funds and inhibiting payment mechanisms. While this is not likely to be effective at individual level, actions targeted at network Hubs have the potential to impact on the profitability of activities across a number of actors simultaneously.

### 1.3.3 Family members and social relationships are important to those who use the services of smugglers and smuggling networks

Research suggests that **family members and social networks** play a vital role as communication channels between migrants and it has shown how these relationships can support the management of financial arrangements. Social migrant networks in certain target countries and along migration routes play an important role in shaping the size and direction of irregular migration flows.

This social aspect is of huge importance in the context of setting policies to address migrant smuggling. Irregular migrants listen to each other and to their families and rely heavily on these relationships to establish the trust required by a migrant to engage with smugglers to facilitate their journey. Policies, which target these social networks to discourage the use of smugglers and raise awareness of the risks, need to engage closely with the networks if they are to be effective.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview representative Federal Judicial Police, Belgium

### *Policy responses*

Policies targeted at breaking or disrupting the business model, or taking action on market mechanisms, are unlikely to work if participant motivations are driven by social, familial or community goals rather than a profit motive. Instead, policies need to be focused on the motivations of migrants and the cost of irregular migration (e.g. diaspora driven risk awareness campaigns).

Evidence suggests that how individuals respond to a message is greatly influenced by the messenger and that individuals are more likely to act on information if the messenger has demographic and behavioural similarities.

There appear to be few activities targeted on social networks and this research could not identify any specific policies in this context. Given their important role in the dynamics of smuggling there is potential to do considerably more in this area. One issue, for example, which might be worth exploring further is for authorities to work much more closely with diaspora to design information campaigns to raise awareness on legal routes and the risks of using smugglers. Using diaspora as the vehicle through which these messages are developed and delivered could positively impact on their effectiveness.

#### **1.3.4 Other important policies**

There are measures taken on a national, European and international level that do not aim to disrupt the market or the business of migrant smuggling but are targeted to **reduce the harm associated with smuggling**. Organisations at international level assist and monitor countries in respecting and protecting the rights of migrants and ensuring their physical safety. These include efforts to ensure the safety of migrants in general and at sea, and to improve awareness of migrants' rights among the relevant national authorities.

Other activities are focused on **increasing the understanding of migrant smuggling**. As smuggling is an illicit activity, there are no official records or statistics that can provide a verifiable estimate of the number of migrants smuggled into the EU each year and/or where their final destination is. It is imperative that organisations cooperate with data collection, research and analysis so that the best possible information can be obtained. Those organisations involved at an international level already share information for the purpose of better understanding the phenomenon. At European level, the Frontex Risk Analysis Network (FRAN) risk analysis reports provide a gold standard for reporting in this area.

