

Migrant Smuggling to Canada



An Enquiry into Vulnerability and Irregularity
through Migrant Stories



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency

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Cover photo: An Iraqi refugee who did not want to have his identity revealed stands in Istanbul's commercial district of Gayrettepe during afternoon rush hour. Istanbul districts, such as Aksaray and Beyoglu have been refugee transit hubs since at least the 1979 Iranian Revolution, with subsequent waves including Afghans, Africans, Iraqis and now Syrians. © Iason Athanasiadis, 2017.

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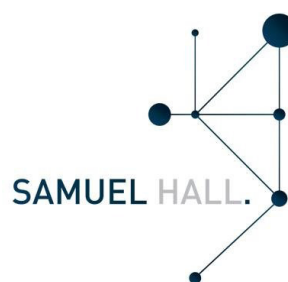
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This report seeks to amplify the voices of smuggled migrants and shares their lived experiences of migration, through the case study of Canada as a destination country. This report is the second part of a series commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and conducted by Samuel Hall in Afghanistan, Turkey, Greece and Canada.

We would like to thank all of those who contributed their insights and experiences – the migrants, smugglers and the key informants, from academia to practice, from authorities to communities and individuals.

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ABOUT Samuel Hall

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise dedicated to migration research. We work directly in countries affected by migration. Our mandate is to produce research that delivers a contribution to knowledge with an impact on policies, programs and people. To find out more, visit samuelhall.org.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ICT	Information and communications technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
GAIM	Global Assistance for Irregular Migrants
RBA	Rights-based approach
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SMS	Short message service
UAM	Unaccompanied minor
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Unless otherwise stated, all definitions have been taken from the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) *Glossary on Migration, Second Edition*, No. 25, 2011.

Aspirations	Migration aspirations refer to individuals' view of migration as a desirable life project – be it as a glamorous dream, the lesser of two evils, or as an instrumental means to an end. Migration capabilities refer to people's power to realize their migration aspirations. While capabilities are constrained by (migration and other) regulations and people's access to social, cultural and human resources (or "capitals"), aspirations are typically not equal within or across societies and constant over time, and are strongly dependent on information, perceptions and value systems. ¹
Country of destination	The country that is a destination for migratory flows (regular or irregular).
Country of origin	The country that is a source of migratory flows (regular or irregular).
Country of transit	The country through which migratory flows (regular or irregular) move.
Ecosystem approach	The analytical framework for assessing migrant vulnerabilities, uses an ecosystem approach, derived from the Ecological Systems Theory that was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. He divided the environment into five different levels. The <i>microsystem</i> is the most influential, has the closest relationship to the person, and is the one where direct contact occurs. The <i>mesosystem</i> consists of interactions between a person's microsystem. The <i>exosystem</i> , on the other hand, pertains to the linkages that may exist between two or more settings. The <i>macrosystem</i> is the largest and most distant collection of people and places. The <i>chronosystem</i> adds the useful dimension of time, which demonstrates the influence of both change and constancy. ²
Exploitation	The act of taking advantage of something or someone, in particular the act of taking unjust advantage of another for one's own benefit (e.g. sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs).

¹ J. Carling, Aspirations and Capabilities in Migration Processes, Workshop, Oxford, available from www.imi.ox.ac.uk/events/aspirations-and-capabilities-in-migration-processes

² U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979)

Feminization of migration	<p>The growing participation of women in migration (some 49 per cent of all migrants globally are women). While the proportion of migrants who are women has not changed greatly in recent decades, their role in migration has changed considerably. Women are now more likely to migrate independently, rather than as members of a household, and they are actively involved in employment.</p> <p>The increase of women in migration has led to certain gender-specific vulnerable forms of migration, including the commercialized migration of domestic workers and caregivers, the migration and trafficking of women for the sex industry, and the organized migration of women for marriage. Because of the unregulated nature of some of this employment, women migrants are often at greater risk of exploitation.</p>
Irregular migrant	<p>A person who, owing to unauthorized entry, breach of a condition of entry or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal status in a transit or host country. The definition covers, inter alia, those persons who have entered a transit or host country lawfully but have stayed for a longer period than authorized or subsequently taken up unauthorized employment (also called clandestine/undocumented migrant or migrant in an irregular situation). The term “irregular” is preferable to “illegal” because the latter carries a criminal connotation and is seen as denying migrants’ humanity.</p>
Irregular migration	<p>Movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. There is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. From the perspective of destination countries, it is entry, stay or work in a country without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations. From the perspective of the sending country, the irregularity is for example seen in cases in which a person crosses an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or does not fulfil the administrative requirements for leaving the country. There is, however, a tendency to restrict the use of the term “illegal migration” to cases of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons.</p>
Migrant	<p>At the international level, no universally accepted definition for “migrant” exists. The term migrant was usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate was taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of “personal convenience” and without intervention of an external compelling factor; it therefore applied to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family.</p> <p>The United Nations defines migrant as an individual who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate. Under such a definition, those travelling for shorter periods as tourists and businesspersons would not be considered migrants. However, common usage includes certain kinds of shorter-term migrants, such as seasonal farm-workers who travel for short periods to work planting or harvesting farm products.</p>

Smuggling of migrants

The procurement in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident” (Art. 3(a), UN Protocol Against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 2000). Smuggling, contrary to trafficking, does not require an element of exploitation, coercion or violation of human rights.

Transit

A stopover of passage of varying length while travelling between two or more countries.

Vulnerability

The quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.³

³ Oxford Dictionary 2016.

1. INTRODUCTION

When trapped at origin or in transit, and left without means to pursue regular options for migration, people have no choice but to resort to smugglers; in many instances, smugglers provide the only lifeline available to migrants. At the point of origin, smuggling is a complex practice with deep roots in communities of origin. In an article analysing the various dimensions of human smuggling and its roots, Majidi argues that “the smuggler is from the community and introduced by the community.”⁴ Through time and distance, and specifically in locations of transit, the smuggler’s profile and role changes. It evolves in terms of methods, using technology and phone-based applications, transnational networks and informal funds transfer systems, as well as treatment, with implications for migrants’ rights and protection needs. This study challenges views on smuggling and the migrant–smuggler relationship, and instead of perpetuating a narrow definition of the smuggler and a linear model for the relationship, captures the broad spectrum of interactions and individuals involved in the experience of being smuggled and the migration process.

Smugglers change, but migrants remain. There’s no good or bad. They all lie to you, but you are forced to go, what choice do you have. Your only assurance is if somebody else has gone with that smuggler and you can know better what to expect.

– Migrant C, Afghan migrant deported from the United Kingdom, planning to leave for Canada; Kabul, 17 March

The study focuses on assessing migrant vulnerabilities, protection needs and exposure to exploitation before migration, during their transit and upon arrival through a qualitative research based on migrants’ experiences of irregular migration to Canada, with a focus on Afghan and Syrian migrants.

With limitations of time and scope, this study provides an enquiry into the following:

- Conditions of the journey, including methods of coercion used in the exploitation of smuggled migrants;
- Factors leading to irregular migration and reasons why migrants select particular routes over others;
- Profile of the interviewed smuggled Afghan and Syrian migrants;
- Migrant perception of the reception processes and the legal frameworks in transit and destination;
- Influence of systems in place on migrants’ strategies; and
- Role of social media in smuggling.

⁴ N. Majidi, “Communities of smugglers and the smuggled”, openDemocracy, 8 April 2016. Available from www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/hsr/nassim-majidi/communities-of-smugglers-and-smuggled

This is not a study on the decision-making progress on smuggling and on routes. It is a case study of smuggling practices to Canada, built on the stories of Afghan and Syrian migrants interviewed at various stages in their journeys. It gives initial elements of reflection that scholars can build upon. Migrants' experiences voice the need to increase protection throughout the journey to avoid the vulnerabilities and the exploitation they are often subject to. Their experiences speak to the central role of smugglers, also referred to as *brokers* and *travel agents*, in a context where migrants have limited legal options to travel. This report should be read with the lens of migrant protection, not migration management.

1.1. Project background

This report is commissioned by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Ghana under the Global Assistance for Irregular Migrants (GAIM) Project.

The study comprises the documentation of vulnerabilities faced by migrants through their stories, challenging notions pertaining to the role of smugglers and the relationship between migrants and smugglers. This assessment also sheds light on the human experience of being smuggled and migration as a deeply complex process. It focuses on four key themes in irregular migration to Canada: (a) preparedness and resource mobilization; (b) protection, exclusion and exploitative practices; (c) assistance (both formal and informal); and (d) aspirations. These four themes structure an understanding of exploitation and the potential for abuse in irregular migration to Canada and capture a multidimensional picture of the diversity of the individuals involved, the extent of networks, the multitudes of stakeholders and the lives impacted. Recommendations from this study can help tailor interventions to ensure a rights-based approach (RBA) that protects the rights of migrants and promotes safe migration, holistically analysing vulnerabilities at home, in transit countries and in Canada.

The genesis of this project started in 2010 when 492 Sri Lankan migrants arrived on the coast of Canada seeking asylum from the civil war in Sri Lanka. The presence of more migrants in Ghana, Togo and Benin, also en route to Canada, alerted IOM to the vulnerabilities of migrants engaged in very tedious, circumvented migration journeys to Canada. The realization that Sri Lankans in West Africa could be vulnerable to human rights abuses on the shores of the continent prompted the investments to launch the GAIM project. Since then, the GAIM project has assisted over 550 Sri Lankan migrants in West Africa. In 2016, the end goal is to re-adapt the GAIM project based on the research findings. Are there groups of migrants, stranded, in transit countries today like there were in 2012?

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. A two-part research plan: Part I (Mapping report) and Part II (Research study)

As this report will show, the nature and trends of smuggling of migrants to Canada have changed since 2012. The reasons attributed to this are wide-ranging, most pertinent being the opening of the eastern, central and western Mediterranean routes to Europe.

To bring it to a concrete case study format, the research team mapped out the populations arriving in Canada, alongside the routes used. From this effort came a mapping report reviewing trends, routes, networks and migrant stories. This mapping allowed the research to see that smuggling channels to Canada remained open to migrants from key hubs like India, Turkey, Greece, Thailand and South America, and that direct assistance and advocacy are needed to protect people's rights. To improve the capacity to intervene and promote State capacity to understand what assistance can make a difference, this report then entered a second phase of research, presented in this study. This study paves the way for IOM to deliver protection programming in key hubs where migrants are stranded.

1.2.2. Primary data collection and secondary data

Part I – Mapping report – of this research followed four steps: (a) identification of regions; (b) identification of country hubs; (c) mapping of locations in countries; and (d) mapping of networks and channels. The desk review in this first phase included a literature review of documents available online. Four types of documents were consulted: (a) journal articles; (b) reports produced by research organizations, professional organizations, UN agencies and government agencies; (c) books on smuggling; and (d) news articles reporting incidents and cases of smuggling of migrants.

The goal of this research is qualitative – not to provide an indication of numbers, but of lived experiences of migration for Afghans and Syrians to Canada. Research conducted on smuggling networks and irregular migration have identified the following data sources as providing some numbers on movements of irregular migrants. The caveats are that the numbers are a patchwork of data collected using different methodologies, definitions and time period. Secondly, they may not be available for Canada at all or may be classified (if they are government sources). For this study, the team will search for these data sets in the context of each of the two countries that they zoom into and then triangulate the data received with qualitative information to arrive at conclusions.

Data source	Short explanation
Enforcement data	Enforcement authorities reveal irregular migrants' status in the course of their work, usually against the migrants' will (e.g. data from border guards, police, labour market inspection units).
Regularization data	Irregular migrants may self-identify to authorities to become regular; includes records of permanent regularization procedures and programmes.
Support service data	Irregular migrants may be identifiable in some services (e.g. health services for uninsured persons); support service data are based on records about such services.
Administrative data	All organizational statistics that cannot be summarized under the specific headings above (e.g. demographic data, school registers).
Census/general survey	All surveys that are directed at general populations are included in this category. Census or population surveys often include a part of the irregular migrant population, although they are not always identifiable.
Expert survey	Expert surveys include the systematic collection and evaluation of estimates and indicators from institutional experts and/or key informants in immigrant communities.
Migrant survey	All surveys in which irregular immigrants are directly targeted.
Employer survey	All surveys targeting employers and requesting information on the irregular employment of foreign nationals.
Economic data	Data on production, income, demand and others that are used for indirect estimations.
Multiple sources	Studies relying heavily on several of the above data sources.
Unknown	Usually quotations of estimates, or expert opinions without explanation.

A large number of governments do not collect information in line with obligations under the Smuggling of Migrants Protocol. Thus, many governments do not distinguish in their statistics if a person was a smuggled migrant (an irregular migrant who resorted to the assistance of migrant smugglers) or if an irregular migrant entered or stayed in a country without the assistance of migrant smugglers. A significant number of governments that have introduced the category of “smuggled migrant” into their data collection systems do not ensure the required efforts to establish if an irregular migrant was also a smuggled migrant and do not record such information accordingly. There is tremendous discrepancy between what is recorded regarding persons who were detected when attempting to illegally enter a country or when already illegally staying in a country and the data recorded regarding smuggled migrants. This illustrates the challenge of a quantitative approach to understanding the phenomenon of interest in this study.

As a result, part II of this research, presented here, privileges a purely qualitative approach. It uses in-depth interviews and case studies lasting between 2 and 2.5 hours with each migrant/family/smuggler, to draw out nuances of migrant stories and experiences. A comprehensive interview guidelines manual was developed, providing guiding questions for the interviewer on 10 thematic areas. The approach to the interview itself was participatory – i.e. driven by the respondent rather than by the interviewer. This allowed the research team to move away from a linear analysis of a migrant story (origin → transit → destination) to one where the migrants themselves identified and focused on what they considered to be the significant aspects of their experience.

Locations of fieldwork, sample size and criteria for inclusion

The research study lasted six months – between September 2016 and March 2017, following a phased approach. Interviews for this report were conducted between February and March 2017, while interviews for part 1 were conducted between September and November 2016. The table below provides an overview of the locations of fieldwork for the study, number of interviews conducted in each location, the criteria used to select migrants and the purpose of interviewing that cohort of respondents. A total of 31 interviews were conducted for this study across four countries, including 3 smugglers (2 in Turkey and 1 in Afghanistan).

Figure 1. Map of interview locations for the study



Source: Samuel Hall, 2017.

The researchers interviewed 31 migrants in the following countries: India, Afghanistan, Greece, Turkey and Canada. The nationalities of migrants included Afghans, Indians, Syrians and Iraqis. Migrants who reported wanting to go to Canada or had family who was en route to Canada using smugglers was conducted through the following:

- (a) **Interviews in key cities in Afghanistan and India** (Part I – Scoping study)
- (b) **Interviews in Greece and Turkey** (Part II): Migrants stranded in Greece and Turkey were identified through a scoping exercise in migrant-dominated neighbourhoods of Istanbul and Athens, and a snowball technique where a migrant would introduce the research team to another migrant.
- (c) **Interviews in Canada** (Part II): Migrants who had successfully were interviewed. A snowball technique was applied to identify others that fit the criteria for the study.

Table 1. Locations of fieldwork, sample size and criteria

Country of fieldwork	Tools	Criteria	Purpose	Number
Afghanistan as a country of origin	In-depth qualitative interviews	Prospective migrants in or migrants who have been returned to Afghanistan preparing to reach Canada via smuggling	Assess vulnerabilities of those who have made the entire journey from source to transit to destination country	15
Greece, Turkey and Germany as countries of transit	In-depth qualitative interviews	Migrants intending to be smuggled to Canada	Assess the level of awareness, preparedness and vulnerabilities of prospective migrants at origin, thinking about using smuggling routes to get to Canada, and those who were unable to make it to their destination, including the challenges of voluntary return or deportation to Afghanistan	7
Canada as the country of destination	In-depth qualitative interviews	Migrants who have been smuggled into Canada	Assess vulnerabilities of those stranded in transit left without alternatives and exploring ways to be smuggled to Canada	9
Regional interviews	Key informant interviews	Stakeholders present at origin and transit	Provide feedback on initial findings, identification of locations, protection response challenges	20
Total				51

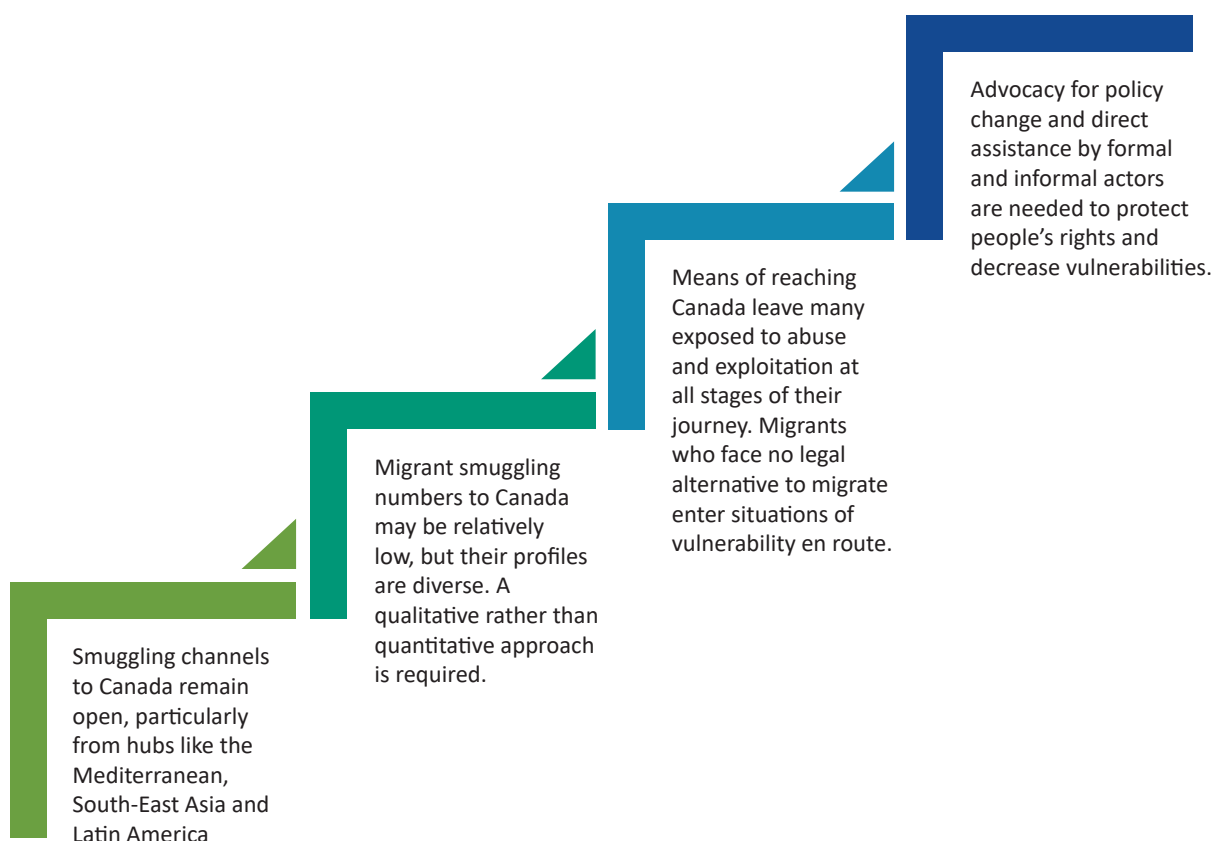
1.3. Limitations and constraints

Finding migrants, returnees, families and smugglers willing to participate in an in-depth study involves a great deal of trust and risks exposure, even if utmost anonymity is conveyed. There was also a difficulty in identifying potential migrants in the countries of origin (Afghanistan) and transit. This was a necessary part of the research since relying on interviews only in Canada would have produced a significant sampling bias of restricting research to those who had arrived, more or less successfully. Nevertheless, discussing an uncertain future poses a challenge for research. Finally, there is an ethical issue associated with raising hopes among often desperate and vulnerable migrants. This may also alter the information they were able to provide. In order to limit this, field coordinators and interviewers at origin and transit were also tasked with reminding interviewees that participating in this study in no way impacted their process or prospects of reaching Canada. Difficulties in finding smugglers and migrants at origin highlight the clandestine and community-led nature of smuggling and the lengths migrants must resort to when faced with no alternatives to migrate. Difficulties in finding willing participants in transit countries and in destination can be in part related to the nature of arrival and being smuggled, lack of status in that country, concerns about the journey onwards, or the yet undetermined case for asylum. Interviewing unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and children, as well as other child protection issues, were not within the scope of this study.

1.4. Structure of the report

This report is divided into five sections: (a) introduction; (b) context and background; (c) unpacking the human stories further subdivided into migrant thresholds and migrant vulnerabilities and exposure to exploitation; (d) aspirations; and (e) recommendations. Information in brackets and parenthesis in the quotes throughout the study have been added to clarify and contextualize migrant stories. All names of interview participants, except experts and key informants, have been changed to protect the identity of the individuals.

Findings of the mapping report



2. CONTEXT OF MIGRANT SMUGGLING

Routes, means and profiles of smuggled migrants reaching Canada may quite likely expand considering political developments, particularly in Australia, Europe and the United States.

Public campaigns and controversial efforts to turn back migrants in Australia, the ongoing polarized rhetoric in the United States, and overburdened migration reception capacities in Europe, create new pressures to reach Canada for migrants left without alternative destinations among the wealthiest countries in the world. The pressures may outweigh the large costs, complex nature and geographic difficulties that traditionally kept Canada insulated from irregular arrivals.

Through the course of this research, the research team noted new entry points into Canada – from the United States, from South America – and new profiles of undocumented migrants including Syrians, Afghans and a range of nationalities from Africa. Even as the team undertook this study, global geopolitics were changing the trends of migrant smuggling to Canada. The research focuses on profiles of the smuggled Afghan and Syrian migrants, many of whom are likely in need and qualify for international (refugee) protection. In the majority of instances, smuggled migrants from these countries have much stronger chances of applying for and being granted refugee status compared to economic migrants from West Africa. However, as the study will show, an opacity in legal migration procedures, restrictive admittance policies and times taken to process applications often push migrants towards smuggling, driven by their own aspirations and desire to reach Canada.

This indicates the need for an enquiry into the experiences of migrants along the journey, for stakeholders to identify and respond to protection concerns in new environments when their ecosystem and ability to make informed decisions and choices may be weakened.

2.1. Approaches to addressing migrant smuggling

Existing assumptions of smuggling

The sole focus on the criminal and profit-making aspects of smuggling, or the image of smuggling as an organized transnational network, is narrow and fails to capture the entire picture or the diversity of lives impacted, including those of migrants. This approach is taken by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) 2004 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplemented the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, which proclaims "smuggling of migrants and the activities related to it cost many people their lives and generate billions of dollars in profit for criminals. They also fuel corruption, such as through the bribery of officials, and strengthen organized crime in the countries of origin, transit or destination."⁵ Academic scholars working on migrant smuggling issues have been challenging this narrow viewpoint. The works of Collyer, Sanchez, Baird and others working on migrant smuggling have shown that our knowledge of irregular migration facilitation is often plagued with fragmented perspectives on the sociocultural dynamics of the migratory journey, the facilitator–traveler relationship and their community dimensions.⁶ The evidence presented in this report contributes to this scholarship using the ecosystem approach by presenting migrant stories, as narrated by them, at various stages of their migration.

Emerging approaches

While many States portray a linear model of the migrant–smuggler relationship, are quick to criminalize migrants, and to try to obstruct passage, they fail to provide alternative options for migration, or acknowledge migrant agency.⁷ Imposing restrictive measures against movement of people, particularly in countries of transit, limit regular options for migrants to safely reach their destination and only feed irregular migration. Policies that restrict movement and offer no solutions or alternatives actually create a market for smuggling and work against the human rights and life prospects of migrants, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation.⁸ Much is left to uncertainty and trust when decisions and arrangements are made, but migration and smuggling are nonetheless human processes that involve many people across various borders. On analysing the various dimensions of human smuggling and its roots, Majidi argues, "the social organisation of smuggling's strength resides in the community at the point of origin, but has its weakness in the diversity of actors, cultures and languages along the way."⁹

New approaches are being sought that lay greater emphasis on the protection of vulnerable migrants, than solely on the criminal aspects of smuggling. One example of an emerging approach is the Humanitarian Corridor project, in response to migrant deaths at sea trying to reach Italy. This project is being piloted in Italy to prevent border deaths at sea by providing a safe flight to Italy, and it also aims to combat smuggling and trafficking networks. Specifically, the programme seeks to support people in

⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Smuggling of migrants: The harsh search for a better life", *Transnational Organized Crime: Let's put them out of business*, n.d. Available from www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/migrant-smuggling.html

⁶ M. Collyer, "Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(3):273–293 (2010); M. Collyer, F. Düvell and H. de Haas, "Critical approaches to transit migration", *Population, Space and Place*, 18(4):407–414 (2012); G. Sanchez, *Human Smuggling and Border Crossings* (Routledge, Oxfordshire and New York, 2015); T. Baird, "The double disadvantage of migrant smuggling studies", Oxford Law Faculty, 16 November 2015. Available from www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2015/11/double

⁷ S. Castles, "Why migration policies fail", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27(2):205–227 (2004).

⁸ E. O'Brien, "Human trafficking heroes and villains: Representing the problem in anti-trafficking awareness campaigns", *Social and Legal Studies*, 25(2):205–24 (2016).

⁹ Majidi, 2016.

so-called “vulnerable conditions”¹⁰ to enter Italy legally on the Article 25 Schengen Limited Territorial Validity visa. This means that people are able to make a claim to international protection once they have safely arrived to Europe, rather than making dangerous journeys without visa authorization in order to claim territorial asylum.¹¹ Another approach covers the systems of regional free mobility within the Economic Community of West African States.¹² In line with this, the findings aim to shed light on vulnerabilities and resultant exposure to exploitation that migrants often face as a result of their status as smuggled migrants.

2.2. Nature of migrant smuggling

Exposure of migrants to vulnerabilities at all points: Origin, transit and destination

The clandestine element of migrant smuggling by its nature makes migrants more vulnerable as they often shy away from seeking assistance and approaching law enforcement and justice officials. Insecurity, political unrest and poor economic conditions, including exploitation, are issues that migrants have to deal with even before they have embarked on their journey. Once en route, lack of proper documentation, long periods of travel and waiting, constant risk of detention and deportability, and the absence legal mechanisms that would protect them or provide them with avenues of self-reliance mean that migrants are constantly exposed to exploitative practices not just at the hand of smugglers, but also opportunistic employers, corrupt law enforcement officials, thieves and criminals. The psychological impact of undertaking a prolonged journey that often transcends new and unknown cultures, food, climate and environment often go undocumented. All migrants interviewed for this study had at some point experienced **exploitation**, often depending on the location, cultures, ethnicities, languages and genders of the parties involved, particularly when migrants were away from their own communities and at the hands of smaller-scale smugglers in foreign lands. Sea travel harbours many vulnerabilities for migrants, such as losing communication with networks, having to hide in shipping containers or risking being crushed by trucks boarding ships, never being permitted to leave cramped and overcrowded quarters or inconspicuous compartments, or being apprehended and detained and losing investment and prospects in the process. Considering that irregular migration to Canada involves air travel, migrants are open to exploitation and lack of resources while waiting for onward flights, passports and visas, for up to many months without status or support.

Where formal structures fail: Irregularities in legal channels of migration as a push factor

For many migrants, smuggling is a last resort, often the most expensive, uncertain and dangerous one. For many, opaque immigration procedures and failure to acquire visas for travel prompts them towards smugglers. In this research, migrants did not avoid legal channels and formal structures; on the contrary, they engaged with regular channels and with the hope of receiving formal visas to allow them to travel safely. It is only when: (a) their visa application was rejected; and (b) the visa or asylum processes took too long (with cases in Turkey of individuals waiting for over two years) that they considered smuggling as the necessary plan B.

¹⁰ This project derives its definition of vulnerable conditions from IOM’s definition, which include victims of trafficking, smuggled migrants, stranded migrants, unaccompanied (and separated) minors, those subject to violence (including gender-based violence), psychological distress and trauma during the migration process, vulnerable individuals, such as pregnant women, children and the elderly, and migrants detained in transit or upon arrival (European Union, *Humanitarian Visas: Option or Obligation?* (Policy Department C, Citizens Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Union, Brussels, 2014)).

¹¹ V. Squire, “Humanitarian corridors: beyond political gesture”, openDemocracy, 17 October 2016. Available from www.opendemocracy.net/5050/vicki-squire/humanitarian-corridors-beyond-political-gesture

¹² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, ECOWAS Common Approach to Migration (2008). Available from www.unhcr.org/49e47c8f11.pdf

This is exacerbated by the fact that corruption goes hand in hand with smuggling; the nexus between smuggling and corruption is vital to the operation of many smugglers, often visible in irregular migration practices.¹³ Corruption renders migrants without choice or alternatives for safe passage vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, placing high financial, physical and mental tolls on migrants in an unpredictable fashion.

Where opportunities for protection arise: Use of technology and social media as a supporting factor

With polarized rhetoric, restrictive policies and punitive practices in countries of transit, migrants rely on dense social networks aided by communication technology, involving friends and other migrants, community members, financial transaction facilitators and smugglers, transcending continents and borders.¹⁴ As deduced from the interviews, migrants and smugglers contact travel agents and facilitators by phone and SMS, transfer money, and share live information pertaining to certain borders, passages or even open convenience stores for provision of basic goods in transit. Migrants can maintain contact with family and friends, cited by many as a coping strategy, whether by phone, e-mail or through social media. All these structural changes in how people communicate and how technology can be incorporated into the migration process present opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem the further they are from home.

2.3. Political environment and context

Trends in numbers reaching Canada

As captured in part 1 of this series compiling data from various Canadian and international sources, irregular migration to Canada as recorded by authorities had been in decline, from 5,000 in 2010 to 1,000 in 2013. Similar to irregular migration in many other settings, migrants can arrive in Canada through irregular channels or can arrive regularly, but overstay their permission. Canada is relatively shielded from irregular arrivals by its geography, including the Atlantic, Arctic and Pacific Oceans on its eastern, northern and western frontiers, respectively. Its only political neighbour is the United States with whom Canada shares the longest bilateral border on the planet. As such, reaching Canada is quite costly and cumbersome since it involves flights for anyone outside the Americas, and fraudulent passports and travel documents, if legal ones cannot be obtained.

Even though over the past few years, numbers reaching Canada had been declining, routes are very much open and numbers of people trying to reach Canada by land has been steadily rising. With the ongoing well-publicized Islamophobic political rhetoric and anti-migrant sentiments in the United States, and European migration and humanitarian structures seemingly overburdened, attempts to reach Canada through irregular channels may increase, especially in light of Prime Minister Trudeau's open and welcoming attitude towards refugees, which stands in sharp contrast to many other Western countries. Migration and smuggling are complex processes that rely heavily on communication, vast social networks and migrant agency. When forced into displacement without alternatives for regular migration, numbers of migrants attempting to reach Canada from countries of origin or while stranded in transit may soon be on the rise. However, it is also worth highlighting that due to the combination of push and pull factors, mismatch between jobs offers and demand and policy changes within a country or in a neighbouring country, a minimum stock of irregular migration is and will be unavoidable.

¹³ IOM/Samuel Hall, *Migratory Routes to Canada: Irregularity and Vulnerability* (December 2016), Internal report.

¹⁴ Collyer, Düvell and de Haas, 2012.

Figures posted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) from only one of the popular irregular crossing points between the United States and Canada at Emerson Manitoba, 40 people were intercepted between 28 February and 3 March 2017, crossing without authorization, bringing the total for 2017 to 183.¹⁵ Thirty-nine (39) people were intercepted in the previous week. An article by the Canadian Press cites concern by the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency and other immigration and border security officials that “a relative winter trickle of crossings into Canada could turn into a spring flood.”¹⁶ Canadian officials and agencies contacted to offer interviews for this study, refused. Citing electronic mail exchange between the writing team and an official at RCMP, “Agencies are now saddled with the influx coming from the United States and we don’t yet have a clear picture of the routes and level of organization, criminal or otherwise, behind it.”

Trends in means of travel to Canada

Two main features of smuggling networks to Canada, as deduced from interviews in the phase 1 report, are fraudulent documents and the prevalence of air travel, the latter mostly dependent on the former. Even for routes other than air travel, such as by long distance ships or by land through the Americas, Canada is shielded from irregular arrivals by its geography. Any irregular journey to Canada almost inevitably spans multiple countries and often combines different modes of travel. For people seeking irregular migration solely for economic opportunities, Canada was often overlooked in favour of the United States, considering the latter’s larger economy, larger population and much more readily accessible labour markets. However, these trends may very well change considering political developments in the United States starting in late 2016 onwards, and there are already reports of migrants braving freezing weather conditions to reach Canada by land.¹⁷

Migrants interact with many individuals in coordinating their journey to Canada, including official travel agents, escorts and travel facilitators, financial agents, sponsors at destination, large- and small-scale smugglers, document forgers and corrupt high- and low-level officials. Sometimes these individuals work together and come in one “package” while at other times, they each must be contracted and paid separately. Most migrants reported that they ended up spending more money than anticipated, particularly while stranded in transit or for having to explore alternative ways when one or another had proven futile. For example, the person providing forged documents may not be involved in the rest of the smuggling process at all, and so whether a migrant reaches Canada or not, the money invested is spent. This adds to vulnerabilities in transit, origin, and for some upon return, since the resources for most migrants had come from borrowing or by selling assets.

Most migrants cited having to pay between USD 30,000 and 40,000 to reach Canada. The difficulties of making this estimate are exacerbated by exchange rates, memory bias, route, means of travel, starting point, and payment instalments; nevertheless, these estimates indicate a substantial sum of money invested by migrants. The more assistance they received on the journey and the more inclusive the “package”, the higher the cost. Some migrants had spent as little as USD 10,000 when they had already been in Europe, and a smuggler would only guide them to a ship bound for Canada and give them tips for boarding. This study distinguishes between established smugglers with strong networks that provide some reassurance by asking migrants to pay in instalments, the final one upon arrival in Canada, and opportunistic smugglers who ask to be paid before departure without providing guarantees who could also along the way ask for more money at the threat of abandoning the migrant.

¹⁵ RCMP Manitoba, Twitter post, 4 March 2017, 7.04 a.m. <https://twitter.com/rcmpmb/status/838042396751499265>

¹⁶ The Canadian Press, “Cabinet to Map out Scenarios for Dealing with Border-Crossers”, *CBC News*, 5 March 2017 (last updated 6 March 2017). Available from www.cbc.ca/news/canada/cabinet-to-talk-about-border-crossers-1.4010811

¹⁷ K. Pauls, “‘Informal’ network helping refugee seekers get to Manitoba, U.S. officials say”, *CBC News*, 8 February 2017. Available from www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/informal-network-helping-refuge-seekers-get-to-manitoba-u-s-officials-say-1.3971636

There is an additional caveat to arriving in Canada by land, and that is the 2004 Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States of America, stating that those seeking asylum must claim it in whichever country they arrive at first, Canada or the United States. As such, if a person has claimed asylum in the United States and arrives at an official port of entry in Canada to claim asylum, they would be refused. However, if they are already on Canadian soil, then they would qualify. People fearing the rejection of their asylum cases and possibly facing deportation and wanting to try their case in Canada must then seek irregular ways to enter, such as by land crossings. This agreement is highly politicized, and revoking it could impact bilateral relations, causing friction between the Trudeau and Trump administrations. On the other hand, the agreement can place already burdened asylum seekers and migrants questioning their future prospects in the United States under increased pressure and vulnerability to seek irregularly ways of entry into Canada.



Preparedness and Resource Mobilization;
Exploitation, Vulnerabilities and Response

3. MIGRANT THRESHOLDS

Profiles of migrants: Indifference, locational and trajectory thresholds of leaving

This section draws on the idea of “migration thresholds”, used in a 2016 Overseas Development Institute report on Eritrean migration to Ethiopia.¹⁸ The strength of this approach lies in the cognitive progression of events leading to the migration decision and journey. This cognitive aspect of migration builds on background and circumstances, as well as aspirations and dreams.

As revealed by interviews in Afghanistan, prospects of safety, growth and personal development seem bleak to most, particularly women and young men. Women face many structural and gender-based barriers in Afghanistan that prevent their progress from cognitive migration to physical migration. The thresholds are different for young men; interviews with Afghans stranded in transit further solidified the association they make with international migration and bringing about positive change in prospects and well-being. When elements are shockingly not aligning in transit, for many Afghans in Europe, they must continue their journey to reach a destination where these elements and prospects would align, where their aspirations could become reality. In the case of those interviewed in this research, this promise and destination is Canada. The threshold process continues and impacts their decisions, and the networks they rely on. Once this cognitive threshold of needing to migrate internationally has been reached, whether at origin, in transit or after return, migrants will actively seek ways to emigrate to fulfil their life goals and aspirations.

In this section of the report, light is shed on Afghan, Syrian and Iraqi migrants’ thresholds when it comes to migrating to Canada using smugglers. For some like the Syrians, it was compelled by sudden circumstances, while in the case of some Afghans, despite a long-drawn mental process, the move for most was still triggered by a sudden event or incident, usually traumatic in nature.

3.1. The diversity of profile of migrants

Migrants interviewed for this study come from diverse backgrounds, age groups and socioeconomic profiles. They comprise young and old, men and women, single or married, with or without children, those contemplating migration for the first time, as well as returnees and migrants stranded in transit. There are migrants who could easily afford the way forward if given the chance or provided with regular means of migration, and there are those who have reached the limits of their financial resources and have become stranded, barely making ends meet, and wondering why they ever left in the first place. This section highlights three key aspects of the socioeconomic profiles of migrants trying to reach Canada using smugglers: (a) women using smugglers to come to Canada (highlighting a feminization of migration); (b) family reunification as a key aspiration in choosing Canada rather than only economic factors; and (c) an informed thought process by migrants in choosing where and how they want to go. Seeking advice from family and information from various sources were common in contexts where migration is a collective rather than individual process, and in contexts where the reasons to migrate have been part of the structural markers of countries for decades.

¹⁸ R. Mallett et al., “Journeys on hold: How policy influences the migration decisions of Eritreans in Ethiopia”, Working Paper 506 (Overseas Development Institute, London, 2017). Available from www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11336.pdf

I had been trying to leave Afghanistan for a long time. It is just this lack of security in Afghanistan that forces many young Afghans to leave. People who leave Afghanistan are not only the ones that do not have jobs, there are so many other people, people with well-paid jobs who leave their country.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

There are those who are planning to leave Afghanistan for the first time and those who have spent years in transit, trying to reach Canada in any way possible, or doing it all over again after being deported. Most migrants interviewed in Afghanistan had sold their assets or their family had pooled resources to support their journey. Some had “mortgaged” their ancestral lands by placing them up for bonds and going under pressure to pay off the price by working in transit or once at destination. This adds a layer of failure and associated shame to any precipitated return, potentially placing returnees under additional pressure if they were not able to pay off the debt incurred in their initial attempt at finding peace and security.

Similarly, the Syrian migrants interviewed had collected the money from friends and families to pay the smugglers. Most of them felt that they were stranded in Turkey with little freedom and rights, no documentation and access to jobs. The Syrian migrants had fled the Syrian Arab Republic with their families to Turkey (unlike Afghan families who were in transit alone). However, for most Syrians, they were able to afford to send only one person (usually the young male) to Canada through smuggling.

According to one smuggler interviewed in Istanbul: “The majority are young people between 18 and 25, especially, those who had to escape from military service. Also, one year ago, there was a rumour that the Turkish government was arresting Syrian men and sending them back to the Syrian Arab Republic to fight. So a lot of them had to leave.”

The section that follows provides a rapid profile of Afghan and Syrian migrants that form the cohort of those using smuggling channels to reach Canada. The nature of smuggling to Canada remains in flux given global events, the continued conflict in Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic leading to migrants fleeing death and persecution along with those seeking better economic opportunities, and often a combination of all such factors. The profiles will not look at motivations to migrate – as these are multiple, complex and interrelated. The indicators used include education, profession of migrants and parents prior to departure, skills and professional background of the migrants themselves.

The feminization of irregular migration: Women and considerations of gender

Assumptions of male-dominated migrant smuggling are being challenged as more and more women are undertaking perilous journeys using smugglers.¹⁹ The term “feminization of migration” was popularized by a UN Working Paper²⁰ that brought attention not purely to an increase in absolute numbers of women migrating, but in the drivers prompting women to migrate independently. A decade after the UN’s paper, the Migration Policy Institute published another article that questioned the trajectory of discussions and more importantly, response frameworks around women who migrate that move beyond the generic needs of migrants.

In the present study’s findings, the feminization of irregular migration is highlighted, whereby the number of women seeking irregular means to get to Canada and other countries is visible, even though there is little data collected. Interviews were conducted with seven Afghan women who had prepared to go to Canada using irregular means, as well as male migrants in transit on some of the challenges faced by women who were part of the groups that they often moved with. Evidence exists that female

¹⁹ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons*, February 2009. Available from www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf

²⁰ United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, “Feminization of Migration”, Working Paper 1. Available from www.renate-europe.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Feminization_of_Migration-INSTRAW2007.pdf

migrants suffer from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as they are proposed or pressured into having sex by smugglers, agents, corrupt officials and others they face during their migration process. The fact that women migrants face additional gender-related vulnerabilities cannot be refuted. This has been the case in countries of transit where women have been sexually violated and not offered basic protection, safety and security.^{21, 22} However, interviews with women revealed that they also migrate to improve their economic and educational opportunities, with agency and determination, and are aware of the risks of the journey. These aspirations for women, similar to men, influence the cognitive threshold of migration, and when consistently faced with institutions that represent an obstacle to their progress and self-development, women turn to opportunities abroad. However, unlike men, there are many familial and societal barriers that prevent women from being able to move beyond the cognitive threshold of migration.

When women migrate, labelling them as “vulnerable individuals”, risks promoting a victimhood narrative, while persistently grouping women with children in statistics, perpetuates a narrow definition of gender and fails to recognize women’s diverse needs and to account for their individual identity and agency.²³ All male migrants interviewed for this study reported abuses they faced on their journeys and the conditions they were forced to succumb to when, for example, shelters in transit locations would only welcome women, children or families, leaving single young men over the age of 18 stranded in unfamiliar settings and away from protective mechanism to fend for themselves.

Emerging profiles of Afghan migrants to Canada

Education and socioeconomic levels

An equal number of male and female Afghan migrants were interviewed in Afghanistan by the research team. The majority was under the age of 30 and possessed a high school degree. This cohort shared great aspirations for improving their future prospects, and all of them highlighted safety and security as a major factor behind their decision to leave Afghanistan. Older participants with plans to reach Canada were deportees from Europe, some after having lived many years abroad. They were going against a (so far) failed cycle of migration. The possibility to be naturalized as a citizen, to study, receive government support, be accepted as migrants by society, and concurrently be able to work were commonly cited reasons for why the Afghan migrants interviewed wanted to reach Canada. The centrality of becoming citizens, i.e. belonging, and being able to bring family members over in a reasonable time, highlights what defines an aspiration for “home” for the interviewees. That once they would have their family securely with them in Canada, they would be “home” even if they had never been there before. This is exactly why many felt lost and vulnerable while in transit, even if they could communicate with their families through modern communication technology. They did not belong anywhere, and they did not have their community with them.

Older interviewees had more attachments to Afghanistan, and reported that their memories would always stay with them, regardless of the realities of the current state of the country. However, younger participants did not have many good memories associated with Afghanistan, recalling mainly violence and conflict. Female participants, in the age group of 20–30, also shared this view. This could attest to the institutional and systemic barriers that hold women and young people back, contributing to their vulnerabilities at home and eventually leading many to consider migration. However, it must be noted that no female Afghan migrants were interviewed in the Mediterranean or in Canada, further signifying the internal and external barriers that Afghan women face in migrating abroad on their own. Women interviewed in Afghanistan planned to reach Canada with their families or were exploring any

²¹ Amnesty International, “Female refugees face physical assault, exploitation and sexual harassment on their journey through Europe”, 18 January 2017. Available from www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/01/female-refugees-face-physical-assault-exploitation-and-sexual-harassment-on-their-journey-through-europe/

²² Amnesty International, “Refugees and migrants fleeing sexual violence, abuse and exploitation in Libya”, 1 July 2016. Available from www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/refugees-and-migrants-fleeing-sexual-violence-abuse-and-exploitation-in-libya/

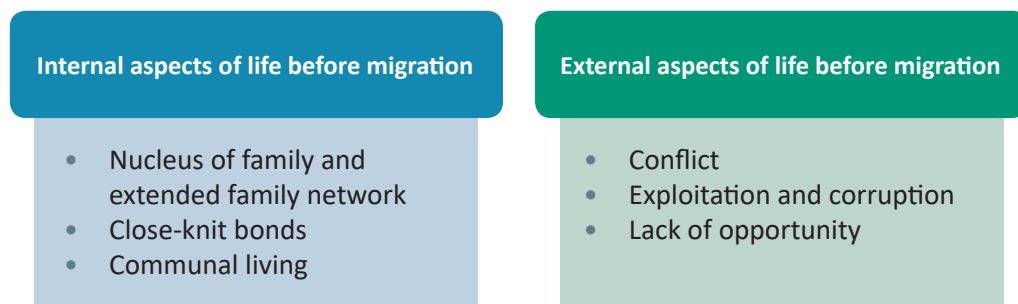
²³ M.D. Smith, “Rethinking gender in the international refugee regime”, *Forced Migration Review*, 53. October 2016. Available from www.fmreview.org/community-protection/smith.html

and all means of regular immigration, afraid to trust smugglers on their own, not having permission from their families, or not believing in their own agency.

What life was like before migration

Interviews in Afghanistan revealed two aspects about life before migration: (a) internal aspect that comprised the nucleus of family and extended family members, close-knit bonds and communal living; and (b) external aspect of conflict, exploitation, corruption and lack of opportunity. It was this external aspect that they wanted to eliminate and with prospects in Canada, be able to build that internal aspect and sense of identity internationally.

Figure 2. Internal and external aspects of an Afghan migrant's life before migration



Source: Samuel Hall, 2017.

3.2. Indifference threshold

The initial discussion of migration as a viable and beneficial option – Family reactions

3.2.1. Initial thoughts on the decision to leave: The hope for legal pathways

Migrating to Canada for all interviewees was part of a long and thought-out process, involving information seeking, reaching out to contacts at home and abroad, research and reliance on multitudes of actors and operators, such as smugglers and financial transaction facilitators. For every individual, different combinations of preferences, assets and priorities comprised the preparation and resource mobilization phase. A key finding here was that **the first reaction point when a migrant considered options to leave were not the use of smugglers, but through legal channels** – either by applying for visas, registering on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) lists for resettlement (in the case for Syrians in Greece and Turkey) or exploring opportunities to go for education. Before reaching out to smugglers and exploring irregular ways for migration, all interviewees had explored or sought information regarding legal systems that could facilitate regular migration. **Smuggling remained a plan B** when one or more of these options failed.

Not a single person in my family was unhappy about my decision. Everyone encouraged me to do what I wanted. My mother cried a little bit, but other than that, nobody was sad that I was leaving. Everyone was happy.

– Migrant D, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

At first, my wife was not happy. I was not happy either, but I had to make a hard choice. She told me that she did not want me to leave. She even cried, begging me to not leave her alone. When I explained to her that I might get killed if I stayed, she changed her mind and became very supportive. My father was the most difficult person to convince. He did not talk to me again. On the day that I left for the United States, he did not even say goodbye to me. My siblings were very supportive. They promised that they would look after my wife.

– Migrant E, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

3.2.2. Family reactions to the decision to leave: From support to fear and discouragement

Respondents reported a wide range of reactions from immediate family members, especially those who were in the country of origin, upon hearing their decisions to migrate, but never short of emotions. Reactions of close family members ranged from support to fear, unhappiness and active discouragement. Family reactions and support are integral to a migrant's journey, and as subsequent sections will show, to varying extents family members form both a support network for migrants during the journey, as well as become the motivating factor for the migrant to carry on the journey and spend long periods in transit and destination so as to legally bring them to Canada in the future.

They weren't happy about it, but they had to accept the reality because I can't live in the Syrian Arab Republic because of the war.

– Migrant F, Syrian migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

When I told my wife – she was pregnant with our first child at that time – and my siblings that I wanted to go to Europe illegally, everyone supported me, except for my mother. She did not want me to leave. After my father's death, I was looking after my siblings and my sick mother. She did not want me to leave her to my siblings. She was also worried that something might happen to me on the way to my destination.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

It is important to underline the financial support that a majority of respondents received from their families when they asked for it, without which they would not be able to leave or as the interviews show, survive when in transit. Financial contributions by families, loans taken locally using real estate as mortgage and in some instances, selling family heirlooms and jewelry are all essential for the success of the journey. All this comes with an unsaid pressure on the migrant to succeed given what is at stake. The inability to pay off debts undertaken for this journey on local salaries upon return mean that for many, the consequences of failure would be too disastrous to imagine.

3.3. Locational threshold

Deciding where to go and reasons for leaving

3.3.1. Deciding to go to Canada as destination: The centrality of family reunification prospects

We finally decided that we would go to Canada for two reasons: we heard that in Canada, the Government was providing health care and also that the Government of Canada was very immigrant friendly. [...] If we stay in the United States, God knows when we would find out about whether we would be granted asylum or not, but if go to Canada, we would only need to wait for two months.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

The decision to migrate to Canada was difficult for the migrants interviewed and involved different aspects for each person, regardless of whether that decision was made from the beginning, as a way out when left stranded in transit, or after struggling upon return. For most, Canada came highly recommended by family members and trusted friends, who commended its positive life prospects, open attitudes and culture towards migrants, ample opportunity for education and employment, and an institutional environment conducive to newcomers and **family reunification**. This last aspect was integral for Afghans who, regardless of how they viewed their life in Afghanistan, planned establishing themselves in Canada and eventually bringing their families over to their new homes. Interviews revealed that the only apprehensions about reaching Canada were due to impossible means of reaching it regularly, given its geographical distance and separation by the ocean and therefore, the high cost and difficult nature of smuggling.

Now that I look back at the day I made my decision to come to Canada rather than staying in the United States, I think one of the main reasons was its impressive immigration policies and process. [...] I met someone in the United States, an Afghan and a friend – my brother's friend, who had been living in the United States for the past three years – and he still did not know whether he would be accepted as refugee or not. So I decided to come to Canada.

– Migrant D, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

Canada's positive global image: When compared to the stance taken by the United States and Australian administrations or the bleak situation of Afghans they had heard about or personally witnessed in Europe, interviews revealed praise for Canada's organized, fast and well-structured asylum process and supportive immigration system once the migrants had arrived in Canada. For one interviewee, it had always been a childhood dream to live in Canada. For another, it was Prime Minister Trudeau's public show of support for Syrian refugees that had convinced him Canada would be a good destination. Overall, the decision to go to Canada, particularly when factoring in the costs, routes and means of reaching it, was not one made in haste, but rather the product of a calculated decision and a complex thought process, research, discussion with family, friends and trusted sources, and eventually an introduced smuggler.

Interviews in Afghanistan revealed that everybody had contemplated or already explored other cheaper and geographically less complicated options, particularly Europe. Some of these interviewees had even attempted to go to Europe and had returned or been returned, or had become stranded when alternatives for transit had been restricted. For returnees from Europe or the United Kingdom interviewed in Afghanistan, their next attempt had to be somewhere with guaranteed support from institutions that welcomed migrants and provided streams for naturalization and family reunification. For Afghans, at the moment, this is only possible in Canada.

For some reason, I thought Canada was my dreamland. When I was a child, I had read a book about Prince Edward's Islands. There was a little girl in the book named Anne. I was in love with her as [a] child. Sometime when my uncles would call us from America, I would beg them to bring me to the United States so that I could go to Prince Edward's Islands and marry Anne. I just grew this fondness to Canada. I had told myself that if one day I leave Afghanistan, I would go to Canada. When I decided to leave Afghanistan, I started researching about Canada. I read as much as I could about their immigration policies and the country itself online. I checked websites of the Government of Canada, and I also followed their politicians on Twitter and Facebook. My Canadian journalist friend sent me a lot of material[s] to read about Canada as well. After three weeks of extensive reading, I finally decided that Canada is the place that I wanted to go.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

A second category chose Canada as a destination while in transit: Canada may have not originally been their plan (because of distance, difficulties in smuggling, the high financial burden), but the difficulties of transit in Europe led them to a change of routes and destination choice. In light of recent political events and the conditions faced by many in Europe, Canada is increasingly being viewed as a “politically safe” country, less susceptible to anti-immigration sentiments and policies. As a result, migrants who have successfully entered Europe using smugglers, but are stranded or have undetermined future prospects, are now considering paying smugglers to get from Europe to Canada. Reasons for this are many, not excluding anti-immigrant, populist and nationalist sentiments against immigrants in Europe, and that migrants themselves see Europe as being “overcrowded” by migrants.

Yes, I was thinking of moving there [Europe], but I didn't because it is now too crowded with refugees. Also, I think Canada is better than Turkey now because if I want to visit my family in the Syrian Arab Republic in the future, it will be easier because I can't go back through Turkey as their visa is tough to get as a Syrian.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

For Syrian migrants, the locational threshold also applies when living in Turkey in transit. The duration spent in Turkey, coupled with factors prompted by the Government of Turkey's failure to provide identity documents or work permits while refugees and migrants languish in limbo have contributed to decisions to migrate further to Canada. This has both psychological and financial implications for individuals and their families.

My wife is coming here in two weeks through the Turkish borders. I can currently afford the cost of living as a single person, but not for my entire family – wife and children.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

3.4. Trajectory threshold

Coming to terms with the means of travel

3.4.1. First thoughts

Once decided, respondents reported a myriad of reactions to the idea that they would be travelling to a foreign country potentially using dangerous routes. Fear and the thought of a long journey were the first thoughts that most reported, both from Afghanistan and from the Syrian Arab Republic.

When I made my decision to leave, the first thing that came to my mind was the long journey that I would be taking to make to my destination. I thought about the troubles that I would face, that would threaten my life and I thought about not seeing my child when he/ she would come. I pictured myself walking long distances on foot, walking through woods, and swimming in lakes. These were all the images that I had of the journey to Europe. All of it from the stories that I had heard from other relatives and my older siblings who had taken the same or other routes to make it to Western Europe. I also felt guilty for leaving my pregnant wife and my sick mother; she was diagnosed with a brain tumour in the back of her head. But I had to do this trip.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

One respondent interviewed in Afghanistan reported that he had convinced a friend to travel with him. In all of these instances, migrants were often aware of multiple risks for them and their families left behind.

To tell you the truth, I was scared. It was my first time trying to go somewhere illegally and with a smuggler. I thought if there are two of us, then it would be much safer.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

3.4.2. Tipping points

It became established in the rapport with interviewees at origin, in transit and in destination that the decision to migrate to Canada was not made in haste. Most had sought information, discussed the decision with family and trusted friends, and contemplated it internally. For some migrants, their departure had been gradually planned and anticipated, set after the culmination of a lifetime of insecurity, barriers to opportunity, persistent vulnerabilities at origin and exploitation. This was the case for Afghan migrants, especially women and young men, who did not associate Afghanistan with home, and who did not see future prospects for themselves and their families at home, passing the cognitive threshold of migration.

There were many [reasons], but chief among them was the security situation there. Things are falling apart so rapidly there. I did not make the decision to leave in one day. It was something that I had been thinking about for a long time.

– Migrant D, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

Many of those who had not planned on leaving “home” were nonetheless aware of the deep-seated and complex problems. Although they still felt many reasons to stay, an uncertainty underlined their daily lives. For many, a final, firm decision to leave was initiated by a particular event or experience, a tipping point that eventually set the migration process in motion.

On the eve of the Persian New Year [2014], I came home to the news of an ongoing attack at the five-star hotel Serena in downtown Kabul. It was not the first time that something like this was happening. I went to bed that night like any other night hoping that everything will be over by tomorrow. I went to work that day as usual, and suddenly there was the news of this Afghan journalist Sardar Ahmad. He was dining at the restaurant with his wife and three children. They were killed by the Taliban attackers. [...] It was that same night that I decide[d] to leave Afghanistan and take my family with me.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

I was in a shared taxi, coming from downtown Kabul home, when a government police waved to our driver to stop. The driver either did not see the police waving or he deliberately did not stop. Then I heard two shots from behind and a faint moan in the back of the taxi. When the driver stopped the car and opened the back of his taxi, we found a little boy that was sitting in the back lying, face down, in a pool of blood. The police had fired from behind, and one of his bullets had hit the kid. I remember thinking it could have been me since the boy was sitting right behind me.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

One incident always stands out in my mind. One morning, we woke up to the deafening sound of an explosion. It was very close to where we lived. My older brothers and I ran downstairs to see what had happened. Our friends from other houses joined us. On the western side of the apartment building that my family used to live, we found a naked man, completely burned. He was lying beside a large hole. We thought he was a man, but when we turned the body around, we saw that it was a woman. The rocket had complete[ly] burned her clothes on her body. I ran back to our apartment and brought a bedsheet and unfolded it on her. For many years after that incident, I would have nightmares about her and her burned face and body.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

I was in the university in Damascus, a couple of guys came to the university and took me and my friend from Homs to a military branch in Damascus because they thought we had bad behaviours against the regime. They detained us for nine hours and started to kick us and gave us electric shocks. They made us say things of loyalty for Assad.

– Migrant H, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

4. PREPAREDNESS AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Information; Relying on a range of actors within the migrant's ecosystem: Beyond the "smuggler"

This chapter highlights the interplay between various actors within a migrant's ecosystem at different junctures of their journey, and how these may contribute to their lived experience in transit (discussed in the next chapter). Cassarino²⁴ defines prepared and resource mobilization, outlining conditions necessary for migrants to undertake their journey. According to him, resource mobilization pertains to tangible (i.e. financial capital) and intangible (i.e. contacts, relationships, skills, acquaintances) resources that have been mobilized during the migration experience. Resource mobilization includes resources that the migrants had brought with them prior to leaving their origin country (i.e. social capital). In fact, these two subgroups of resources are part and parcel of resource mobilization.²⁵ Resource mobilization patterns vary with the experiences of migration of the returnees, as well as with their social backgrounds. In this section, the authors outline conditions of preparedness and response, that when interact with the key elements of each of the circles of a migrant's ecosystem (level of information/knowledge; migrant-smuggler relationship; relationship with other actors), provide for either a support or vulnerability factor when they are in transit.

Similarly, drawing on Carling's work on the role of aspirations in a migrant's journey, this section highlights the motivations and aspirations that play a pivotal role in a migrant's decision. People's general aspirations in life form part of the background to migration desires. This conviction that migration is preferable to staying can be understood as an attitude to frame the understanding of force, choice and mobility in migration.²⁶ Through a more detailed discussion on aspirations in chapter 6, the present study highlights how aspirations form a constant element in the migration journey to Canada.

The findings below present an analysis of the preparedness and resource mobilization of migrants according to their: (a) level of information about Canada during decision making; (b) reliance on smugglers; and (c) reliance on other actors. The study finds that in the absence of legal pathways to migration, the smuggler and other actors that form a part of the migrant's ecosystem become a resource and the nature and strength of interaction between these groups is conditioned by circumstances in countries of origin and transit, social groups and use of information technology.

²⁴ J.-P. Cassarino, "Theorising return migration: The conceptual approach to return migrants revisited", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 6(2):253–279 (UNESCO, 2004).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ J. Carling, "The role of aspirations in migration", Paper presented at Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, 23–25 September 2014, Peace Research Institute, Oslo. Available from <https://jorgencarling.org/2014/09/23/the-role-of-aspirations-in-migration/>

4.1. Level of information about Canada during decision-making

Considering the difficulties in reaching Canada and the higher-than-average costs for smuggling, all migrants interviewed had sought information from family and friends, consulted various sources, including lawyers and smugglers, and weighed their options. This is quite different than in Europe, where without proper information or knowledge, migrants transit from one country to another, trying their luck at finding support, often faced by overburdened administrations, cumbersome bureaucracy or outright rejection before even trying. As discussed throughout this report, migration is a social process, heavily reliant on extensive networks and communities. Unsurprisingly, a lot of information regarding reaching Canada and prospects in Canada are obtained through social networks, close and extended family members and friends, at home or abroad. Advances in information and communications technology (ICT) have also drastically impacted the framework of migration and become wholly integrated with the “standards of operation”, such providing information prior to departure, sharing live updates en route, getting in touch with loved ones for coping throughout and during the tough times, and confirming arrival at a pre-determined destination for funds to be released thousands of miles away. Interviews revealed that a great deal of information about Canada was sought online, particularly by younger and more tech-savvy migrants with instant connectivity with friends and family members, and access to infinite volumes of media, from news articles to popular culture, literally at their fingertips.

I have friends in Australia and have relatives in Canada. I think that if you have friends and relatives in these countries, especially ones who have recently moved there, they will give you all the information. I got some of the information from these relatives and friends, and the rest of it is online. All it takes is a simple Googling.

– Migrant D, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

On the Internet and the United Nations, but the UN refugee status determination process takes too long. Also I have learned by smugglers, one of whom I am dealing with now.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

4.2. Relying on the smuggler

Deconstructing the migrant–smuggler relationship

4.2.1. Perception of a smuggler

When not given an opportunity to migrate through regular channels, individuals resort to smugglers who provide avenues to move. While not one migrant informed that they wholly trusted smugglers and all had at some point been exploited (either financially, physically or through coercion) by smugglers and travel facilitators, they all recognized that without smugglers, their journey would not have been possible.

The interviews with both smugglers and migrants found that the perception of the nature of the smuggler was neither consistent nor similar between migrants or smugglers themselves. Perceptions varied on the basis of the nationality, ethnicity, roles and references of the smuggler. There are many dichotomies in this relationship, smuggler as villain, and smuggler as a positive travel facilitator when no other options exist. There is also a whole spectrum of perceptions in between the two extremes.

There are many risks in engaging with smugglers and much is left up to trust, particularly once the migrant leaves the safety net of the community at origin, often from which the smuggler had come, and steps into the unknown.

Perception by migrants

While the initial smuggler may be from the same community and known to the migrant through family and friends, and hence comes with some sense of trust and guarantee, subsequent smugglers and the plethora of other individuals involved may not abide by the same rules, leaving migrants vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. There is initially therefore a perception of trust, not an actual guarantee from the smuggler. However, smugglers are also the lifeline of irregular migration and provide a vital service where institutions do not. As ascertained from interviews, some migrants may have trusted a smuggler more than others, mostly the initial smuggler that had been introduced through family or friends. However, in no interview was the smuggler called “a friend”. Even migrants who liked their initial smuggler and had built great rapport with them said that they would not fully trust him. All the migrants interviewed for this study reported that they had engaged with male smugglers. Some interviews revealed harrowing tales of smugglers as villains, especially “foreign” smugglers or opportunistic ones, numerous nameless smugglers who viewed migrants simply as packages they had to deliver, without sentiments or sentimentalities. However, most interviews placed the smuggler in a grey area as a character they never fully trusted, but on whom they had to rely on to facilitate the process of migration.

I have been hearing all these horrible stories about immigrants being beaten and mugged by smugglers, but I had a different experience. They did not cause me any trouble. I guess maybe that is because I paid them well. [...] That said, you can't trust the smugglers fully. They will tell you one thing, and they will do a different thing.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

One of my relatives had used his service in the past. Haji had helped his son to get to Sweden. He had flown him from Kabul to Turkey and then from Turkey to Greece and from Greece to Sweden. So someone vouched for his credibility. Part of the reason we trust him was that he was a high-ranking government official. The other thing was that we were not giving him any money in advance. He was so confident on his service that he agreed to not take any money from us in advance.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

Perceptions by smugglers

Smugglers, on the other hand, very much see themselves as providing a lifeline to migrants and many, in the case of going to Canada, see “providing visas and passports” in exchange for money as a legitimate business. While our research did not touch upon it, anecdotal evidence suggests that smugglers are often failed asylum seekers or migrants themselves, who become facilitators in transit as they prepare the next steps of their own journey. We also found evidence of smugglers coming from well-connected families, having wide networks or backgrounds in security and intelligence. Some interviews with migrants revealed that low-profile smugglers and local travel facilitators had been more recent migrants themselves who had been recruited by the smuggler, for example to make money or work off a debt to finance their migration. Other migrants reported smugglers abroad who were from the same ethnicity as the migrants, but knew the foreign surroundings well and spoke the language. Some smugglers view migrants as parcels/packages they must pass on, without much care for their being other than to keep them moving; this was particularly the case for the well-trodden land routes from Afghanistan to Europe. Other smugglers took their business seriously and referred to migrants as clients, guaranteeing a smooth process as much as possible and going to great lengths to ensure migrants arrived as promised, both to get paid and naturally, for the business’ reputation.

First of all, I see my job as a legal one. You can't tell me it is an illegal job; people bring me legal passports, and I give them visas, but they have to pay me a lot of money to get the visa. They have to pay more than EUR 10,000. You can say I am helping people. Again, you can't call my job illegal.

– Smuggler in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

My smuggler says that his ways are legal, but the only problem is that he provides fake passports.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

4.2.2. Migrant–smuggler terminologies

Terminology can play a great role in shaping policy discussions with wide implications. Imprecise and inconsistent use of words can polarize situations that are often already tense, contributing to human rights abuses where instead protection should be offered.²⁷ The semantics of the ongoing rhetoric on migration is complex and can have varying purposes and consequences, ranging from protective and inclusive to unaware, to outright inflammatory and dangerous. To begin, a major dichotomy in usage lies between “refugee” and “migrant”, who in reality can have very similar circumstances, but legally have different political standings and media representation. All migrants have a right to claim asylum and must be paid due attention and given protection. Interviews with Afghans revealed that they hold the perception of not being considered as “real refugees” in need of protection and assistance, particularly in transit countries, in Europe or in the United States, but rather viewed as “migrants” who have arrived by choice and are simply looking for employment, and therefore should be barred or sent back. This view could not be more narrow or obscured, and the arbitrary distinction can leave many migrants vulnerable, without protection and without alternatives for movement and migration. Another debate exists between irregular and illegal. Irregular is preferred by intergovernmental bodies, researchers and human rights practitioners because legality can describe an act, not a person. Furthermore, irregular crossing of borders is often the only way to seek protection for migrants and can be perpetuated by restrictive policies and practices, particularly in countries of transit. Another key example is in the terminology between smuggling and trafficking, often used interchangeably, when in reality they are different and imply different sets of agency, vulnerabilities and exploitation. The UN Convention on Transnational Organized Crime Protocol on the Smuggling of Migrants states in article 3 that “Smuggling of migrants” shall mean the “procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”. A “smuggled migrant” means any person who has been the object of such conduct. The Protocol on the Trafficking of Persons and Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings states that “Trafficking in persons” shall mean the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” Though the definitions themselves are not crystal-clear, IOM differentiates the two: (a) the smuggling of migrants, while often undertaken in dangerous or degrading conditions, involves migrants who have consented to being smuggled, whereas trafficking victims have either never consented or, if they initially consented, that consent has been rendered meaningless by the coercive, deceptive or abusive actions of the traffickers; and (b) smuggling ends with the arrival of the migrants at their destination, whereas trafficking involves the ongoing exploitation of the victims in

²⁷ P. Pace and K. Severance, “Migration terminology matters”, *Forced Migration Review*, 51. January 2016. Available from www.fmreview.org/destination-europe/pace-severance.html#sthash.kC2Y3lXc.dpuf

some manner to generate illicit profits for the traffickers. Moreover, smuggling is always transnational, whereas trafficking can occur regardless of whether victims are taken to another country or only moved from one place to another within the same country. Trafficking involves force, deception, abuse, exploitation – a crime against the individual. Smuggling is a “fee for services” illegal business transaction – a crime against the State. That being said, in reality, smuggled migrants are at risk of trafficking, and the line between the two is sometimes blurred.

The interviews revealed a variety of words and nuances used by both migrants and smugglers. While all migrants used the local translation for smuggler, for example *ghachaghbar* in Farsi/Dari, interviews revealed other slang and colloquial terms, such as *mamagan* for Afghans, “uncle” of if the smuggler was an older respected man coming from within the community, then the endearing and respectful term *haji* was used.

We have special names for smugglers and police. Of course, these are just made-up code names that Afghan immigrants have come up. We called smuggler “Mama” – Uncle (your mom’s brother) in Pashtu and Farsi – because there is always one smuggler travelling with you. We called the police “Mamagan” – Uncles in Pashtu – because they always come at in groups.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

These distinctions reveal complex hierarchy of roles and positions of powers between smugglers and migrants, and among smugglers themselves. They also underscore the links within the community in the case of Afghan migrants and smugglers. In interviews with smugglers, migrants were sometimes referred to as clients, while other times as parcels, possibly to avoid being caught in migrant smuggling. For example, the word *noqtah* – meaning point – was used to denote points of meeting, crossing and landmarks between Afghan migrants and smugglers.

The other thing that he said was that smugglers and immigrants use the word noqtah – or point – for different locations. For example, before leaving the smuggler or the guide, tell them that their aim is to get to a certain noqtah. He describes the next noqtah for everyone. It can be a bridge, a mountain or a gathering of trees somewhere, or a ditch. They choose noqtahs just in case someone gets lost or police disperse them.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

4.2.3. Initial contact and nature of engagement

The initial contact with a smuggler was found to be mostly facilitated through the migrant’s family, friends or colleagues. Recommendations from the community transfer an element of trust to a process that otherwise leaves much to the unknown. There is always an initial interaction; that first phone call, meeting somewhere out in the open, or under inconspicuous circumstances. Some migrants reported liking the smuggler and feeling positive about their charisma, confidence or reassurance. Other migrants did not have positive interactions and found it hard to trust this unknown travel facilitator who would be so integral to their migration process.

A friend – a colleague of mine – introduced me to a young man who claimed to be a smuggler and that he could get me to Canada. I met him in Kart-e Naw in a car. He was not more than 25. He was asking for USD 30,000. He said that he would not ask me for any money in advance, and as soon as I reach to Canada, I could pay him. He was talking with so much confidence. I asked how he was going to do it. He told me I did not need to be worried about that. He said he could guarantee that he could fly me from Kabul to Canada.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

Flying on forged visas or passports was the safest, shortest and most expensive route. Costs went down as the route became longer, more dangerous and involved land and water crossings. Beyond the initial smuggler, interviews revealed countless other low- and high-profile travel facilitators that had come in and out of their journeys and been instrumental to small or large segments of their migration.

I talked to a number of [smugglers]. Most of them were charging the same or slightly less than what my smuggler was asking, but they were suggesting dangerous routes like going to Turkey from Iran and then Greece. Some of them were asking for part of the fee in advance. I did not feel comfortable with what they were offering. The person that I used was very confident, and he told me that he would fly me from Afghanistan to Canada. I was paying a little bit more, but it was a much more safer option. Besides, in case I couldn't make it to Canada, I would have all my money.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

When I met with him (smuggler), he told me that he could get me to Turkey and that I had two options: I could pay USD 3,000 to get to Turkey through Iran or I could pay the USD 4,500, and he would get me a Turkish visa from the Turkish embassy in Kabul. I went with the second option.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Another finding that emerged in the interviews was that the nature of the transaction itself was a key factor in trust building between the migrant and the smuggler and an indication of the smuggler's authenticity. Migrants tended to trust more those who did not take payments before departure, and instead collected it from a third source once the migrant had successfully reached a determined destination, a form of guarantee in a clandestine but vital business.

I had heard stories from friends, relatives and friends of friends about people trusting the smugglers without checking their credibility. They had given the money in advance, and on the day that they were supposed to meet, the smuggler had disappeared with his money. Remembering those stories, I recommended that we should leave the money with a third party. We found a money exchanger in Kabul Money Exchanging Market – Sarai-e Shahzada. I deposited the money with him, and I told him that unless I or a member of my family calls him, he should not give the money to the smuggler.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Smugglers at origin often will ask for money to be released in instalments at determined geographic intervals through a financial transaction facilitator, adding another element of trust in addition to roots in the community of origin. There are also smugglers who ask for money upfront, usually targeting migrants in destitute situations without many other options. This was particularly a case for migrants interviewed stranded in transit, or as recalled upon return.

Contact with smugglers in transit locations

In transit, the initial contact was more varied. The reference and contact number still often came from friends, but some migrants reported being approached by the smuggler at known smuggling hubs, such as in parks. Smugglers also use social media, mostly Facebook, to publicize their services in legal terms, portraying themselves as either visa facilitators, travel agents or information consultants. Migrants interviewed tended to trust smugglers of the same nationality more than those from other nationalities. It was observed that usually the main smuggler for a number of Afghan migrants was Afghan, with the *Rahbalads*²⁸ being a combination of Kurds, Syrians, Turks and Afghans. For Syrians, while Syrian smugglers helped them reach Turkey through the Syrian Arab Republic, they thereafter reported engaging with non-Syrian smugglers. The smuggler interviewed for this study was Syrian but born and raised in Russia. He lives in Turkey and holds Canadian citizenship.

I have a Facebook page for all the people that I sent, and they post their stories so I know the situation.

– Smuggler in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

Information provided by the smuggler

As opposed to the information-gathering efforts that go into decision-making, once the migration process has been set in motion, there is a great deal of unknown that the migrant steps into. The unease and anxiety, and hence vulnerabilities and lack of control that come with this unknown, are somewhat mitigated based on the trust and rapport built with the initial smuggler. However, as the journey further proceeds and more actors and external factors become involved, the information gap grows.

The interviews revealed that the level of information shared by smugglers is unpredictable and highly varied, and this could be because many steps of smuggling are dependent on other actors, structural elements and even legal frameworks that operate concurrently but external to the individual migrant's migration process and are not necessarily known to the smuggler either.

You don't ask questions. You don't know why you're waiting in guesthouses to move forward. If you ask, "When are we going?" "Where are we going?" the smuggler would just say, "Eat your bread", "Get some rest", "Don't ask".

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant from Kabul, deported from the United Kingdom and planning to leave for Canada, March 17

Dissimilar to the trust and relationship built with the initial smuggler, other travel facilitators may not be so inclined to share whatever information is available to them with the migrant, they may not know themselves, not see a need to share, or not be permitted to, especially if it involves institutional corruption. Some interviews revealed that the migrant did not even know the exact departure date once financial arrangements had been made with the smuggler, for example if dependent on a border opening or while waiting for fraudulent documents.

²⁸ *Rahbalad* in Dari/Farsi literally translates into "the one who knows (*balad*) the way (*rah*).

It was only when we got into the boat that I found out that they were taking us to Lesbos, not Athens. I called the smuggler and complained. He told me that I shouldn't be worried, and that there was no difference between Athens and Lesbos. Just like that. He thought I was an idiot, and I did not know the difference between the two places.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

There is a great deal of power in knowledge and information. The less migrants know about their onward journey, the more vulnerable they could feel. As revealed by the interviews, not knowing where you are, not knowing when you are leaving or how long you have to wait, not knowing who your next travel facilitator will be or when they will contact you, if they will contact you, and as for the case of forged documents, not knowing who you will be, all place a great deal of stress on already vulnerable migrants in unstable and clandestine settings, leaving them out of control of their circumstances and vulnerable to exploitation and suffering.

He didn't say anything. Actually, he didn't mention from which airport we will leave Turkey. He just said from Turkey. He has just told me that the passport nationality will be something from South-Eastern Europe, like the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania or Bulgaria. He did not tell me anything about arrival to Canada.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

4.2.5. The migrant–smuggler relationship

The relationships that develop between migrants and smugglers are complex and highly dependent on the arrangements and circumstances of the migration process, encompassing the diversity of routes, means and actors. There is a clear difference between migrants who make arrangements from the origin towards a pre-determined destination, often introduced by family, friends or colleagues, as opposed to those that find smugglers ad hoc or out of desperation, and often in transit settings when stranded and without options.²⁹ As one migrant shared in Kabul, his smuggler was a *hamvatan*, a country man introduced by friends, so he could be trusted more, but as with any business, when money is invested, trust could dissipate, especially the further the migrant gets from that community of origin and becomes more vulnerable to exploitation by smaller scale, opportunistic or “foreign” smugglers. These opportunistic smugglers may not necessarily be known, and the initial contact could have come at a hub without prior introduction, like at well-known parks in Istanbul, Athens, Milan or Paris. The nature of these relationships is less predictable and has more inherent vulnerabilities on the migrant's side. This is when migrants are taking a big risk and changing their destination or making ad hoc arrangements on their own, such as for paying to only cross a certain border or for having documents forged and doing the rest on their own. On certain routes, such as around North-East Africa, such small-scale smuggling operations are the norm, where opportunistic smugglers with local knowledge are frequently relied upon for assistance on a single border.³⁰ Smuggling over longer distances, such as to Canada, involves a greater degree of professionalization. Some migrants also reported encountering a *hamvatan* (or fellow national) in transit locations who would treat them better than others.

²⁹ H. Crawley et al., *Destination Europe? Understanding the dynamics and drivers of Mediterranean migration in 2015*, MEDMIG Final Report, November 2016. Available from www.medmig.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/research-brief-destination-europe.pdf

³⁰ Breines, et al., *A study on smuggling of migrants: Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries*. Case study 2: Ethiopia – Libya – Malta/Italy (European Commission, DG and Home Affairs, 2016). Available from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/case_study_2_ethiopia_-_libya_-_malta_italy.pdf

Classifying “smuggler nature” according to their nationality was also extended to other nationalities and over a period of time, migrants have developed a form of classification of what a smuggler from a particular nationality does, how he behaves, to what extent he is to be trusted and what should migrants do to be careful about them. Narratives around dealing with smugglers also indicates a corollary whereby smugglers should know what migrants of particular nationalities are sensitive about and how they too will react.

The Kurds are very bad smugglers too, but at least I respect them for the fact that they will take the risk of being caught by the police, but they will make sure that you reach the noqtah. They do not sexually abuse their clients. Afghans, on the other hand, will not only let you die or get caught by the police, but there have been many incidents – I did not see it with my own eyes, but I heard from many of the guys that I was travelling with – where they have sexually assaulted their clients. I met someone in a jail in Sofia, an Afghan, who was serving time because he had killed an Afghan Rahbalad who had raped his young wife.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

The ever-evolving profile of smugglers in transit is a weakness of the migrant–smuggler relationship and associated with more negative perceptions or experiences. Migrants did not feel like they had the same rapport as they did with the initial smuggler in origin. It is here that many migrants felt at the mercy of the smuggler and had to proceed as told, not fully trusting who they were dealing with and often lacking a great deal of information.

None of the promises that he (the smuggler) made and the things he said about the journey was true. Only 5 per cent of the promises and the things he said were true. For example, he told me that when we cross the border between Turkey and Greece, it would be only an hour of walking and that one of his people would accompany us at all times, that he would hand you over to the next guy in Greece. None of that was true. First of all, they jammed some 25 of us in a small, seat-less van with curtains on its windows and we drove for 12 hours to get to the border between the two countries.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

At the same time, horrific events as narrated by some migrants are also interspersed with intermediaries who were kind and helpful to the migrants.

A young Serbian man took charge of us. I do not remember his name, but he was one of the nicest human beings I met throughout the seven months that I travelled from Pakistan to Germany. He gave us water and biscuit, and he spoke English. He told us jokes and even if they were not funny we laughed. He also showed us a picture of his wife and his little daughter. He was calm, kind and friendly. Unlike other Rahbalads, he did not beat us for asking him for food or water or where we were going.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

4.3. Relying on other actors



From the day I left Istanbul to the day I reached Nuremberg, I met a lot of people, most of them Afghans. I became friends with some of them, but I hardly got the chance to know them. I would become friend with someone for a couple of days and then we get separated because they might stay somewhere and wait for his family to send them money. Others left in the detention centres and prison. Throughout the journey, I was so worried and full of tension that I hardly had the appetite to talk to anyone. I would spend most of my days and nights thinking about my pregnant wife and my sick mother. The four Afghans that were with [me] from Italy to Germany, I did not see them again. I do not know where they are now.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

4.3.1. Range and profile of various actors encountered by migrants

Beyond smugglers, migrants interviewed also reported encountering police and law enforcement officials especially at border crossings, shopkeepers in the locality in which they spent prolonged periods of time in transit, bus drivers, intermediaries between themselves and the smugglers, neighbours, other migrant travellers – from their nationalities and from others. They range on a continuum between support and punishment. What is evident however is that all of the above form a part of the migrant's ecosystem along the journey.

Rahbalads and intermediaries

As much attention and trust that can go in the selection of the initial smuggler, the rest of the journey, depending on the price paid, the means of travel and the route, can involve multitudes of individuals, from other ethnicities, cultures and languages, with foreign mannerisms than that of the migrant and different codes of conduct. The initial smuggler often makes all arrangements and facilitates payments, between the migrant's financial transaction provider and the numerous travel facilitators. The overall terms are set with this "trusted" smuggler. The relationship with travel facilitators is different. They can be plenty and nameless. Interactions can sometimes be very short, from walking through a river to receiving a package containing travel documents.

The only Afghan that I dealt with was the smuggler in Kabul, the young guy. The rest of them were people from the countries that I was travelling to. In India, it was an Indian guy. In Bangkok, they were Thai. In Nairobi, the guys who picked me up and looked after me were Kenyans. In Rio, my contact was a Brazilian.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

The initial smuggler is the point of contact and can become a problem-solver or support network if the migrant is in trouble. As is often the case, the initial smuggler is also known to the migrant's family and should something happen to the migrant, the smuggler would be responsible. Even if they could never fully trust this person or at least the entire process from finish to end, many interviews revealed that migrants viewed this initial smuggler positively. Views of the local travel facilitators, guides or *Rahbalad* (literally, someone who knows the way), were varied, as was the nature of interactions. These ranged from derogatory, abusive and exploitative interactions and harassments, to stoic *Rahbalads* who simply led the way and focused on the logistics of the journey.

However, there were also positive interactions with facilitators listed who understood the plight of the migrants and did what they could to "get the process over with", get to the next destination and set the migrant off to the next person or on the next leg of their journey, such as a flight or a ship. From the migrant's perspective, not knowing when the next leg of the journey could come, what that next leg could entail or who the next facilitator could be was frightening, leaving them feeling vulnerable and exposed, especially the further the migrant was from their nucleus of support and from the initial smuggler.

There were also anecdotal cases as the one mentioned below about people providing alternative services, which while not strictly smuggling, formed a key component of the migrant's journey to Canada.

I had a friend in Seattle. I called him and told him that I would be coming to visit him. When I got to Seattle, he took me to an Afghan restaurant. The owner told me that he had been living in Seattle since 1982. When I told him that I was planning to cross the border into Canada, he was not shocked. He said that he himself had driven a few people near the border, and he offered to drive me there. He was driving Afghans there just for the sake of helping them. He told me about three Afghan National Army officers that he drove there. One of them had made it, and the other two were arrested by the Americans and were in jail.

– Migrant E, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

Money exchangers and safekeepers

Another category of actors often encountered by migrants was the money exchanger, a third-party person who agreed to hold the money that a migrant owed to a smuggler for safekeeping until the migrant reached the destination. These could range from restaurant owners to a member of the migrant's extended family, as illustrated in the quote below.

After a week of negotiation with the smuggler, we finally agreed that I would choose the money exchanger who would keep the money until I reach Canada. We went to the main money exchange market. I knew this one money exchanger – he is our relative – I deposited the USD 30,000 in an account with him, and we both signed a contract. [...] Normally, it takes at least two of three months for a person to get from Afghanistan to the country that they want to go. During that time, they invest that money and make profit of it. They do this for multiple people at the same time.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

Family and friends in places of origin, destination or in other desired destination countries

All respondents for this study reported the key role played by their immediate family in providing financial and emotional support during the journey, as well as the role of family and friends in Canada in providing information. Migrants maintained a close relationship with their networks in Europe and/or the United States to gather information on opportunities to reach Canada safely, even if it meant taking detours through other countries.

My brother's friend told me that I should think about going to Canada instead of staying in the United States. He said that life is much more relaxed in Canada compared to the United States. He also said that in Canada, there is a strong safety net for new immigrants provided by the Government, which one couldn't find in the United States. I have [a] distant relative who has been living in Canada for the past few decades. I called him and asked him about life in Canada. He confirmed everything that my brother's friend had told.

– Migrant C, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

4.3.2. Nature and means of engagement

Friends and family, at home and abroad, in person or via communication technology, are a crucial safety net and support mechanism for migrants; they can link individuals to others, send money through formal and informal financial institutions when resources run low, and provide encouragement when prospects seem bleak. On the other hand, these same elements can add pressure to a migrant's fragile state, from having to send remittances to settling debts incurred for migration and elsewhere, to feeling ashamed if the migrant does not succeed in building a home abroad. Smugglers themselves can provide support, even if a strong financial element is involved and definitely, not all, if not most smugglers abroad would not be immediately trusted by migrants.

Social media is used by migrants both at pre-departure stage (e.g. to get in contact with smugglers), as well as on the move to communicate and receive information on migration routes, via smartphones and/or Internet cafés. The use of social media by migrants can differ by nationality, region of origin, depending on the availability of Internet, and the education of the migrant. For example, among Pashto speakers and among Eritreans and Somalis, the use of social media was limited at the pre-departure stage due to the unavailability of the Internet. Language-specific websites cater to different nationalities of migrants, for example Arabic-speaking migrants use Arabic websites and messenger applications that allow Arabic to be used as a medium of communication, while a Dari/Farsi speaker would choose a platform that allows their language. Messenger apps that provide encryption services are favoured. Pashto is a language that is yet to find support on a broad spectrum of applications, which means that unless the migrants speak English or Dari, social media as a mechanism of support is limited for them.

5. VULNERABILITIES AND EXPOSURE TO EXPLOITATION

Exploitation in transit: A critical causal and consequential element of vulnerability

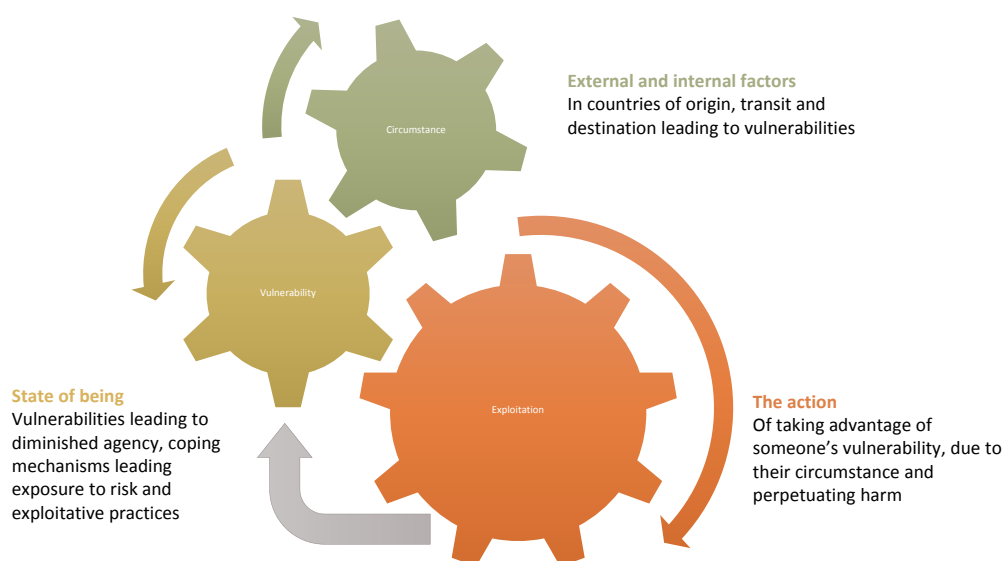
In this section, we distinguish between vulnerabilities and exploitation and focus on the exposure to exploitation that migrants face while in transit, where both available response mechanisms and the migrant's own ecosystem are at their weakest. This section is sub-divided into the following three headings:

- **Definitions** to articulate the definition of exploitation and exploitative practices and distinguish it from vulnerabilities, both of which require different response approaches;
- **Trends** of vulnerabilities and exploitation in transit countries faced by migrants; and
- **Implications** for protection of migrants by an analysis of their coping mechanisms and available formal and informal support.

5.1. Definition: Vulnerability and exploitation

Migrant vulnerabilities arise due to various circumstances in the countries of origin, transit and destination. They lead to diminished agency and coping mechanisms, leaving them open to exploitative practices. Exploitation occurs when advantage is taken of a migrant's vulnerability. In this section, we highlight migrant vulnerabilities and how they leave migrants exposed to exploitative practices. The interviews show that migrants are vulnerable before they embark on their journey in their countries of origin, and by nature of irregular migration and smuggling, while they are in transit. This means that exploitation does not occur at a particular *noqtah* or time in transit but can occur anywhere in transit countries where the migrant's ecosystem is at its weakest, their finances at greatest risk and their level of information to inform decision-making at its lowest. Active perpetration of exploitation by law enforcement officials and passive silence of institutional mechanisms to protect migrants play a crucial role in exacerbating migrant vulnerabilities in transit countries. The evidence strongly indicates a gap in targeted and planned response in transit countries that recognizes and adapts to the fragmented and distracted nature of migrant smuggling.

Figure 3. Exploitation, vulnerability, circumstance nexus



Source: Samuel Hall, 2017.

5.2. Trends in vulnerabilities and exposure to exploitation

5.2.1. Vulnerabilities at the start of the journey

To what extent do circumstance and being in a vulnerable position in the country of origin play a role in exposing the migrant to exploitative practices?

Interviews with Afghans and Syrians highlighted security concerns over all others as a reason for leaving. Structural threats to safety and stability for the individual and the nucleus of the family, and lack of a context of security pushed many to contemplate leaving. In addition to those who held risky jobs, from journalists to translators for foreign forces during various recent occupations of Afghanistan, systemic-wide corruption and institutional barriers add a heavy burden of exploitation and abuse potential for the rest of the population. While some may have received direct threats, becoming fully aware of their risks, others, such as youth and women, have been systematically exploited and excluded.³¹

I'm from Baghdad, Iraq. I was 12 when the war started, and since then, me and my family have been through a lot of problems in terms of security. My father is Shia, and my mother is a Sunni. So in the Sunni areas we were living in, my father got threatened, our dog was killed, there was an attempt to kidnap me, we had to flee our home, to go [to] another neighbourhood. In the other neighbourhood because my mum is a Sunni and Palestinian, they made allegations against her and she went to prison.

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 17

³¹ N. Majidi, "Urban displaced youth in Kabul", *Forced Migration Review*, 46. May 2014. Available from www.fmreview.org/afghanistan/majidi.html

The discussion on migrant thresholds highlighted the first thoughts and initial fears of migrants who have decided to leave. Deciding to leave, despite a long and arduous process in itself, is only the first step with the journey yet to come. Many young men who move have not been separated from their immediate or extended families for long periods of time or have travelled abroad. Interviews with migrants often indicated the decision to leave for Canada being made under personal or circumstantial duress.

I travelled alone the first time. I did not take my wife with me for two main reasons: she was pregnant with our first child, and I did not want to take any risk with her and our baby. The second reason was that I could only afford to pay for one person. I could not pay for two people. I was hoping that once I get to Europe, I would work hard and in a few years, I would bring over my wife and child.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Those migrants who were travelling for the first time experienced more serious limitations. These migrants were wary of the journey given their own inexperience and relied heavily on advice from friends and family. But even that sometimes was not entirely devoid of vulnerability and exposure to exploitation.

But he was lying. You see, I trusted him because I did not have any experience with smugglers. I thought he was telling me the truth; I was introduced to him by my friend's brother. I thought if he trusted him, I could trust him too.

– Migrant C, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

5.2.2. Vulnerabilities in transit and exposure to exploitation

Transit constitutes one of the most significant segments of the journey to Canada. It is marked by a diversity of transit routes, means, costs and experiences, as recounted by migrants, attests to the complexity of the migration process and the many actors involved. The situation of many migrants stranded in transit brings to attention the very real and human vulnerabilities of migrants and the need for collective response and well-considered policies. Outside the traditional nexus of migrant–smuggler state, there are other actors involved, including migrant communities at origin, transit and destination. Developments in technology and the way migrants connect and communicate have a significant impact on transit, needs, vulnerabilities and protection. Detention could be a threat to support systems and ripe with opportunities for exploitation. Moreover, vulnerabilities due to circumstances in countries of origin can be exacerbated in transit. Vulnerabilities in transit are often related to the length of time spent in transit, status and the clandestine nature of being in transit, facing and dealing with corruption, and means of travel.³² Financial resources, social support and integration with surroundings, i.e. having community support in transit, a plan onwards, a sense of purpose and coping mechanisms are among other vulnerabilities noted by migrants in the interviews. The absence of these, to varying degrees and in different combinations, can exert a great deal of suffering on migrants.

³² P. Oberoi, "Protecting the human rights of migrants in a time of fear", OpenDemocracy, 9 September 2016. Available from www.opendemocracy.net/mediterranean-journeys-in-hope/pia-oberoi/protecting-human-rights-of-migrants-in-time-of-fear

A large factor correlated with vulnerability and exploitation in transit is the time spent in transit, where for example, migrants could live at the constant risk of getting arrested or deported if they do not possess the right documentation or permission to stay or continue. Without a clear plan for the way forward, perpetually waiting, without documentation, without work or a reliable source of income, without a purpose or a home, many migrants in transit are exposed to physical, financial and mental exploitation. Such experiences are becoming more and more common with times spent in transit systemically increasing.³³ The wide-ranging challenges experienced by migrants in transit, such as lack of financial resources, lack of legal status, being away from their support network, and relying on smugglers for sustenance, information and communication beg to question ways in which protection is presented by authorities and offered to those who seemingly need it most.

In Iraq, we were an upper middle-class family; we had cars, we sold everything and we came here. Because the legal system in Turkey does not allow us to work and have work permits, we have ended up using all our life savings just to live. We ran out of our life savings, and now my family lived through the last winter without heating. They are eating beans every day. They are in Eskişehir, my father, my mother, my sister.

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

Many governments focus on factors that force migrants into displacement, or on painting smugglers as criminals.³⁴ However, as attested to in the interviews, it is often the lack of regular migration opportunities or alternatives for transit that render migrants most vulnerable to exploitation.

I have seen what is happening to migrants in Europe, and I have heard bad things about their situation. My brother and cousins are just barely making ends meet in Istanbul. They only have enough to live and survive. They work, but haven't been able to save to continue their journey. The borders are closed, and the situation is bad. They have a lot of problems. [...]

– Migrant J, migrant in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 2017

Lack of familiarity with foreign systems, lack of awareness of rights, and lack of access to basic services all leave migrants highly vulnerable to exploitation. In order to not worry parents and family back home, migrants sometimes choose not to speak of their troubles to them. A number of respondents interviewed for this study cited a lack of emotional support.

So being a refugee in Turkey has taught me that, as a refugee, as a person with colour, as a person from Iraq, it's hard to be accepted into society, it's hard to get a job, it's hard to get housing, I was refused from getting a job and housing, basically just because I applied for a job as an English teacher, and they told me they could not hire me because I'm from Iraq. I tried to rent an apartment for my family, and they told me, "We don't give houses to refugees."

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

³³ M. Collyer, "Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey", *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 23(3):273–93 (2010). doi: 10.1093/jrs/feq026

³⁴ O'Brien, 2016.

5.2.3. Exploitation faced by migrants in transit

Physical abuse and humiliation perpetrated by the police

Interviews with migrants highlighted that police officers and law enforcement agencies played a large role in perpetuating exploitation and vulnerabilities in transit. Police and other law enforcement officials were cited as people that migrants were most fearful of, a key point to assess the nature of institutional response that needs to be set in place to tackle the criminality aspect and the exploitative/vulnerability nexus of migrant smuggling.

Whether physically abusing and beating migrants throughout their European transit, or by detaining them, or simply by blocking their transit, migrants reported having to suffer through repeated abuse or have to explore even more costly, more dangerous or more clandestine ways forward.

We reached another barbed wire fence. We all climbed it and jumped to the other side. Some people driving on the highway saw us, and they called the police. Half an hour later, police arrived in a few vehicles. As soon as they got out of their vehicles, their [sic] start beating us with metal rods, punches and kicks. They handcuffed us and put us in the back of a van and drove us to the nearby police station where they took everything – including the little money that I was carrying with me – from us. They force striped us. When a couple of the guys refused to let the Greek police check their rectums, they jumped on him like wolves and beat them black and blue. I took off all my clothes before they even asked me and let them check. [...] I had never felt that embarrassed. But I also did not want to be beaten by the police.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Although I did not run into any trouble with different countries' police, but the law enforcement agents in different countries were the people that I feared the most. I knew that if I was caught travelling with fake documents, I would end up in jail. That was something that kept me awake in the night.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

Exploitation by smugglers, intermediaries and *Rahbalads*

Coercion and hidden costs of the journey

Migrants reported that smugglers, intermediaries and *Rahbalads* too had their own strategies to extort money and keep migrants under their control and dependent on them. These ranged from not providing adequate information to travelling at night or when there are fewer security patrols on the way.

Often earning more on commission, smugglers and intermediaries also made migrants stop in “houses” selected by the intermediaries themselves, making them buy food and essentials from shops chosen by the intermediaries. Migrants were often kept under house arrest in these locations or deprived of food for long periods until the migrant’s focal point or lead smuggler had paid the intermediary.

They picked us up from our hotel and took us to a large house in the suburbs of Tehran. That night, they did not give us dinner. When we asked if they would give us dinner, they told us that there was no dinner and if we wanted to get some food, we can get it from the little convenient store inside the house. They were selling things tenfold their actual price. Now that I think they deliberately kept us hungry to buy their food. We paid 10 for a small bottle of water and 15 for a pack biscuit.

– Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Everything was carefully calculated. They kept us hungry and thirsty to control us and force us to buy their stuff inside the numerous safe houses that we stopped at on the way to the Turkish border.

– Migrant G, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, March 2017

That it is expensive to reach Canada using smuggling is an established fact and confirmed by those interviewed for this study. For most, to pay such a high amount means selling key assets in the country of origin, taking debts and forgoing family savings. The initial lump sum agreed upon with the smuggler however is not the only money that migrants end up paying. As mentioned above, intermediaries often extort money from migrants for food and shelter. Some have reported smugglers asking for a higher price once the migrant is en route, leaving them no option but to ask for more money from home or risk being left stranded in a transit location.

The financial obligations and payments made to the smuggler and anyone responsible for the migrant's journey to reach Canada push them further in cycles of debt, beyond family and close friends to more recent acquaintances in places of transit or forces them to take up employment under exploitative conditions.

I don't have money now; I am going to borrow it from friends. When I arrive in Canada, I will repay them as I work.

– Migrant F, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

Threats by smugglers

Migrants reported being given warnings by smugglers to not report them if caught by police. The report below is an indication of the terms of the warning, enough to leave migrants silent. Yet, one of the respondents did report to have identified two smugglers to the police in Greece after a particularly difficult Mediterranean crossing.

The only thing that they told us about potential dangers was that if the police caught us, we shouldn't tell the police who is the smuggler. We were told that our smuggler is also an immigrant. Of course, they did not say that as a request. They said that as a warning. They told us that if for some reason we give the smuggler up, they could easily find us and that they would make sure we do not see the light of the next day.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

Financial exploitation

Respondents reported being asked for bribes at checkpoints and for trying to acquire documentation and services in transit countries, especially once the other party realized their vulnerability as an undocumented migrant. The burden of debts incurred to pay for hidden and unforeseen costs exposed migrants to further exploitation.

They (Greek police) took our fingerprints and gave us a departure letter, telling us that we have to leave Greece within a month. They also made us pay EUR 60 each for the letters. You have to pay that from your own pocket. They do not care where and how you find it, but you have to find it and pay them. Those who could afford, they would let them go, but there were some who couldn't pay the EUR 60, and they stayed behind. In the hotel (in Greece) I met people, some of them Afghans, who owed so much money to the hotel that they couldn't move anywhere. They did not have a choice but to stay there for months.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

The situation of migrants rendered immobile in Greece, due to a lack of means to further migrate can further lead into situations of bonded labour, when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt. It is one of the most common forms of modern slavery and one that is imposed on some migrants in transit. While this report did not cover it, anecdotal information from those interviewed also indicated the exploitation that migrants suffer at the hands of employers who hire migrants as informal labour and being swindled out of pay cheques and vulnerable to further exploitation – working long hours, exposed to hazardous occupations and tasks, and with no job security.

Discrimination due to undocumented status

Respondents in transit countries like Greece and Turkey reported felt that they were mistreated by virtue of their status and nationality. This often led them further exposed to physical violence.

Turkey is not a good place to be a refugee at all. I feel like I'm not only a second-class citizen, I'm worse than that. I feel like I'm a fourth-class citizen. I try to work and make an honest living; I was working as a tour guide. I was stopped in the street because I had no permit, and I was hit by officials – tourism officials. I was fined 2,000, which I'm still not able to pay right now. I was stopped another time in the airport and hit by people; I was humiliated in front of my clients because I'm not legally working. Every time I see the police now, I get nervous, because I'm not legally staying in Istanbul.

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

Yes, of course, a lot of the Turkish people have been asking me what I am doing here in Turkey. You should go and fight in Syrian Arab Republic. A few days ago, some of my friends had a fight with some Turkish people, and they pulled a knife on one of my friends.

– Migrant H, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

One migrant travelling to Germany to then take an onward ship to Canada reported coming across a group of vigilantes, an increasing concern in today's populist and nationalistic rhetoric found in Europe.

We had not walked more than half an hour when we ran into a group of vigilantes, all of them very young boys in their early to mid-20s. There were some 16–17 of them. They had knives and baseball sticks. It seemed that they had been doing this every day. Before we could say or do anything, they started beating us and shouting something in Bulgarian. They tied our hands behind our backs with whatever they could find and made us sit on the ground. One of them went into the woods. When he reappeared, he was carrying some sticks. Every one of them grabbed a stick and started beating us. They took our money, phones and water from us. One of them even pissed on us. They walked us to a border crossing and handed us to the police. The police beat us as well before sending us back to Turkey.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

These quotes speak of the exposure to physical, mental and financial exploitation by migrants from three different countries seeking to reach Canada. Most do not have knowledge of their rights to prevent exploitative practices.

5.3. Implications for protection

Opportunities and finding connections between barriers and response

The journey leaves migrants physically exhausted while the finances required leave them in dire economic conditions. Cross-cutting between all forms of abuse, exploitation and vulnerability in transit, often undocumented and unassisted, are psychological, emotional and mental stressors that migrants carry. Migrants interviewed all reported feeling deeply scared and fearful during the journey. Many called their smugglers when they needed help or guidance on what to do. This section highlights the opportunities and coping mechanisms that migrants often employ to protect themselves from exploitation and the response available to them, indicating the need to strengthen protection response in transit countries where smuggled migrants are most likely to be invisible and vulnerable to exploitative practices.

5.3.1. Opportunities for migrants to cope with exploitation

Use of technology to keep in contact with family and friends and for information

ICT is instrumental to coping with the difficulties of the journey, particularly being away from home, loved ones and familiar surroundings. Although modern tools of communication can also have a negative caveat; some migrants shared how they could not bring themselves to show the reality of their situation in transit to their family and friends back home, opting to lie and pretend being safe and protected to avoid being seen as a failure. However, being able to communicate with loved ones was a notable coping mechanism for migrants and a great potential for response from formal and informal institutions.

From Afghanistan, I miss my friends and family, and I am in touch with them anyway. I use Viber every day. I don't really miss much else. 90 per cent is war and violence, what's there to miss.

– Migrant L, Afghan migrant stranded in Brazil on the way to Canada, February 2017

Travelling companions as a coping mechanism

Another coping mechanism cited by many migrants travelling solo were the friends they met along the way; this was particularly for those travelling to Europe by land before attempting to go to Canada. This is the opposite of those trying to fly to Canada who were often specifically instructed not to speak with anyone. Many migrants had made close friends along the way with whom they communicated via SMS or smartphone applications, whom they would meet at different points or run into at various popular hubs. With some they would take the entire journey, with others they would fully fall out of touch.

Those who had skills like that of a mechanic or a barber found work in shops and garages on the way to pay for their expenses. Others tried to access informal labour markets. They used these opportunities to meet new people and get information about their context and further opportunities.

Because I am a barber, I can meet and get to know new friends. So I think I can adapt to the new community. My wife also studied sociology so she can adapt as well.

– Migrant H, migrant from the Syrian Arab Republic in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

Soft skills and aspirations: Hope as a coping mechanism in the face of adversity

There were more esoteric coping mechanisms cited by migrants. One was hope. Hope that they would make it through the bad times and be able to look back on this one day from a better place. Hope that they would make it through, become somebody and be able to provide for themselves and their families. Hope in this dream kept them going. Faith was another coping mechanism cited by many migrants. Faith that things will work out. Faith in fate. Faith in God or a Greater Good that was overseeing them, protecting them even when options seemed bleak and keeping their heart beating and their lungs breathing. Many migrants reported that at their lowest points, they could do nothing but pray.

At dawn, we started walking again, this time along the road and in the middle of farmlands until a village appeared in the distance. We wanted to get to that village. We did not know where we were, but the signs were all in Latin, a good sign, indicating that we were in Greece somewhere.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

For many, a breaking point came when they could no longer advance. This could manifest as jail or detention, like many migrants in Europe; whether it was being faced with walls of barbed wire, barking dogs and police violence or being stranded on an island. When they could no longer see a way forward, when they felt their dream of reaching safety, security and opportunity was no longer attainable, when their only way out was through costly clandestine alternatives with smuggler they did not know, many hit a low point and broke down.

5.3.2. Finding connections: Response and support

Being in a position of irregularity means that migrants will not seek out formal institutional support, especially in transit. The interviews conducted for this study highlighted three key findings pertaining to institutional response and informal support:

- (a) Smuggled migrants did not seek out institutional support in transit countries; their encounter with NGOs offering support and assistance was accidental, whether near detention centres, checkpoints or camps.

- (b) Migrants who had spent long periods in transit also actively under-reported or did not report crimes, physical abuse and financial criminality perpetrated against them that would make them visible to the law as “they did not want any trouble with the law”.
- (c) Informal support encountered by migrants before, during and after their journeys were ad hoc and catered to immediate needs of food, shelter and sometimes even money.

Circumstances of encounter

Unless told by friends or advised by people they trust on where to go, what to do and what to say, most migrants interviewed had not been aware of their rights in transit countries or the legal services available to them, if any. They were shy, scared of being detained and deported if they did not possess legal status from national authorities, and many had had negative experiences with formal institutions and law enforcement agencies.

Refugees in Turkey, they don't want any problems with the law, any problems. Even if someone comes and hits you, you don't want to hit them back, because then you have problems. The police, or people who said they were the police, knocked on our door, and accused our cousin who was visiting us, of using fake dollars. So they wanted to come inside our home, they said we had fake dollars, so they came inside and they took me and my mum into my room and my father was in my room. When they left, they stole around 10,000, 9,000.

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

In some settings, particularly in transit countries, migrants were living outside the reach of formal institutions, who they associated with and who provided them with information, highly unreliable and dependent on community networks in transit and also a hint of luck. For many, finding both formal and informal institutional support came down to chance encounters along their journey and even in destination – NGOs, lawyers, practitioners, activists who had the wherewithal, networks and resources to provide support to migrants. Interviews with migrants in Canada highlighted the important role that lawyers played in preparing cases and manoeuvring legal systems. However, such services were not available to most migrants in transit, or at least not consistently or officially.

This begs the question as to the extent to which service providers and institutions able to reach, represent and assist hard-to-access and hidden populations – young migrants, women and children who fear seeking assistance in case it would in some way jeopardize their prospects of being in Canada or getting there. At present, interviews with IOM offices conducted in all four countries of this study indicated that there is no formal mechanism through which these population groups can be addressed, unless they are captured by an area programme, or are seeking assistance as an asylum seeker/refugee in Turkey and Greece. For many migrants – Afghans, Syrians, Iraqis – who roam in neighbourhoods of Aksaray, Zeytinburu and Essenyurt in Istanbul, hubs for migrants and smugglers alike, institutional support is non-existent. In a number of ways, their desire to use smugglers and irregular means has been perpetuated by frustrations around bureaucratic processes surrounding governments and international organizations like UNHCR.

Agencies encountered

In border areas, Greek islands, and known locations of migrant presence in cities like Belgrade, international and local NGOs were reportedly providing essential and psychosocial support to the migrants.

There were all sorts of news about the mistreatment of immigrants in Bulgaria, the border of Serbia and in Hungary that a lot of countries and NGOs had sent their people to the Afghan Park to help immigrants. I saw people from Norway, the United States, United Arab Emirates, Germany and so many other places, the UN, the Red Cross, giving immigrants food, clothes, water. I saw psychiatrists talking to people about their journey, and I saw journalists. My faith was restored on humanity. They gave us a place in the UN compound where we showered and slept, and there were tents in Afghan park equipped with computers and Wi-Fi. I called my wife from there and my brothers and let them know that I was fine and that I had made it to Belgrade.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

In destination, on the other hand, the response met by most migrants included aid agencies, charities and many NGOs. They provided a variety of services, from basic needs like food and shelter to legal counselling and psychosocial support, the most crucial for mitigating immediate migrant vulnerabilities. In many settings, institutions were providing services in lieu of government agencies or in their utter absence. These institutions also provided a vital service and could mitigate vulnerabilities for many migrants.

When we told him that we have decided to come to Canada, he told us about this organization in Buffalo, New York called Viva La Casa. He said we should go to that organization and introduce ourselves as potential asylum seekers. We later found out that this organization's specialty was facilitating the process of crossing the border from the United States into Canada for the people who had relatives in Canada.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

However, cities were still key areas where assistance was difficult to access for migrants, where they interacted more with government officials and law enforcement agencies and were prone to abuse and exploitation. This meant that their vulnerabilities due to missing documents and residency status made them open to exploitative practices of corruption, bribery and extortion when they were trying to access support. Migrants reported: (a) mental stress due to long periods of waiting for documents to be processed for legal channels of migration (up to three years in the case of Syrians and Iraqis); (b) financial impoverishment, decline in family savings and debts as a result of being in a transit country where they were not allowed to work, forcing them to hasten their journey to Europe or Canada using smugglers; and (c) a lack of transparency in legal mechanisms that left migrants in limbo.

Under-reporting and discrepancies in existing institutions

Migration–corruption nexus

The connections between migration and corruption, whether in the country of origin or along migration trajectories, remain relatively unexplored.³⁵ The concept of a nexus implies that there are many connections and that the effects go in both directions. Migration can affect both the practice and perceptions of corruption. And conversely, corruption can induce, facilitate or obstruct migration.³⁶ The role of corruption in facilitating illegal migration, impeding development benefits of migration, promoting transnational ties of elites and most importantly, as found in the study, undermining migrant assistance and impeding legal channels of migration are only some of the areas in which the migration–corruption nexus has begun to be explored recently.³⁷ Interviews with migrants across the

³⁵ J. Carling, E. Paasche and M. Siegel, “Finding connections: The nexus between migration and corruption”, Migration Policy Institute, 12 May 2015. Available from www.migrationpolicy.org/article/finding-connections-nexus-between-migration-and-corruption

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

board in origin, transit and destination revealed widespread corruption in institutions for obtaining visas and documents. These documents could often be acquired from travel agents or corrupt officials at costs many times greater than the regular price. Migrants had no choice but to resort to such corruption and pay such hefty prices, because obtaining these documents otherwise through regular channels was impossible, extremely cumbersome or time consuming. This was particularly the case for Afghan migrants trying to leave Afghanistan through regular means. Similar cases for corruption were also found with asylum claim systems in third countries, such as Turkey, and included government and intergovernmental agencies, such as UNHCR.

Gaps in response and barriers to seeking existing assistance

There are many gaps in response in origin, transit and destination that impact the migration process. Interviews in Afghanistan revealed large barriers to opportunity, growth and development, particularly for young people and women, in a society lacking sensitive programming, integration possibilities for all, and ridden with conflict and sectarian strife. Across the board, there is lack of national legislation or policy that captures the complex nuances of the migrant–smuggler relationship or the important service smugglers offer when there are no alternatives. At a more localized level, gaps occurred when services were unnecessarily delayed or costly. In general, exposing migrants to unequal and unpredictable provision of services made their already weak and exposed circumstances worse.

Getting a hearing was the most difficult thing. I was hearing different time periods. I heard 6 months, 12 months and 18 months. My hearing date came after 18 months. Those 18 months were some of the most difficult days of my life. I felt depressed and alone. I missed my wife, my family, Kabul and my friends. I even regretted my decision to leave Kabul. Then my hearing date arrived, and my application was approved. That made me happy. After a year, I got my permanent residency, and I applied to sponsor my wife and our daughter. It was another long process, but finally they arrived two weeks ago. I am starting to feel at ease now that I have my wife and my daughter with me.

– Migrant E, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

Informal support

Informal response mechanisms are defined as chance encounters with small organizations, people, churches or mosques that migrants encountered on their journey. This distinction is made because informal assistance was often able to fill a gap of providing assistance to migrants that formal institutions and organizations failed to do.

Circumstances of encounter

Migrants, especially those who had undertaken long journeys by land, reported encountering churches and families on the way that gave them food and water. In Europe, the church was identified by two migrants as a place where people were distributing food.

I went to a church the next day where I found a few people who could speak English. They gave me some food, some clothes and a place to shower. I also met a woman, a very generous woman, in the church. She was a German, living in Rome. She offered to give me a place. I am still in touch with her, and I consider her my mother. I took her on her offer and lived with her for the next 45 days. She gave me food and some money to buy clothes.

– Migrant D, Afghan migrant in Montreal, Canada, March 2017

Those interviewed also reported getting ad hoc assistance from some of the smuggling intermediaries, who provided them with food and shelter, but these instances were rare. The discussion above also shows that family back home often came to the financial rescue of migrants through money transfers and *Hawala* systems.

A non-sentient assistance mechanism used by many migrants was social media. Information was cited as a powerful tool towards developing coping mechanisms and solutions, and the use of Facebook, Twitter and news sites to keep up with the most recent developments, find other migrants or simply to negotiate their way in new geographical areas using GPS.

There is evidence from Vancouver, Canada, that involvement in local community-run volunteer programmes can help provide young migrants build a sense of belonging, create social cohesion and present an opportunity for the youth to freely express themselves and their cultural heritage through youth-driven and engaging ways.³⁸

Analysis of response mechanisms and migrant access

Throughout this report, the authors highlight that alternatives for forced displacement and regular means for movement and transit can have a large impact on the migration process and migrant vulnerabilities, including the degree of reliance upon smuggling and the nature of the migrant–smuggler relationship. There is a correlation to which what is legal and permissible, in law or practice, perpetuates the irregular means and nature of smuggling. This is very much the case for migrants transiting through Europe to get to Canada, for example. Whether they are faced with open borders or stranded immobile even if they have no intention to stay in a transit hub and are only there to catch the next leg of their journey. This directly impacts their time in transit and their risks and vulnerabilities. This is also the case for land transits through Central America and the United States, including the Safe Third Country Agreement between the United States and Canada. Policies and practices in Europe and the United States have a large impact on Canada as a destination because of Canada’s geography. Whereas Europe was a desired destination for many Afghans transiting by land, it no longer seems so, with many migrants deciding to pay the high costs and take the difficult journey to reach Canada because of much better opportunities and prospects. Most migrants interviewed did not see any opportunity to stay in Europe, whether to naturalize and become citizens themselves or for future plans to reunite with their families.

The authors also know that migration is a social process with deep roots in communities at origin, transit and destination. Smugglers are part of this process too and provide a vital service where structural systems and infrastructure for regular migration are absent, lacking or unequal. Solely focusing on the criminal aspects of smuggling and its profit-making nature, restricting movement or criminalizing migrants do not address migrant vulnerabilities and exploitation risks, neither do they provide support or respect human rights. Without a formal system for regular migration or protection of the vulnerable, informal systems, which depending on a variety of conditions – such as costs, the nature of arrangements and trust – could have positive attributes or negatively impact individuals. Other crucial aspects of any attempt at a comprehensive response to address migrant vulnerabilities and exploitation potential in smuggling are recognizing migrant agency, their vast social networks at origin, transit and destination, and the ecosystem of support and coping mechanisms that surround migrants and the migration process. Any response must also adapt to modern times and tools of ICT, which have completely changed how migrants and smugglers relate and operate.

³⁸ A.-R. Moosa, “Cultural reflections of Afghan youth living in Canada”, *Forced Migration Review*, 40. August 2012. Available from www.fmreview.org/young-and-out-of-place/moosa.html

6. ASPIRATIONS

For Afghan migrants contemplating to come to Canada or during their decision-making process, means of reaching Canada and costs were the two major barriers. The two are intertwined and related to Canada's geography. For many Afghans at origin, to migrate was an aspiration on its own because of its attachment with benefit and prosperity after a decades-long tradition of emigration. There are political, economic and social vulnerabilities that all people of Afghanistan face, and then there are specific events, opportunities and circumstances that encourage one to migrate. Then there are many individual and personal aspects, as well as micro- and macro-level structures that will influence whether one does or can migrate. Rigid policies that restrict or prohibit movement, especially in transit countries, by detaining migrants or deporting them, exploited the already exploited and vulnerable. Without such policies and practices, migrants would not have to resort to using smugglers, taking risks, and paying such high prices to traverse such great distances in a clandestine fashion. Jørgen Carling argues that migration aspirations are independent of barriers, allowing to identify involuntary immobility.³⁹

Aspirations themselves are highly context-dependent and can be tied with a migrant's opportunities and vulnerabilities at origin. The interviews showed that aspirations were only reinforced in transit. If needs and vulnerabilities feed into aspirations, then aspirations also largely impact the decision-making process. Whereas many Afghans migrating to the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan do it primarily for economic opportunities, those leaving for Europe and Canada aspire to move more permanently, build a life and eventually bring their family over. Prospects of which made Canada a desired destination for most. As revealed in the interviews, they were doing it for peace and security, opportunity and abundance, and for family.

My dream destination is a place that's calm, that supports you, like Canada. My sister is in Canada, in Toronto. She has told me I can study there; nobody would disturb me. They accept migrants there. My friends in Europe don't have many options and are just waiting to see if they can stay or get deported. My brother is stuck in Turkey; he's working to only support himself, and every day he's risking getting caught and being sent back.

– Migrant J, Afghan migrant in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 2017

Like migration, aspirations start at origin, based on the context, background and circumstances of life, based on upbringing and surroundings, based on influence and perspective. Aspirations are there long before migration. Some people hang on to their aspirations unwaveringly, others change and adapt them as they go along, as they become more familiar with their reality and adjust to their environment. Even though some core elements of aspirations remain consistent, such as education, work and family reunification, priorities change with circumstances, the environment and opportunity. In time and space, a migrant may prioritize one aspiration over another without a choice, but out of necessity, such as having to work first to be able to pay for school, or vice versa, studying first to find a dream job, and through either way, then sponsoring the family and gradually bringing them over.

The thing is that in order for me to be able to sponsor anyone, I need to earn at least CAD 50,000 a year. I think once I graduate, I will be able to make that amount and soon, I will bring my family members.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

³⁹ J. Carling, "The role of aspirations in migration", Paper presented at Determinants of International Migration, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, 23–25 September 2014, Peace Research Institute, Oslo. Available from <https://jorgencarling.org/2014/09/23/the-role-of-aspirations-in-migration/>

6.1. Then and now

For some migrants, Canada offers benefits that go beyond economic well-being. Many youth are keen to leave conservative societies in search for those that provide freedom of speech and expression. For women especially, Canada provided a range of opportunities not available to them in Afghanistan.

I am a secular-minded person, and I had already found it difficult to live in an ultra-conservative society like Afghanistan, where expressing your one true feeling and thoughts could get you in serious troubles, including death. Seeing that little kid lying in a pool of his blood really made me more determined to leave Afghanistan.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

I live away from the conservative restrictions that I had lived under for almost 27 years of my life. My wife works here; she can wear what she wants, and I can express my opinions openly. But there is something about Kabul that still drags me to itself. I still feel connected to Kabul. I still think that Kabul is home for me. It is my dream that one day I return to Kabul and live and work there again.

– Migrant N, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

The transition from being in a country of origin where the migrant was unhappy to being in Canada is not a simple one, and many respondents interviewed for the study spoke of lost status. Tied into this is the feeling of “having to sacrifice” established positions of respect and social standing in their countries of origin (in this case Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic) to become one among many in a foreign country for the sole reason that they could provide a better future for their children. For example, on being asked why Afghans leave Afghanistan, one respondent opined:

They (Afghans) want to give a better future to their children. They want to raise their children away from the never-ending violence and war.

– Migrant A, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

This dynamic is useful to understand the driving force between the decision to migrate and has implications for efforts to address the circumstance of migration using smuggling routes.

I am happy because I am safe, and soon my children will be joining me. I am not happy, because I am not the same person that I was in Afghanistan. There I had a status. I was working for the Government and was making a lot of money. People respected me. Here, I am just another immigrant, another Uber driver. But I am ready to make that sacrifice so that my children will have a better future.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

A second strand evident in migrants' testimonies was nostalgia for home. While arriving in Canada was a fulfilment of long-held dreams and aspirations, for most migrants, it was an "either-or" choice between fulfilling their aspirations and being able to be at home. For those who were interviewed for this study and had arrived in Canada meant that they were still separated from their families until such time as they were able to legally stay in Canada, a process that can take multiple years and start the process for family reunification.

I think that is a no-brainer. Kabul has always been home for me, and it will always be. I have roots there. That is where I spent most of life. I have friends there. That city gave me troubles, tragedies, but it also gave me love, and a feeling of belonging and security. I cannot tell you how much I miss everything about Kabul. I miss the dust, the dirty streets, the messy traffic, the food... everything.

– Migrant B, Afghan migrant in Toronto, Canada, February 2017

6.2. Looking to the future

When asked about whether they thought the journey had been worthwhile or not, responses were mixed. While some felt that despite all the trouble that they had been through, it was a worthwhile journey; others, especially those still in transit, spoke of the indignity of being treated as a second-class citizen and not being at home. One Afghan migrant who had made it to Germany, but then returned to Afghanistan and is now in the process of trying to get smuggled to Canada, gave a glaring description of the difference between life in Afghanistan versus the treatment he was met with in Europe in his first attempt. And yet, he aspires to go to Canada in search for a better life.

When I got back to Afghanistan, I compared my life in Afghanistan with the two months that I had lived in Germany. The difference was like day and night. In Germany, I had all the freedom that one needs. I was eating well, I was working out, and I was reading a lot. I was very hopeful that I would be able to make a new start there. Sometimes I would see my brothers or other Afghans and how happy they lived with their kids, and I would wish I could do the same for my wife and my child. It was really tough for me to accept that I was this close and yet too far from achieving my dream, and I was back at square one. I would also think about my life in Italy. The 45 days and all the horrible experience that I had in Italy. I would compare my life in Afghanistan and what would happen to me if I stayed in Italy. Again, the difference was like day and night. Yes, I was in war zone. Yes, I could get killed any minute. Yes, life was tough in Afghanistan, but I was back in the place that I called "home". I was not living like a dog. I was living, poor but with dignity. I decided to give up my dream of migrating to Europe with my family.

– Migrant I, Afghan migrant in Berlin, Germany (seeking to go to Canada), February 2017

The desire to return is contingent on the migrant's ability to give something back to their country of origin.⁴⁰ Remittances, along with repatriation for the purposes of capacity-building and international advocacy, are some of the more obvious ways in which Afghans in the West "give back". The role of this diaspora in addressing the circumstance of migration emerging in countries of origin and the vulnerabilities associated with migrant smuggling is an area of opportunity that begs further research and enquiry. Akseer's work on Afghan diaspora in Canada drawing on qualitative research conducted with young Afghan women in Canada concludes that "return is not contingent on peace but rather on having "something to offer". These active, vocal and motivated young women in the diaspora have a zeal and passion for aiding the reconstruction efforts.⁴¹ None of the above overshadows, however, the aspirations that migrants who have arrived in Canada have towards a better future.

I want to study political affairs and international relations. I love following news and international affairs. There's work in Canada; I can study, work on my English. If there would be work, if I could study, if a place be safe, without problems, I would be happy there. If there would be protection in Afghanistan, you could live and contribute to society, why would you move? I want to live safe. That's my dream. To study and work. I want to have kids, but haven't thought about it yet because I don't have my life stabilized. The Government should provide opportunities for young people to have future prospects, to be able to study, to be able to work and to be able to travel, to move and travel free. Life is so unsafe here; it's hard for people right now.

– Migrant J, Afghan migrant in Kabul, Afghanistan, March 2017

For those who are still in transit, their aspirations that had prompted them to leave in the first place continue to remain a driving force in their journey.

I want to study at university. I want to study political science or international relations. After that, I want to work in NGOs so that I can work on improving women's right, LGBTQ rights, religious minority rights in the Middle East. Or just work with the refugees, try to make a difference.

– Migrant K, Iraqi migrant in Istanbul, Turkey, March 2017

⁴⁰ T. Akseer, "A view from the Afghan diaspora", *Forced Migration Review*, 46. May 2014. Available from www.fmreview.org/afghanistan/akseer.html

⁴¹ Ibid.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study show that migrant vulnerabilities are heightened in transit, when their ecosystem is at their weakest and when a number of barriers prevent them from approaching law enforcement officials seeking protection. Keeping in mind Canada's GAIM programme's objective is to protect smuggled migrants stranded in transit countries, the recommendations below reflect the changing trends and parameters of migrant smuggling to Canada and provide actionable steps to identify and assist vulnerable migrants in transit to Canada. Recommendations are aligned with the four pillars below, and written based on the findings of this study.

The focus is on pillars 1 and 4 of IOM's approach to counter migrant smuggling. Where appropriate, the recommendations made are in line with existing guidelines by UNODC and IOM on combating migrant smuggling. However, as the findings of the research show, very often irregularities in legal migration mechanisms and implementation of anti-smuggling policies push migrants towards smuggling. This calls for a shift in the approach in pillar 3 to enhance capacity of States not just to disrupt activities of migrant smugglers but to do so in recognition of the complex dynamics of a migrant's ecosystem that prompt the migration in the first place.

7.1. Recommendations for Member States, governments, international organizations and other stakeholders

The table below summarizes this report's recommendations in line with IOM's pillared approach.

IOM's Countering Migrant Smuggling Pillars		Recommendations from this report for stakeholders on smuggling of migrants
Pillar 1	Provide protection and assistance to smuggled migrants	<p>(a) Reinforce the capacity of community-based organizations and civil society actors to be part of the migrants' ecosystem so that they can replace the reliance on smugglers and provide a support system for migrants, especially in transit.</p> <p>(b) Make information available in different forms and at different times in the transit/journey to empower migrants to protect themselves. Lack of familiarity with foreign systems, lack of awareness of rights and lack of access to basic services all leave migrants highly vulnerable to exploitation.</p> <p>(c) Develop protection safeguards for all that is gender sensitive and includes women (feminization of migration), men and develop a model that provides for "protection of migrants in transit".</p>
Pillar 2	Address the causes of migrant smuggling	<p>The report sheds light on key aspects of a migrant's threshold before embarking on a smuggled journey to reach Canada. Pertinently, the report shows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get smuggled to Canada is not a decision made in haste. There are multiple, building-up factors that need to be addressed holistically. • There are administrative causes that pose as barriers to safe and legal migration. <p>To successfully address the root causes of migrant smuggling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the implementation of regular channels of migration in tandem with addressing causes of migrant smuggling through a more holistic approach is key. This can be done through engaging with organizations like IOM, NGOs and others, as well as exploring innovative approaches like the humanitarian corridor, humanitarian visa proposal, reducing the time lags on asylum procedures in transit, or facilitating access to family reunification from the point of origin. • Strengthen formal structures and options for migration. • Introduce a sub-element in the response that specifically "addresses the causes of migrant smuggling – and of exploitation in transit countries", where migrant vulnerabilities are highest.
Pillar 3	Enhance the capacity of States to disrupt the activities of migrant smugglers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce formal structures at points of origin and transit. • Build the capacity of law enforcement officials to be more protection minded and migrant sensitive as their behaviour, which factors in the feminization of migration and is based on a gender-balanced approach. • Use ICT to reach out to migrants in transit about the services offered to them and possible dangers those services can help them avoid. This can also include contacts, numbers, names of offices to reach out to. • Recognize broad "unsafe areas" that span a range of geographical locations. For example, the research shows that both cities and borders are areas where migrants are exposed to increasing exploitation.
Pillar 4	Promote research and data collection on migrant smuggling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data disaggregated by gender is still difficult to get on migrant smuggling. Law enforcement officials and other stakeholders should be trained to collect disaggregated data that captures the movement of men, women and children alike through smuggling. • Commission research that provides a better and in-depth understanding of migrant smuggling relationships in diverse contexts.

⁴² A. Betts, Introduce humanitarian visas for refugees to stop their dangerous journeys, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 24 September 2015.

7.2. Framework for protection programming in contexts of transit

No one programme will also be able to address all structural and protection causes of vulnerability, exploitation and smuggling. What is needed is a framework for protection against vulnerability, exploitation and smuggling in transit – that is people centred and not border or State centred.

A pilot programme to address some of the main protection concerns faced by migrants smuggled to Canada would benefit from being based on the following principles:

- (a) A **human rights-based approach** that keeps the protection of a migrant's fundamental rights at its core, whether implemented in origin, transit or destination;
- (b) An approach that is **non-discriminatory**, especially in unsafe areas where vulnerability and exploitation risks are heightened;
- (c) A gender- and **age-sensitive approach** that equally recognizes the feminization of migration and vulnerabilities that arise for men during transit;
- (d) A **network approach that is well coordinated** that leverages the support and agency of formal and informal actors alike to protect migrants; and
- (e) Approaches and programme design reflects **evidence from the field** rather than relying on existing assumptions on migrant-smuggler relationships.

An indicative recommendation of interventions is provided below based on gaps identified in the report.

Gap identified in the study	Recommended response
<p>Women resorting to smugglers to reach Canada is significant and show an agency in choice and level of information. Protection mechanisms for them in transit countries however are few.</p>	<p>(a) Law enforcers who are likely to encounter smuggled migrants, especially women, should do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Respond promptly, especially to complaints of violence. (ii) Inform the migrant of the assistance (legal, material, medical, psychological and social) that is available to them. (iii) Investigate, report and follow-up thoroughly and professionally. (iv) Keep a roster of contacts handy, with all information on available services for assistance to those seeking support. (v) Establish close cooperative procedures with medical, social, legal and other victim assistance providers. (vi) Ensure that a female officer is present during all contact with female victims of crime, especially violence. (vii) Explain to migrants their rights, their role in legal proceedings and the nature of the legal proceedings. (viii) Provide transportation to a safe place and, if necessary, to medical services (or arrange for medical services to travel to the victim). (ix) Keep records secure and carefully protect the confidentiality of victims. (x) Establish migrant assistance guidelines to ensure that prompt, proper and comprehensive attention is given to the legal, material, medical, psychological and social assistance needs of victims. <p>(b) Recognize the agency of women in their decision to use smugglers and explore avenues where women themselves can be empowered to support one another through information and access to assistance.</p> <p>(c) Advocate for greater protection for women and avenues for them to access justice in contexts of transit.</p>
<p>Smuggled migrants who reported mental trauma either suffered in the country of origin or during prolonged exposure to loneliness and exploitation in countries of transit.</p>	<p>The impact the psychological reactions of trauma in transit countries can potentially be minimized by the following means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Arranging for comfortable shelter or safe houses and other support services. (b) Ensuring that any promises made can always be kept by those who engage with them. (c) Trained psychological support is available at easy-to-access locations.
<p>Smuggled migrants reported being coerced to stay in cramped spaces with no access to food when journeying through long routes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Basic assistance should be provided to smuggled migrants whose lives or safety are endangered by virtue of having been the object of smuggling. Such assistance includes ensuring medical and health assistance to smuggled migrants. (b) Depending on the circumstances of any given situation, key considerations may need to involve the provision of physical security (for example, by law enforcement personnel); access to emergency food, shelter and medical care; access to consular services; and legal advice.

7.3. Recommendations for the use of complementary approaches and non-traditional response

Migrants shy away from approaching government officials and law enforcement officials. This research's recommendation highlights the importance of building local civil society capacity as a complementary approach that brings together formal and informal actors to identify and assist migrants in need of protection.

This approach should be determined by the following principles:

- (a) Inclusion of civil society and grass-roots organizations that work on a variety of sectors, not exclusively on migration to support assistance efforts;
- (b) Using new technology and innovation to provide migrants with assistance or information to empower them to take care of themselves;
- (c) Conserve the ecosystem of the migrant by facilitating access and contact with people that the migrant trusts and derives support from, and leverage it to strengthen the migrant's response to exploitative practices; and
- (d) Use an ecosystem approach that reflects the appropriate temporal (time in transit/journey) and spatial (origin, transit, destination and/or return) points of migration.

Gap identified in the study	Recommended response
Smuggled migrants are not travelling in large groups and are reticent to approach traditional actors when in transit	(a) Empower intermediary, non-State actors like civil society in transit countries not engaged in migration issues but with local presence to recognize and identify vulnerable migrants and provide them with assistance directly or through referrals to larger organizations like IOM.
Migrants are increasingly relying on smartphones, using applications to stay in touch with family members and GPS to mark out travel routes	(a) Work with tech firms that are working to develop innovative ways of reaching refugees and migrants through smartphone technology. (b) Provide in-transit information using special hotlines via texts on safe houses and assistance available to them.
Social media is a key medium through which smugglers advertise their services and migrants use to get information	(a) Counter-narratives on social media (i.e. information and awareness-raising campaigns) can help prevent potential migrants to engage in hazardous journeys and irregular migration. (b) A number of information and awareness-raising campaigns have been implemented in recent years, which have identified several "lessons learned": the need to tailor campaigns to the target audience using informal channels and involving credible, reliable and neutral partners. (c) For example, the need to involve the local community, in particular the diaspora; the use of different media channels depending on the target audience; conclusion of consortiums/partnerships; and the use of innovate tools, such as platforms and applications to provide information including on legal and safe ways to migrate to the European Union.
A migrant's ecosystem is composed of multiple actors and interacting layers that over time engage with each other during the journey.	(a) IOM to start developing a network of civil society organizations in the five countries identified above, to advocate for stronger national legislation to protect migrants and prosecute smugglers. (b) Moreover, strategic communications in transit and source countries could slowly lead to combating methods used by smugglers to lure migrants into making hazardous journeys.

7.4. Recommendations to strengthen the ecosystem that protects migrants

Through the course of this research, the team has noted new entry points into Canada – from the United States, from South America, of Syrians, Afghans, Africans – showing that the routes are changing, and that this requires in-depth research, not from a migration management perspective but from a migrants' response perspective; people adapt their routes and their means of travel (good, shows agency), but it can also highlight greater concerns for their protection: in new environments, their ecosystem may be less robust, their ability to make informed decisions and choices. Strengthening a migrant's ecosystem with the aim to not control but build on existing mechanisms and support systems to protect the rights and well-being of migrants is a key aim emerging from this study. This framework should be based on the following principles:

- (a) Recognizing the centrality of multiple layers of actors and protection around migrants;
- (b) Building protection safeguards at every layer; and
- (c) Reinforcing the capacity of actors within each system.

Gap identified in the study	Recommended response
A migrant's ecosystem, a key support system, is weakest when they are in transit.	The use of ICT has improved the means by which migrants can keep in touch with family. These can be reinforced by establishing hotlines in local IOM offices for those in transit.
Informal responses encountered by migrants are ad hoc.	Informal channels, such as local mosques, churches, schools and community centres, can be leveraged to understand the vulnerabilities faced by smuggled migrants and establish a local network to provide protection and assistance to these migrants.
Formal responses encountered by migrants are accidental.	The availability of direct assistance, protection and response to smuggled migrants needs to be scaled up both in its flexibility to reach these migrants and provide them with a range of services including psychosocial support.
Law enforcement and government agencies are feared and expose migrants to exploitation.	Proper training, sensitization and accountability is needed in law enforcement organizations to ensure that smuggled migrants are given humane treatment and not discriminated on the basis of their nationality, age, gender or immigration status. Law enforcement agencies should understand their duty to protect all groups in mixed migration flows.
Migration management in transit countries fails to account for and protect smuggled migrants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Need for an RBA to migration governance. An RBA is essentially a conceptual framework and methodological tool for developing programmes, policies and practices that integrate the rights, norms and standards derived from international law. (b) For States, this means placing the individual at the centre of migration management and recognizing each individual as a rights-holder. States have the legal obligation to protect and promote the human rights of all people on their territory.
Law enforcement officials are often perpetrators of exploitation against migrants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Establish standards of conduct, principles of human rights protection and accountability in law enforcement offices in border areas, hubs in urban areas where migrants usually live and in identified routes of migrant smuggling. (b) Ensure that punitive measures are in place against law enforcement officials who mistreat smuggled migrants. (c) Ensure that all detention centres, border offices, police checkpoints and stations have readable information on migrant rights available.
Migrant vulnerability is multiplied when there is no or reduced access to essential services, such as mental or psychosocial health, education or housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Migrants are most likely to enjoy protection when they can take advantage of safe, orderly and regular migration channels. In this respect, access to essential services is of paramount importance. (b) Measures are needed that encourage migrants to seek out protection without fearing punitive measures against themselves or an attempt to hinder their journey to Canada unless expressed specifically by them.

ANNEX

Interviewee list

The list below includes both migrants who were interviewed (shaded rows) and those that were reached out to but who did not agree an interview (unshaded rows).

R #	Interview done?	Current country	Age	Sex	Country of origin	Intending/ Potential migrant	Migrant in transit	Migrant at destination	Returnee/ Deportee	Family of migrant	Smuggler
1	Yes	Afghanistan	33	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
2	No	Canada	29	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
3	No	Canada	27	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
4	Yes	Afghanistan	27	M	Afghanistan				Yes		
5	Yes	Afghanistan	30	M	Afghanistan				Yes		
6	Yes	Afghanistan	26	M	Afghanistan				Yes		
7	No	Afghanistan	25	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
8	No	Afghanistan	28	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
9	No	Canada	28	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
10	Yes	Afghanistan	41	M	Afghanistan				Yes		
11	No	Afghanistan	24	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
12	Yes	Afghanistan	23	F	Afghanistan	Yes					
13	Yes	Afghanistan	45	F	Afghanistan					Yes	
14	No	Afghanistan	60	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
15	No	Afghanistan	35	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
16	No	Afghanistan	25	F	Afghanistan	Yes					
17	No	Afghanistan	30	F	Afghanistan	Yes					

R #	Interview done?	Current country	Age	Sex	Country of origin	Intending/ Potential migrant	Migrant in transit	Migrant at destination	Returnee/ Deportee	Family of migrant	Smuggler
18	Yes	Afghanistan	60	M	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
19	No	Afghanistan	18	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
20	No	Afghanistan	20	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
21	No	Afghanistan	22	M	Afghanistan	Yes					
22	Yes	Afghanistan	26	F	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
23		Afghanistan	27	F	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
24	Yes	Afghanistan	29	F	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
25	No	Afghanistan	22	F	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
26	Yes	Brazil	22	M	Afghanistan		Yes				
27	No	Senegal	35	M	Pakistan						Yes
28	Yes	Afghanistan		F	Afghanistan						
29	Yes	Afghanistan	22	M	Afghanistan	Yes				Yes	
30	Yes	Afghanistan	24	M	Afghanistan	Yes			Yes		
31	Yes	Afghanistan	20	F	Afghanistan		Yes				
32	Yes	Turkey	28	M	Syrian Arab Republic		Yes				
33	Yes	Turkey	32	M	Syrian Arab Republic						
34	Yes	Turkey		M	Afghanistan		Yes			Yes	
35	Yes	Turkey	27	M	Syrian Arab Republic	Yes					
36	Yes	Turkey	25	M	Iraq	Yes					
37	Yes	Turkey	2	M	Syrian Arab Republic						Yes
38	Yes	Turkey	26	M	Syrian Arab Republic	Yes					
39	Yes	Greece	33	M	Afghanistan	Yes					

R #	Interview done?	Current country	Age	Sex	Country of origin	Intending/ Potential migrant	Migrant in transit	Migrant at destination	Returnee/ Deportee	Family of migrant	Smuggler
40	Yes	Turkey	28		Syrian Arab Republic	Yes					
41	Yes	Germany	27		Syrian Arab Republic	Yes					
42	Yes	Turkey	27	M	Syrian Arab Republic						
43	Yes	Serbia	23	M	Afghanistan						
44	Yes	Germany	36	M	Afghanistan		Yes				
45	No	Canada		M				Yes			
46	Yes	Canada	33	M	Afghanistan						
47	Yes	Canada	34	M	Afghanistan			Yes			
48	Yes	Canada	36	M	Afghanistan			Yes			
49	Yes	Canada	30	M	Afghanistan			Yes			
50	Yes	Canada	37	M	Islamic Republic of Iran			Yes			
51	Yes	Canada	21	M	Afghanistan			Yes			

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