



Typology of Migrant Smuggling: A holistic understanding

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Introduction



Over the past decades, migrant smuggling has become increasingly important among the general public, policy makers, practitioners and academia. In the media and public (policy) discourse, smugglers are often depicted as ruthless profiteers profiting off migrants in a vulnerable and weak position, putting their lives at serious risk in the process. While there are clear examples of such situations, as well as corruption, exploitation and violence, in many cases the situation is more complex. At the same time, within the operational environment, counter-smuggling efforts concentrate their efforts on dismantling smuggling networks, with investigations focusing on identifying the various agents involved and the modus operandi used. Academics, on the other hand, often emphasise migrants' own position and agency in engaging migrant smuggling services. To better understand the dynamics of migrant smuggling operations, however, an **understanding of both perspectives and the complex environment in which they operate is necessary.**

Indeed, smuggling operations can be understood also within the wider environment in which they operate, and counter-smuggling efforts may take these into account as well. Recent research highlights several important aspects to be considered in analysing migrant smuggling operations that speak to this wider environment.¹ Firstly, **the smuggling service itself is not alone in terms of economic activities** – a wider range of activities have been created around migrant smuggling activities, from shop owners selling life jackets or travel supplies, to renters and hoteliers in certain hubs, to money transfer shops. This broader economy of smuggling also supports the maintenance of certain smuggling hubs. Secondly, **smuggling networks often depend not only on profit for their success, but also systems of trust** established within community networks, through which smugglers' services are recommended to other potential migrants, and payment (through *hawala* networks) are ensured. Depending on demand for services, however, this trust-building and maintenance may not be deemed necessary for smugglers' business model (as demonstrated through the often callous smuggling operations from Libya). Lastly, the border itself has become more formalised and secure. In so doing, however, more **formalised smuggling networks (often also involving a wider network of roles from recruiters and guides to corrupt officials) are those best equipped to bypass those borders**, as compared to less organised and more informal actors that are could be engaged to cross more porous borders.

When we understand migrant smuggling within this context, then, we may observe a **range of possibilities open to both smugglers and to migrants depending on the local, national and regional contexts** – some riskier than others. In more effectively countering migrant smuggling, therefore, this **context is equally important to understanding the organisation of migrant smuggling operations, as well as migrants' agency in the process.**


1 Triandafyllidou, A. (2018). Migrant Smuggling: Novel Insights and Implications for Migration Control Policies. In: ANALS AAPSS 676(1), pp.212-221.

To better understand the dynamics of migrant smuggling operations, ICMPD researchers and partners developed a typology of migrant smuggling consisting of six generic types that could be applied to smuggling processes and routes directed towards Europe. The typology provides a set of **explanatory models that allow for a better description, analysis, and classification of migrant smuggling**. Any specific type is applicable based on the context within which both actors (smugglers and migrants) operate and make their decisions, and the entire typology integrates both a top-down (based on law enforcement data) and a bottom-up perspective (based on migrants' accounts). These types were developed in the early 2000s in the context of profound transformation in Europe in terms of geopolitical landscape, when the fall of the Iron Curtain and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in an unprecedented magnitude of asylum migration, irregular migration flows, and migrant smuggling. Nonetheless, it remains useful and relevant and, in the past years, has been applied to better understanding recent migrant smuggling to Europe.

In this paper, we present the six types and discuss them as they emerge in two particular regions (South-West Asia and Western Balkans). We also highlight initial findings on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant smuggling operations. We find that the fundamental mechanisms and types of migrant smuggling that were identified nearly two decades ago have persisted over time, but that certain changes in the modus operandi of migrant smugglers can be observed, changes that are linked to geopolitical, market, infrastructural, and other factors.



The types of migrant smuggling



The below table outlines briefly the main elements of each particular migrant smuggling type, including the usual features related to payment, smugglers' level of knowledge or engagement, and migrants' characteristics. As one moves from one region to another, or one hub to another, or even one smuggler to another, certain migrant smuggling types emerge based on the contextual environment within which smugglers operate and migrants make decisions.

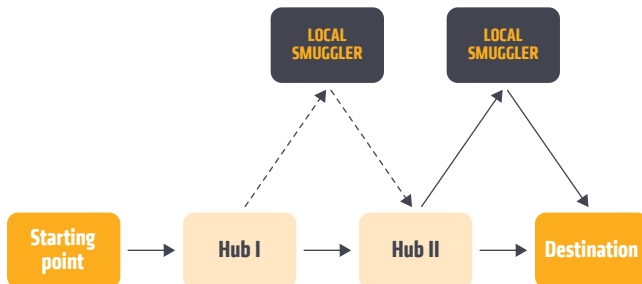
Additionally, the table is organised according to the practitioner (top-down) or migrant perspective (bottom-up) as they respectively view the migrant smuggling operation:

The Top-down Approach: these three types of migrant smuggling focus on the **organisational environment** in which smugglers are embedded and the **broader strategies** they apply in order to successfully carry out their activities. The underlying questions include how migrant smuggling is organised, which actors are involved, and how these actors work together.

The Bottom-up Approach: these three types place emphasis on the **migrants' own position** in smuggling. Since the arrival at a desired destination is of utmost importance to migrants, examining the conditions of arrival and the "**relative power**" migrants have in this process are central. The three types focus on different types of interactions between smugglers and migrants, which occur within a wider contextual environment.

Top-down perspective²

Partial Smuggling

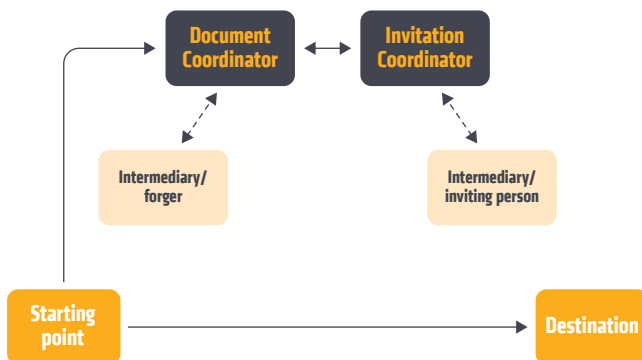


Smugglers are “booked” for a border crossing at hubs; small-scale smuggling operations; low level of coordination; most frequent where migrants carry out migration in stages; One-off relationship between migrants and smugglers

Smugglers: local smugglers offering a particular service; involved sporadically on their own account or cooperate with others on an occasional basis; migrants who know the territory; offer services at hubs; contacted for cooperation

Payment: cash before crossing or after safe arrival (sometimes several tries guaranteed / possible)

Document Smuggling

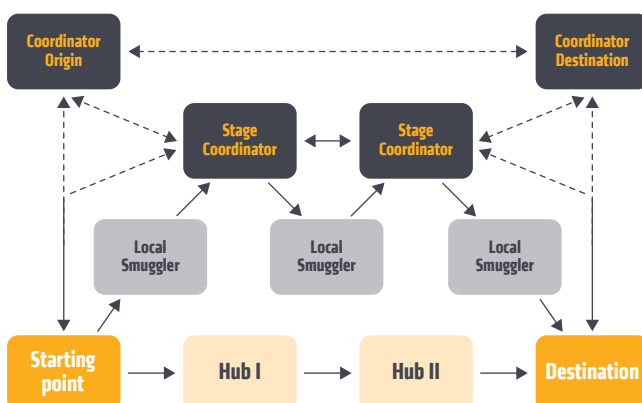


Sophisticated organisation; no services on the route; services limited to provision of (forged) travel documents; for high traffic environments; airports and highest security standards

Smugglers: Understand themselves as “travel agents”; strong international cooperation (manufacturing, distributing); technically highly specialised; locally known travel agents or business persons; strongest link to corruption; “visa scandals” in embassies and recently also link to terrorism

Payment: before departure

Organised Chain Smuggling



Most sophisticated organisation; pre-organised from start to destination; carried out in form of a “smuggling chain”: all stages are connected; based on horizontal and vertical division of tasks; network/chain of cooperation with regular providers

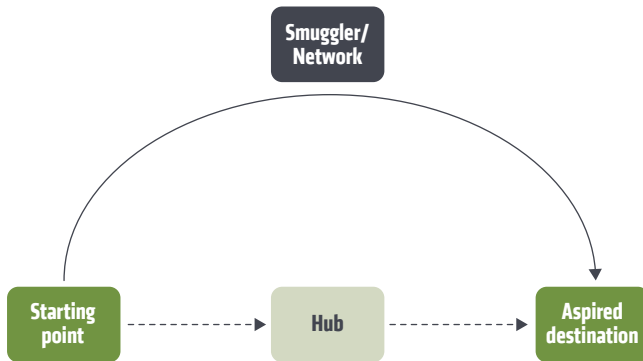
Smugglers: accompany over larger distances; coordination and managerial level cooperation based on national, ethnic, kinship or friendship group

Payment: money deposited. Payment plan or after safely arriving at a certain destination

2 Neske, M. (2007). *Menschenschmuggel: Deutschland als Transit- und Zielland irregulärer Migration* Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius. Bilger, V (2018): *Modeling migrant smuggling: Testing descriptive types against recent findings. New Perspectives on Turkey*, 59, 33-61.

Bottom-up perspective³

Service Smuggling

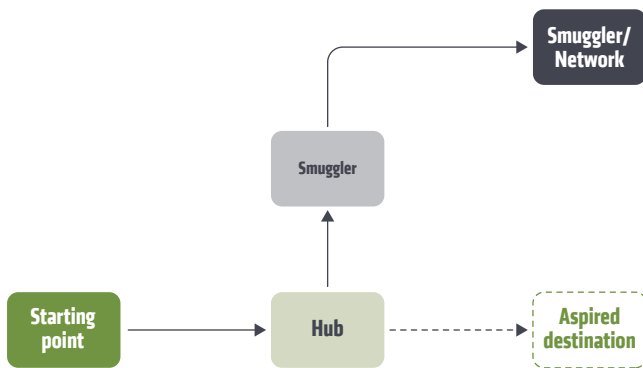


Migrants approach a smuggler (network), agree on a price and destination, smugglers deliver or credibly try to do so; process based on trust and reputation; ties between smuggler and client established before start of journey

Migrants: only accessible for migrants who have access to information about smugglers' performance (network); for those who can afford lower risks and higher prices

Payment: money deposited. Payment arrangements in various instalments and based on a payment plan or after safely arriving at a certain agreed destination.

Directive Smuggling

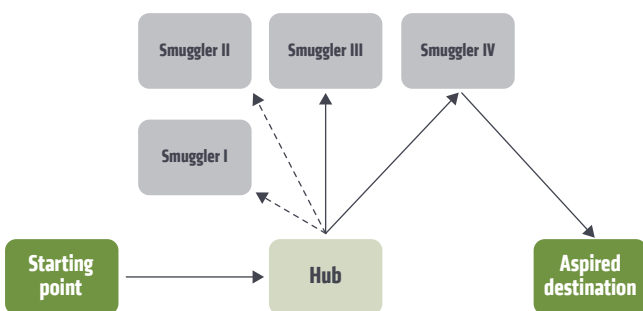


Final destination is exclusively in the sphere of smugglers who have an interest in directing migrants towards a destination (reduced costs and risks); Smuggler determines what happens; choice of destination can be either intentional or circumstantial; difficulties handling external interventions or unforeseeable incidents: smugglers interrupt or let migrants down

Migrants: Lack financial and network contacts that would support service type; migrants in desperate situations; take what seems the best offer; "hope for the best"; smugglers are "necessary evil"

Payment: before leaving or post arrival

Negotiable Smuggling



Migrants have covered parts of the journey themselves and arrive at strategic places along the route where smugglers openly advertise their services (hubs); Stage-by-stage approach; migrants choose from different service providers; comparatively strongest market position of migrants; smugglers forced to improve their services while maintaining reliability.

Migrants: well connected with other migrants and former migrants, particularly in hubs; prolonged periods of stay in hubs (money, information, negotiation)

Payment: depends on negotiations

³ van Liempt, I. (2007). *Navigating Borders: Inside Perspectives on the Process of Human Smuggling into the Netherlands*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. Bilger, V (2018): *Modeling migrant smuggling: Testing descriptive types against recent findings*. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 59, 33-61.

The above table presents all six types together, but it is important to understand that de facto, **there are only three types depending on the perspective**. Within the migration journey of one individual, several of the types could apply, even within the same perspective. **For irregular migration processes over long distances in particular, it is rare that only one type would apply**, especially since long distances are often covered in stages over a longer period. Thus, several types from both the top-down and the bottom-up perspectives would be possible within one irregular migration journey. Moreover, a number of factors contribute to the prevalence of one type as compared to another along any particular route segment, including:

- **obstacles to cross independently** (e.g. border closures or additional controls),
- **available capital** (e.g. those who can afford a safer means, such as via air route with the use of document fraud),
- **access to trusted intermediaries or networks** (e.g. through hubs or connection to previously successful irregular migrants).

The regional examples in this document (South-West Asia and Western Balkans) highlight the most prevalent characteristics and forms of smuggling in those respective regions, but one person's migration journey might transect both. For example, an Afghan migrant aiming to arrive in Germany would likely engage various smugglers across his journey, which could take place over years, with the migrant staying and working for longer spells in hubs along the way to raise money to pay for smugglers' services. The following describes such an imagined migration journey, and how various smuggling types could be engaged over the course of such a journey:

Taking the **top-down perspective**, an Afghan migrant could experience **Partial Smuggling** from Afghanistan via Pakistan to Iran, given the porousness of some sections of the borders between countries, as well as the informal and loosely connected nature of smuggling networks in these countries. Then he could experience **Organised Chain Smuggling** from Iran to and via Turkey, engaging a smuggler in Iran that could convey him through Iran, passing him on to another facilitator in Turkey to bring him to Istanbul. After this, he stays for several months in Istanbul working in a factory to raise money for the next leg of the journey, and surveying the services offered by various smugglers. Then he could again engage in **Partial Smuggling** from Turkey to Greece, considering the sea route is exclusively passed with the support of smugglers, as well as then later on in his journey via Serbia and Hungary, hiring smugglers in order to bypass the more stringent controls and patrols. In Greece, he could also engage in **Document Smuggling**, obtaining fraudulent identity documents in Thessaloniki to use later on in his journey, since he was advised in Turkey to dispose of his original documents.

In this same theoretical journey, but from the **bottom-up perspective**, he could experience **Negotiable Smuggling** from Afghanistan via Pakistan to Iran, covering stretches of the journey by himself as feasible. Then **Service Smuggling** from Iran through Turkey, and again from Turkey to Greece, hiring a smuggler based on recommendations from other Afghans in Tehran and Istanbul. Then he could experience **Negotiable Smuggling** again as he crosses the Western Balkans, using recommendations from fellow migrants met along the journey and GPS to cross segments on his own.

Migrant smuggling from the South-West Asian region⁴

South-West Asian Routes to Europe



Source: UNODC (2018). *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants*. Vienna: UNODC, p.109.

Examining migrant smuggling routes from South-West Asia towards Europe demonstrates several migrant smuggling types. **Smuggling routes from South-West Asia towards Europe generally transect Afghanistan-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey, with routes segmented among and across the countries.** For this region, Afghan migrants and asylum seekers make use of smuggling networks, as do Pakistani and Iranian migrants, particularly young men. Smugglers operating in the region are commonly citizens of the countries' borders to be crossed, and often share the same citizenship or ethnicity as the migrants (Afghan, Iranian or Pakistani nationals, as well as Kurdish and Baluchi ethnic groups), particularly at the recruiter or first-contact level.

In this region, smuggling operations tend to be more loosely connected and informal, rather than hierarchical. Related to this, most Afghan migrants using this route organise their journeys step-by-step. From Afghanistan, they may cross the border on their own, or use a local smuggler with whom they have a connection or who is recommended by someone within their network for the first leg from Afghanistan to Iran or Pakistan, and then subsequently connecting with another smuggler to organise the next step of the journey. This demonstrates **Partial Smuggling** (from the top-down perspective), as well as **Service Smuggling** and **Negotiable Smuggling** (from the bottom-up perspective).

Fraudulent document smuggling (counterfeit passports or identity documents, as well as fraudulently obtained visas or residence permits) – **Document Smuggling** – is also a modus operandi for migrant smuggling from this region, usually for the purpose of entering the EU/Schengen area. For those countries where legal authorisation is needed to leave the country, migrants may use fraudulent documents or (more commonly) covert methods to cross a border, as this is cheaper. While the land route segments are demonstrated in the map above, air routes are also

⁴ The information included here is based on: UNODC (2018). *Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants*. Vienna: UNODC; Aksel, D.B., A. Dimitriadi, M. Hendow, A. İçduygu, A.B. Karacay, M. Marouf, J. Andersson-Pucher (2015). *Study on Smuggling of Migrants: Characteristics, Responses and Cooperation with Third Countries*. Case Study 3: Pakistan-Turkey-Greece. Brussels: European Commission, DG Migration, and Home Affairs/European Migration Network.

possible (but less common), from any of the countries along this route, but with varied pricing: smuggling by air from Afghanistan could cost up to \$25,000, whereas from Pakistan could cost up to \$18,000. Land routes paid in various instalments to various smugglers along the route segments from Afghanistan or Pakistan can reportedly cost between \$3-6,000. Most fees are not paid by lump sum but rather following a successful leg of the journey being completed, often relying on *hawala* transfers. In such cases, fees are released upon provision of proof of safe arrival, for example a photo of him or herself in front of an iconic landmark in the destination, sent via a messaging application.

For this region, therefore, two operational types of migrant smuggling emerge as the most common: **Partial Smuggling** and **Document Smuggling**. From the migrants' perspective, **Service Smuggling** and **Negotiable Smuggling** seem the most common.

The impact of COVID-19

Although not much data is available on the impact of COVID-19 on migrant smuggling, some initial findings and analysis are available.⁵ The uncertainty and upheaval caused by the pandemic – in countries of origin, transit and destination – likely led to postponement of travel plans for some potential (irregular) migrants. In addition, travel restrictions and reinforced border checks have made irregular border crossings more difficult. While this has meant that irregular arrivals have decreased, previous research demonstrates that border closures may stem irregular flows, but only to a limited extent and often not for long (particularly for those fleeing conflict, violence and inhumane conditions). Border closures, however, do result in the use of **riskier routes, more difficult conditions, increased vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, and higher prices**. Recent reports already highlight increased frequency of “pushbacks” and “pullbacks” of migrant boats, failure to assist boats in distress at sea, as well as extreme examples of human rights violations and abuses by smugglers.⁶

Indeed, Europol has highlighted that migrant smugglers have already adapted to the new reality by **changing their modus operandi and routes**.⁷ While air routes have closed, smuggling routes have shifted to land and sea routes. Smugglers have engaged freight trains, lorries, boats (including the re-emergence of “mother boats”⁸ along the Western Mediterranean route) and other larger capacity vessels, to recoup economic losses. New routes have emerged (such as from Albania to Italy, as well as from Algeria) or re-emerged (such as from the Canary Islands on the West African route), as well as riskier ones (such as the use of rivers such as the Danube or Evros). **Prices have increased**, and smugglers have reportedly spread misinformation about the pandemic in order to increase demand for their services.⁹ There have also been new nationalities detected on various routes: for the Central Mediterranean route, detection of irregular crossing of Bangladeshi migrants doubled for 2020 as compared to 2019, likely due to worsening conditions in Libya.¹⁰ In recent years, outside of COVID impacts per se, **smugglers have increasingly used more sophisticated technologies**, including cryptocurrency.

5 UNODC (2020). *How COVID-19 restrictions and economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America*. Vienna: UNODC; Europol (2020). *How COVID-19-related crime infected Europe during 2020*. 11 November. The Hague: Europol; Europol (2021), *European Union serious and organised crime threat assessment, A corrupting influence: the infiltration and undermining of Europe's economy and society by organised crime*. Luxembourg Publications Office of the European Union.

6 Horwood, C. (2020). *Normalisation of the extreme 2020*. Mixed Migration Centre, 17 December. Available at: <https://mixedmigration.org/articles/normalisation-of-the-extreme-2020/>.

7 Europol (2020). *How COVID-19-related crime infected Europe during 2020*. 11 November. The Hague: Europol. Europol (2021), *European Union serious and organised crime threat assessment, A corrupting influence: the infiltration and undermining of Europe's economy and society by organised crime*. Luxembourg Publications Office of the European Union.

8 This is the use of smaller vessels to transport migrants from the shore to a “mother boat”, or larger capacity vessel, waiting in open or international waters. This larger boat (often with small dinghies on board), then delivers/leaves migrants in small boats along the route to various destinations. Smugglers used this modus operandi in particular along the Central and Eastern Mediterranean route from Egypt and Turkey in 2012-2014.

9 Europol (2020). *How COVID-19-related crime infected Europe during 2020*. 11 November. The Hague: Europol.

10 Frontex (2021). *Migratory Map*. Warsaw: Frontex.

While these initial findings demonstrate recent trends, they are likely short-term impacts. However, the broader economic repercussions of the pandemic could fuel irregular migration trends more broadly: where recovery is unequal, interest in labour migration as a livelihood strategy may increase, for those who can afford it.¹¹ Given recent developments then, the **demand for smuggling services to Europe could increase in the short-, medium- and long-term.**

Importantly, **the pandemic has not altered the migrant smuggling types – rather, it has constrained the opportunity and access of migrants to more negotiable and safer types.** From migrants' perspectives, **Directive Smuggling** has emerged as ubiquitous, given current constraints, leaving less room for negotiation and more opportunity for exploitation. From a law enforcement perspective, **Organised Chain Smuggling** may become more important, as the type with the most resources to network, engage and coordinate more complex and difficult border crossings. **Partial Smuggling** may also remain common, where the increased demand for services may mean that more inexperienced migrant smugglers (but who have knowledge of the border region or access to vehicles) enter the market.


Migrant smuggling in the Western Balkans¹²



For migrants who have arrived to Europe already (Greece or Bulgaria) via the Eastern Mediterranean route in particular, the route via the Western Balkans is the typical next step to connect to destinations further north within Europe. While the crossing to Greece from Turkey is made almost exclusively with the help of smugglers, **it is not clear the proportion of migrants who engage migrant smuggling services while transiting the Western Balkans.** It also very much depends on law enforcement and other policy measures in place at any given time. Initial evidence suggests that border closures related to COVID-19 could have increased the demand for migrant smuggling services. At the same time, irregular arrivals in this region decreased in 2020, perhaps due to postponement of migration projects.

11 ICMPD (2021). ICMPD Migration Outlook 2021 Seven things to look out for in 2021. Origins, key events and priorities for Europe. Vienna: ICMPD. Available at: https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/2017/ICMPD_Migration_Outlook_2021.pdf; UNODC (2020). How COVID-19 restrictions and economic consequences are likely to impact migrant smuggling and cross-border trafficking in persons to Europe and North America. Vienna: UNODC.

12 The information included here is based on: UNODC (2020). Measuring Organised Crime in the Western Balkans. Vienna: UNODC; UNODC (2020). "The impact of COVID-19 on organised crime." Vienna: UNODC; UNODC (2018). Global Study on Smuggling of Migrants. Vienna: UNODC.



For this route, in recent years arrivals of nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan have been significant. Women and (unaccompanied) children also make up a significant share of those using this route. Smugglers often share the nationality of the migrants making the journey, with the largest networks composed primarily of Afghans, Albanians, Iraqis or Kurds – but engaging local nationalities (e.g. Greek, Albanian, Montenegrin) or those familiar with the terrain for certain jobs (e.g. driver). It seems that various groups cooperate with each other as needed.

Migrants transiting this region do not always engage smuggling networks. Recent research suggests that migrants often use smuggling services on the advice of family or friends, after having (unsuccessfully) attempted to cross on their own.¹³ Prices could occasionally be negotiated, and based on 2019 research ranged from \$170-\$500 for a shorter journey (Greece to Albania) to \$6,000 to a Western European country (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Germany) and \$15,000 to the U.K.¹⁴ As most migrants disposed of or hid their original documents in Turkey (on advice of smugglers and other migrants), many then purchased fraudulent documents in Greece before onward travel.

Previous research suggests horizontal and flexible smuggling networks, described as a chain with small and large links including the smuggler/boss, recruiters, drivers, skippers and money collectors.¹⁵ UNODC findings suggest that smuggling in the region was usually conducted as a part of an organised criminal group under the auspice of a main smuggler.¹⁶ That main smuggler divides tasks among partners and is in charge of certain portions of the border, along which migrants would be handed over from one group to another for the next leg of the journey.

Thus along this route, **Negotiable Smuggling** (from the bottom-up perspective), **Partial Smuggling** and **Document Smuggling** (from the top-down perspective) seem to be the most common, although **Service Smuggling** and **Organised Chain Smuggling** could also be possible.

13 UNODC (2020). *Measuring Organised Crime in the Western Balkans*. Vienna: UNODC.

14 Ibid.

15 Aksel, D.B., A. Dimitriadi, M. Hendow, A. İçduygu, A.B. Karacay, M. Marouf, J. Andersson-Pucher (2015). *Study on Smuggling of Migrants: Characteristics, Responses and Cooperation with Third Countries. Case Study 3: Pakistan-Turkey-Greece*. Brussels: European Commission, DG Migration, and Home Affairs/European Migration Network.

16 UNODC (2020). *Measuring Organised Crime in the Western Balkans*. Vienna: UNODC.

Conclusions

The six migrant smuggling types offer a holistic way to understand a migrant smuggling operation: to integrate migrants' perspectives within a law enforcement one, and vice versa. In terms of reliability, from the migrants' perspective Document Smuggling and Organised Chain Smuggling ensure arrival at an agreed-upon destination. However, these types tend to be particularly expensive, and are not universally available at any point of departure or transit. Deception, as well as cases where migrant smugglers exclusively decide on a final destination, can occur in Directive Smuggling and Organised Chain Smuggling, as well as Partial Smuggling (to a certain extent). On the other hand, in Partial Smuggling, migrants can have a relatively strong position on the smuggling market. Traveling via hubs, larger cities within transit regions along irregular migration routes, can support Negotiable Smuggling, as these cities often offer a wide range of providers and services and allow migrants to get in contact with a broader network with more reliable information. New forms of social media or **communication platforms can also strengthen migrants' negotiating positions**, but also should not be overestimated.

Using the typology also allows us to clarify what aspects maintain and change over time. In particular, **external forces (as seen with COVID-19 impacts) can influence which types are more common.** Reports from this period echo those of previous years, where inexperienced smugglers enter the field due to increased demand, leading to a rise in reports of deception, exploitation and endangering of migrants during the smuggling operation. In 2015, changing geopolitical dynamics led to the expansion and opening of new smuggling markets, and in response to growing demand stemming from the ongoing Syrian Civil War and the aftermath of Arab Spring protests, a great number of smugglers lacking the experience and usual business ethics (e.g. established trust through networks, etc.) entered the business. Consequently, smuggling networks have become increasingly unsafe and violent, putting migrants at even greater risk. This can be observed along the Central Mediterranean route in particular, where migrants detail horrifying experiences with migrant smugglers and their partners in Libya, who operate in an institutional vacuum and without repercussions. In 2020, given border closures and negative economic impacts, the situation has only been compounded.

However, we do observe that **the main elements in terms of how smuggling is organised and migrant decision-making do seem to stay the same.** As noted in the introduction, understanding the wider context in which smuggling operations function is crucial in order to more effectively dismantle smuggling networks. In the same vein, recent research¹⁷ has highlighted that decision-making on irregular

¹⁷ ICMPD has conducted needs assessments on prospective migrants' needs, in the context of improving Migrant Resource Centre outreach. These studies have been conducted for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and are forthcoming. For more information, see: <https://www.budapestprocess.org/migration-in-the-silk-routes/migrant-resource-centre>. Moreover, ICMPD has also conducted background research on migrant decision-making and drivers of migration in the context of a new project "Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan", see: Hahn-Schaur, K. (2021). Awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration in Pakistan. Background Report. Vienna: ICMPD.

migration for migrants from the South and West Asian region is complex and influenced by a number of considerations, including:

- While smuggling costs can be high, migrants consider that the costs can be recouped within a few years, so still worthwhile in the longer term.
- Migrants' alternative options may be constrained, particularly in the current economic environment. For economic migrants, legal options for example to the Gulf may not be attractive, while for asylum seekers access to resettlement options are very limited.
- For some, irregular migration can sometimes be framed as an adventure with a certain appeal, despite the risks, while for others is considered unavoidable to escape more grave risks in their country of origin.
- Migrants make decisions on emigration based on information they receive from people they know within their family and friend networks, as well as the needs of their wider family or household.

These findings reiterate that **taking into account the broader dynamics within which migrant decision-making is situated could be more impactful than policies and actions focused purely on the criminal operation itself.**

While migrant decision-making processes maintain over the years, migrant smuggling has adapted in various ways in terms of modus operandi, routes, and diverging market conditions. Nevertheless, **the six descriptive types of migrant smuggling outlined above maintain and are relevant still today**, even if the relative importance of each type might have shifted over the years in response to external forces. Given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic both short- and longer-term, it remains to be seen how migrant smuggling operations will adjust in response, and which types will persist given the circumstances.

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The development of this typology was undertaken within the framework of a European Social Fund-funded European Collaborative Research Project “Human Smuggling: Types, Origins and Dynamics in a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspective” (2002–2005). Relevant publications based on this work include:

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